This thesis focuses on discourses about feminine beauty in relation to *mexicanidad* in Mexico City during the 1950s. The research keeps in mind the ideological change Mexico experienced during this period of time, which transformed from highly nationalist to embracing an expanding consumerist society. First, this research briefly examines the evolution of Mexico’s beauty ideals since colonialism. Then, this investigation analyzes various works that artists like muralist and Contemporáneos created in the post-revolutionary period to demonstrate how artists expressed *mexicanidad* through the depictions of women’s complete bodies. This thesis argues that the strengthening of Mexico as a consumerist society drastically transformed *mexicanidad*. By examining articles, beauty columns, beauty advice, and advertisements published by magazines and newspapers, this thesis illustrates how representations of the female body not only became fragmented but also absent of ethnic and racial diversity, ultimately favoring an international form of beauty that championed a European aesthetic. This research will end with a succinct analysis of indigenous beauty as a way of shedding light to different forms of beauty while also identifying problems in these depictions.
MAYBE SHE'S BORN WITH IT, MAYBE IT'S MEXICANIDAD: DEPICTIONS OF MEXICAN FEMININE BEAUTY AND THE BODY IN VISUAL MEDIA DURING THE 1950S

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

by
Gisel C. Valladares

Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2017

Advisor: Elena Albarran
Reader: Stephen Norris
Reader: Andrew Offenburger

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This Thesis titled

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by

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has been approved for publication by

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Dedication

Dedicated to my mom and dad who have dedicated their entire lives at working hard to be able to give me a better future. Your sacrifices have not been in vain. I also dedicate this to my older brothers who have always been supportive of my decisions and continue to believe in me. To my dear spouse, I could not have done this without your encouragement and support.
Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my committee members whose input was foundational to my work. I would like to thank to Dr. Elena Jackson Albarrán, my supervising committee member, for being patient, flexible, and understanding throughout my journey. I am eternally grateful for the valuable time you spent on reading through my writing and providing the comments I needed as guidance.

I would also like to thank Dr. Stephen Norris and Dr. Andrew Offenburger for taking the time out of their busy schedules for participating as readers of this thesis. I highly appreciate your comments. To Jake Beard, Luke Stanek, and Zach Golder, thank you for all your excellent input while reading my drafts. A special thanks to the rest of my colleagues whose help and support made this experience a positive one.

Lastly, I want to thank the Department of History at Miami University for believing in me and giving me the opportunity to be a part of their master’s program.
Introduction

During the 1950s, visual media continued to play an important role in educating the public, especially women, in Mexico City about what it meant for a woman to be beautiful. Mexico is an intriguing location to study due to its political and cultural standing after its revolution. After the violent stage of the revolution that ended in 1920, the Mexican elite embarked on a nation-building project where they sought to develop the nation’s identity. As Mexico ventured into the re-making of its national identity by becoming a modern nation and attempting to be more inclusive of its indigenous population, depictions of beautiful women in the media functioned in an educative manner by informing the public about what was socially acceptable in respect to race, gender, and class.

*Mexicanidad* was the identity that resulted from Mexico’s recreation of its national identity. *Mexicanidad* was a unique concept created by the elite in an attempt to unify the country after the revolution by identifying “…rural Mexicans as Indian and [placing] their culture at the center of post-revolutionary national identity.” In creating *mexicanidad*, women played a strong role in Mexico’s desire to create a newly transformed modern nation, and the media also took part in legitimizing Mexico’s transformation through their portrayal of women. It is important to note, however, that Mexico did not uniformly adopt one vision of what the country or its women should look like; its developing cultural identity was often filled with contradictions.

The decade of the 1950s is important to consider because there seems to be a shift away from emphasis on national identity to the adoption of modernity via consumerism. For example, Kerry T. Hegarty analyzes several films that demonstrate the loss of appeal of *comedias rancheras*, which heavily emphasized national pride and unity. Instead, films such as *Medias de seda* (silk stockings) illustrated Mexico’s “…transition from the independence of revolutionary

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nationalism to the fear of exploitation under an impeding global capitalism.” It is within this historical context that I seek to place my scholarship. Various scholars have traced Mexico’s evolving perceptions about what society perceived as beautiful, and I want to continue to extend this scholarship during a different period of time when Mexico seems to decrease its emphasis on national identity to the adoption of modernity by increasing their consumerist habits.

My research will mainly explore visual media found in periodicals published in Mexico City during the 1950s. I will analyze the messages expressed in advertisements, beauty columns, and articles to identify how that information was involved in discourses about Mexican feminine beauty. Part of my research will explain how various scholars have traced the ways in which feminine beauty evolved since the beginning of the 20th century. By evaluating the messages women were largely exposed to in print media, I hope to identify how ideas about feminine beauty were expressed during a transitioning period when Mexico sought to be increasingly involved in the world economy. Additionally, my research will investigate the following historical question: if feminine beauty was manifested in Mexico’s heavily constructed identity of *mexicanidad*, which was characterized by “revolutionary nationalism,” how did *mexicanidad* in relation to female beauty change during the 1950s, when the country sought to become more modern by expanding as a consumerist society?

My thesis will argue that the *mexicanidad* reflected in feminine beauty declined in favor of the consumerist drive towards modernity. In defining modernity, I am borrowing Joanne Hershfield’s definition. She states that Mexican modernity was “…motivated by growth of the middle class, and the resulting expansion of European and U.S. ideals of capitalism, liberalism, and democracy…” as well as the “…‘interweaving’ of local indigenous cultures and practices with modern, global social and economic institutions.” Although she applies this definition from 1917 to 1936, it is still applicable to my research. I hypothesize that by the 1950s, the messages that periodicals conveyed concerning feminine beauty incorporated a high amount of information

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4 Kerry T. Hegarty, “From Chinas Poblanas to Silk Stockings: The Symbology of the Female Archetype in the Mexican Ranchera Film,” *South Atlantic Review* 74, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 89, 92.
5 Hegarty, 92.
6 To define consumerism, I use Julio Moreno’s claim that consumption and material prosperity were mutually inclusive. He states, “…Mexican and American political leaders, corporate executives, and advertising agents regarded Mexico’s race toward modern industrial capitalism as the key to material prosperity, upward mobility, democracy, happiness, and self realization.” See Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home! Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 3.
7 Hershfield, 12.
educating women about becoming beautiful by emphasizing the use of beauty products to their beauty regiments. The encouragement of incorporating products to women’s beauty regiments seems to have overshadowed considerations of *mexicanidad*.

### Historiographical Context

Mexican historical scholarship has identified the strong influence that visual culture had on the country during the 20th century. This information has allowed Mexican studies to expand, as a variety of perspectives, including those pertaining to gender and the lower classes, have added exciting new lenses through which historians can view information differently. My research fits within this scholarship by continuing to study Mexico’s visual culture. I seek to demonstrate that, even though Mexico sought to incorporate its indigenous population into Mexican mainstream culture at the beginning of the 20th century, my case study analyzing the 1950s shows that, when dealing with beauty regiments, minor emphasis was placed on the incorporation of indigenous culture and their practices. Instead, a stronger sense of modernization was favored, which encouraged the engagement of a consumer culture that involved the purchasing of beauty products. The latest scholarship that considers Mexico’s visual culture has shed new light regarding Mexico’s cultural interpretation of gender during the first half of the 20th century, a time period of great socioeconomic change; however, content investigating female beauty after 1950 could be furthered developed.

Ageeth Sluis, one of the most recent scholars to have published content about Mexico and visual culture, explores how changing views about gender affected the development of Mexico City’s urbanization. In *Deco Body, Deco City: Female Spectacle and Modernity in Mexico City, 1900-1939* Sluis argues that the change in gender norms, that resulted from women occupying more public spaces after the Mexican Revolution, influenced the ways in which Mexico City urbanized. The author describes performing modernity as women’s ability to freely navigate public space. When addressing race, Sluis asserts that the popular Deco body placed emphasis on its “abstract shapes” instead of the color of one’s skin.8 This allowed darker skinned

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women to be able to feel that they could also perform modernity. The author’s approach conceptualizing space as affected by gender, perceptions of feminine beauty, as well as her consideration of race is intriguing and well argued.

Even though Sluis demonstrates that the feminine beauty ideal of the Deco body influenced the rearrangement of space in Mexico City, Joanne Hershfield’s *Imagining la Chica Moderna: Women, Nation, and Visual Culture, 1917-1936* analyses Mexican women during a similar timeframe in a different manner. *La chica moderna* (the modern woman) was similar to the flapper but within the context of Mexican society. Instead of emphasizing space, Hershfield argues that the internationally constructed views about gender illustrated in images played a significant role in shaping Mexican national identity as it sought to become modern. She defines Mexican modernity as “…the growth of the middle class and the resulting expansion of European and U.S. ideals of capitalism, liberalism, and democracy…” as well as the “…‘interweaving’ of local indigenous cultures and practices with modern, global social and economic institutions.” As a result, women’s depictions engaging in fashion or in the work place exhibited their roles in Mexican society as it attempted to modernize.

Hershfield’s analysis of visual content is strong and it contrasts *Deco Body, Deco City*, but *la chica moderna* also has minor weaknesses. Although Sluis indicates that the ideal feminine beauty of the Deco body affected space and architecture, Hershfield relies on the theory of everyday life to convey that images depicted an ideal modern woman that could be embodied by women in real life. On the other hand, Sluis claims that it was the beauty ideal of the Deco body that influenced public space, which then allowed the chica moderna to rise and freely navigate that space. As a result, Sluis expresses that the beauty ideal of the Deco body helped established a space where women could perform modernity before the rise of *la chica moderna*. Moreover, the weakness that Hershfield’s work succumbs to is a common one in studying cultural history: reception. Her argument could have been stronger by gathering information

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9 Sluis, 72.
10 Natasha Varner is another recent scholar analyzing beauty. She specifically explores the “*india bonita*” within Mexico’s nation-building project by analyzing beauty pageants and film. Additionally, she conveys that the figure of the *india bonita* connected the modern with the Aztec past. See Natasha Varner, “La Raza Cosmética: Beauty, Race, and Indigeneity in Revolutionary Mexico” (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2016), 1-187.
12 Hershfield, 12.
13 Sluis, 97.
about how women felt when seeing visual media, but it is understandable that these sources are extremely difficult to obtain.

In addition to Hershfield, Julio Moreno’s *Yankee Don’t Go Home! Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* explores the ways that the United States influenced Mexico’s national identity via business practices. Like Sluis and Hershfield, Moreno’s methodology implements visual analysis but within the context of business culture. He does an excellent job demonstrating how advertisements aimed toward women connected to the larger theme of national identity. He argues that Mexico’s efforts to become modern meant that the country needed to become involved in their adoption of a capitalist economy, where Mexican and American businesses ultimately created a “middle ground.” Moreno uses Richard White’s concept to show that the U.S. and Mexico created a “cultural middle ground” in which both countries “…consciously ‘syncretized’ values and practices as they insisted that modern industrial capitalism was mutually beneficial to Mexico and the United States.”

Moreno’s analysis of how feminine beauty was illustrated in advertisements is strong, but his book overlooks revolutionary policy executed during the decades of his focus. When discussing advertisements about female beauty, his examples clearly depict the ways advertisements attempted to maintain Mexico’s traditional values while also adopting new ones. One small example Moreno provides mentions that, instead of advertising a global beauty that Europeans and Americans shared, there were U.S. companies that incorporated *mexicanidad* to make their products more appealing to Mexicans. He states, “[U.S companies’] definition of Mexican beauty adopted Mexico’s mixed heritage of the mestizos as the model of feminine beauty…” The advertisements of cosmetics by U.S. companies reflected Mexico’s evolving identity as U.S. companies attempted to cater to Mexican women by incorporating values that the nation perceived as traditional yet modern.

Although Moreno’s work focuses on business culture, he does not seem to consider revolutionary policies such as land reform. Considering the policies the post-revolutionary

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16 Moreno, 137-150.
17 Moreno, 137.
18 However, not all U.S. companies integrated this concept of Mexican beauty in their advertisements.
government executed could have aided the understanding that the Mexican government was weary of U.S. economic imperialism. At the same time, identifying the shift from weariness to a stronger sense of favoring U.S. investment in Mexico would have helped contextualize how complex it was for Mexico to abide by the revolutionary goals that denounced northern imperialism while attempting to make the country more modern by strengthening economic international relationships.

Ultimately, my research will further contribute to the current scholarship that analyzes visual culture while also considering how Mexico’s expanding consumerist society affected the evolution of feminine beauty. Scholars such as Sluis, Hershfield, and Moreno have done an excellent job in examining visual culture during the first half of the 20th century, and I hope to continue to pay attention to Mexico’s visual culture that manifested ideals about beauty during a different period of time.

Method of Investigation

The main primary sources I will use consist of advertisements and instructions on beauty regiments found in magazines and newspapers from 1950 to 1960. Additionally, I used letters from readers that were sent to magazine publishers. I specifically used ads, beauty instructions, and letters to the magazine with caution. The Ads included in this research were chosen because they saturated the periodical vigorously through an entire issue. The frequent appearance of these ads demonstrates a strong presence to which readers were exposed. The letters to the magazine are also important because, even though they may have been edited by the periodical, they shed light on the way women lived their lives at the time and exposes various concerns. The names of the periodicals are: El Universal, Excélsior, Jueves de Excélsior, La Familia, Mimosa, and Revista de Revistas. I have gathered information about these sources from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and the Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada located in Mexico City.

Throughout my analysis, I draw information from scholars to inform my argument. For example, Sluis’s work explained that the Deco body minimized the emphasis on race in favor of the shape of the body. Similar to how Deco bodies downplayed racial components in Mexican society by conveying that anyone could participate in performing modernity, my research shows
that emphasis on race also decreased. Instead, visual media found in periodicals seemed to favor women’s ability to engage in modernity by encouraging women to buy products to aid their beauty regiments. Additionally, Hershfield argues that visual culture reflected Mexican women’s adoption of modernity, and most importantly, she defines Mexican modernity as adopting ideals about capitalism while also incorporating indigenous culture to their national identity. My research agrees with Hershfield, which demonstrates that images encouraged women to adopt modernity.

The work of Moreno and Hegarty will illustrate Mexico’s increased adoption of U.S. ideals of capitalism. In Moreno’s analysis of cosmetics, he points out that cosmetic advertisements incorporated *mexicanidad*; therefore, I will seek to identify how the manifestation of *mexicanidad* changed in cosmetic advertisements during the 1950s. Hegarty’s work will help contextualize that the discourse of feminine beauty in relation to *mexicanidad* was not exclusive to print media since film exposed people’s anxieties about Mexico as an expanding consumerist society.

By using information that previous scholars have provided, I will construct a case study that examines how *El Universal*, *Excélsior*, *Jueves de Excélsior*, *La Familia*, *Mimosa*, and *Revista de Revistas* moved away from representations of nationalism that incorporated *mexicanidad* into adopting an expanding consumerist society that emphasized the consumption of beauty products. Moreno explains that during the 1940s, magazines like *La Familia* offered beauty advice “…using homemade products and methods.”19 The magazine seems to emphasize a natural look by the lack of use of commercialized products. I will synthesize this information with the content Sluis discussed about *camposcape*. She conveys that camposcapes eroticized the rural space often inhabited by indigenous populations, and by the 1920s, camposcapes became eroticized and associated with purity.20 The natural aspect of camposcape that was associated with purity, and therefore indigenous *mexicanidad*, is expressed in Moreno’s analysis that beauty regiments were free of commercialized products that emphasized a natural look. My case study will identify how this association of a natural look with natural items was replaced with the use of manufactured beauty products.

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19 Moreno, 143.
20 Sluis 103, 129.
Lastly, all my primary sources are in Spanish. As a fluent Spanish speaker, I will be the one translating all the content. My main purpose will be to convey meaning rather than doing a literal translation. I will leave various words unchanged, as there may not be an adequate English translation that will convey the meaning behind the word. When this occurs, I will state the meaning behind the word by adding context, or I will use descriptions used by other scholars that I find fitting to the context that I will be addressing.

The Outcome

This project seeks to bring attention to the concept of *mexicanidad* in relation to feminine beauty during the 1950s by analyzing various periodicals that published content such as ads, beauty columns, and articles. This thesis seeks to accomplish several goals. I will establish Mexico’s prevailing appreciation for characteristics often associated with countries that elites perceived as strong and modern such as Europe and the U.S. I will reference artworks created during the post-revolutionary period by artists known as the muralists and Contemporáneos. I will show how artists who belonged to both groups illustrated women’s bodies in a complete manner rather than fragmented body parts to embodied *mexicanidad*. I will discuss the differences between muralists and Contemporáneos to determine that the former emphasized a nationalist message in their art while the latter sympathized more with a cosmopolitan worldview. This is important because the cosmopolitan view was the one that was present during the post-revolutionary period and remained during the 1950s whereas the point of view that emphasized nationalism decreased along with *mexicanidad*. Lastly, I will identify elements that are foundational to *mexicanidad*, such as the concept of the “natural,” in order to identify how this concept evolved in the 1950s. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to add knowledge to the current scholarship by demonstrating that as the goals of the Revolution weakened, sources focusing on cosmetics and discourses about feminine beauty in relation to *mexicanidad* indicate that the integrity of the female body also became fragile.

The first chapter will include a brief overview of discourses about feminine beauty that examine the transformation perceptions of beauty in modern Mexico from its colonial period to the first half of the 20th century. I will discuss how after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), the Mexican elite sought to unite the country by redefining the nation’s identity based on its
indigenous population. The elite thought that this “Indianness” was a characteristic all in Mexico had in common whether one was mestizo/a or indigenous. In reshaping the nation’s identity, the elite also modified what it meant for a woman to be beautiful. The chapter will briefly discuss European ideas about beauty introduced by the Spanish during Mexico’s colonial period, and it will show that the continuity of these ideals were a result of the elites’ perception of Europe as a role model of progress and modernity. By analyzing Mexico’s cultural identity concerning female beauty, I will argue that even though the Mexican elite attempted to consider its darker-skinned indigenous past and population by attempting to incorporate them into the country’s nationalist ethos after the Revolution, Mexico’s prevailing appreciation for characteristics often associated with Europeans demonstrates that Mexico’s post-revolutionary efforts to become a more inclusive country diminished.

Chapter two will delve into the differences and similarities between the muralists and the Contemporáneos. I will use various artworks by both schools of art to demonstrate that both found importance in depicting a complete female body while also calling attention to the ways in which the muralist and Contemporáneos were different. I will explain that muralists engaged with the use of women’s bodies in their works to illustrate a nationalist form of mexicanidad. In contrast, Contemporáneos illustrated a form of mexicanidad that focused less on nationalism. My analysis will show that the element that muralists and Contemporáneos’ had in common where both displayed women’s entire body was no longer the case in the 1950s because women’s bodies had been fragmented. I will posit that the nationalist aspect that muralist emphasized was no longer there. I will also point out that the cosmopolitan aspect that Contemporáneos sympathized with remains in the 1950s in the way in which women are depicted, but unlike the Contemporáneos, women no longer seem to be characterized by mexicanidad.

In chapter three, I will briefly discuss how cosmetic advertisements in the 1950s utilized text and conveyed messages that associated the “natural” as “authentic” in order to attempt to sell more products and encourage women to participate in a consumer market. I will evaluate Mexican beauty during the 1920s through the 1940s to establish there was already a strong presence of the concept of the “natural” in relation to mexicanidad by paying close attention to the emphasis on the natural and pure aspects of campesino. Determining this strength is important because I will trace how mexicanidad gradually decreased as a globalized form of beauty strengthened due to Mexico strengthening as a consumerist society. By studying the
1950s, I will analyze visual media such as advertisements as well as beauty columns to examine the remnants of *mexicanidad* to illustrate how they are hardly recognizable at all even though the aspect of “natural” remained. I will indicate how the characteristics associated with *mexicanidad*, such as the emphasis on modernity and sympathies towards outside influences, prevailed as a global form of beauty absorbed them. This chapter will end with a close analysis of indigenous beauty and will identify how of *mexicanidad* is present in that particular example.

This research seeks to engage with the current scholarship that focuses on Mexico’s post-revolutionary period, specifically the 1950s. Scholars have come to a consensus by agreeing that the decades of the 1940s and the 1950s marked a strong historical shift in Mexican history since the country began moving away from implementing post-revolutionary goals and began adopting a stronger sense of a consumer culture. Scholars such as Ageeth Sluis, Joanne Hershfield, Ricardo Pérez Montfort, William Beezley, and Alan Knight have placed a strong emphasis on Mexican culture and national identity in modern Mexican history. I seek to add to this scholarship by continuing to focus on Mexico’s national identity while also considering gender and feminine beauty as a lens through which new information can shed light on the country’s transitional period during the middle of the 20th century. By analyzing sources such as advertisements, beauty advice, and beauty columns, this thesis will demonstrate how images of women and their bodies reflect the larger economic transformation that Mexico experienced.
Chapter 1: Contouring Mexican Feminine Beauty from Colonialism to the 20th Century

This chapter will explore the evolution of feminine beauty in Mexico from its colonial period to the first half of the 20th century. This analysis will demonstrate that Spanish imperialist endeavors resulted in the introduction of different aesthetic and behavioral ideals into the social and cultural construct of Mexican society. The content in this section will also consider Mexico’s ideological and political background. It is important to establish the historical context of the country to understand how ideologies, such as positivism and social Darwinism, affected views about beauty. Race, ethnicity, and gender will be examined to identify the ways in which conceptualization about these subjects affected interpretations of feminine beauty. This chapter will trace chronologically, in the best way possible, how ideas about beauty were introduced under Mexico’s colonial period and continued under the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, and it will show that the political and ideological rupture caused by the Mexican Revolution in 1910 attempted to generate alternative ways of conceptualizing Mexican beauty, but lingering preference towards European forms of beauty remained evident well into the 1950s. Ultimately, this chapter will argue that even though Mexico became an independent country, and it attempted to consider its darker skinned indigenous past and living population by seeking to incorporate them into the country’s transforming nationalistic ethos after the revolution, Mexican elite’s seemingly prevailing appreciation for characteristics often associated with Europeans indicates that Mexico’s post-revolutionary efforts to become a more inclusive country were diminished by the elites’ exclusionary attitudes.

Mexican Beauty under Colonialism (1521-1810)

In order to fully grasp Mexico’s evolving ideals about beauty, it is important to consider the country’s colonial context, as it demonstrates the framework within which cultural norms were created that affected the Mexican feminine ideal. For example, the Virgin of Guadalupe serves as an example demonstrating the exchange of culture between the Spanish and Mexico’s indigenous population during its colonial period, which may have helped women and men understand what it meant for Mexican women to be beautiful. The Spanish introduction of Catholicism to Mexico was arguably quite successful. The Virgin of Guadalupe was and still is
particularly important to Mexican identity because of her association to the nation as a patriotic figure. Various theorists claim that the Spanish may have presented Tonantzin, a female deity worshipped by the Aztecs, to the indigenous population in Mexico in a Christianized manner by using the an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe in such a way that was familiar to the indigenous population, “hence her humble robes and darker skin.” This image served several purposes. For the Spanish, the image educated their new subjects that, like Spanish women, Mexican women were presumed to be pious and caring mothers. To the native Mexican women, they could have easily related to the image due to the virgin’s darker skin tone and simple clothing.

Within Mexico’s colonial context, the Virgin of Guadalupe embodied the behavioral character traits desired by the Spanish and later by Mexican society that included purity, motherhood, and selflessness. Purity was one of the most important deciders in fulfilling the duty of a feminine woman; its ideal form would have been marriage. According to gender norms, society placed a higher amount of pressure on women to remain pure by remaining a virgin. Mexican women carried the reputation of their families in the form of chastity. As a result, women during this period of time could not have conducted themselves in a promiscuous manner, or they could have been considered unattractive to fulfill their womanly duties. A woman’s purity, like that of the Virgin of Guadalupe (the Virgin Mary), was an indicator of her and her family’s honor, which made her both desirable and worthy of marriage. A woman’s purity based on her chasteness would allow her to bear legitimate children that would carry the father’s name. Therefore, a woman was not allowed to engage in sex with various men. Once she became a mother, her life would selflessly be devoted to the care of her children, husband, and home. The Virgin of Guadalupe represented the epitome of the way an ideal mother embodying exceptional piety was supposed to behave; she was a role model that Mexican society may have easily depended on when conceptualizing how women were expected to conduct themselves.

In addition to religious connotations that associated feminine beauty with purity, motherhood, and selflessness, beauty was also closely related to European views about domesticity. Scholars have used the term marianismo to illustrate similar characteristics expressed by domesticity but within the context of Latin America. Silvia Marina Arrom explains that marianismo was not unique to Latin America. Instead, it was derived from the Victorian cult

1 Kathryn A. Sloan, *Women’s Roles in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011), 73.
2 Sloan, 18-19.
of domesticity, which was introduced to Latin America during the 19th century. The name hints at its association to the high regard of the Virgin of Guadalupe, who is also known as Maria. Since women, especially those who belonged to the higher classes, were expected to marry and become mothers, they were perceived as attractive if their character expressed “…youth, prudence, modesty, seduction, decency, moderation, truthfulness, sweetness, humility, grace, virtue, quietness, and pleasantness.” Physically, a woman was considered beautiful if she had small feet, hands, and waist, as well as light skin and hair. The same way that domesticity educated women about what it meant to be a woman, marianismo shows that Mexican women, as well as those from a variety of other Latin American countries, were considered semi divine by holding a higher sense of morality and spiritual strength than men. Mexican women were considered “real women” through “…self-denial, commitment to the family, and spirituality.”

As a cultural norm, women who did not fit the mold may not have been considered attractive by men or socially acceptable by women. The similarities between Victorian domesticity and marianismo manifested in the emphasis placed on women’s aesthetic and behavioral demeanor indicated a continuation of Spanish culture while, at the same time, it was also being modified to fit a new spatial context in Latin America.

**Perceptions of Beauty that Permeated during the Porfiriato (1876-1910)**

Porfirio Díaz ruled over Mexico from 1876-1910. During this time frame, also known as the Porfiriato, Díaz pushed towards modernizing the country, and in the process Mexican society had to come to terms with becoming modern themselves. The process of modernizing the country mostly benefited the Mexican elite, and those who belonged to the lower classes as well as indigenous populations were often did not enjoy the fruits of modernity the same way the elite did. José Tomás de Cuéllar’s short story, “Having a Ball,” helps illustrate Mexico’s society during the Porfiriato showing the already established societal norms associated with Europeans and begins to question them when the drive towards modernization developed an aspiring

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5 McCracken, 150.
aristocratic class, or nouveau riche.

Cuéllar, a Mexican military veteran-turned-writer, helps illustrate how Mexican society coped with the rapid changes of modernization in his satirical novel, “Having a Ball” by reflecting on the ways in which the lower, middle, and upper classes attempted to appear modern. In the story, the Bartola family that decided to have a ball belonged to an emerging nouveau riche living in Mexico City that wanted to appear modern by having a gathering. They realized that they did not know enough people in the city to invite nor had the utensils or seating arrangements to hold such a gathering. Lucky for the family, they knew a working-class man called Saldaña who took charge of planning the ball. Even though Saldaña seemed to be helping the family by arranging the event, he swindled the family by making a deal with the store clerk who agreed to price the drinks for the party at a higher price so that Saldaña could keep the rest of the money.

The ball relied on the presence of three well-known “high” class women known as the Machuca sisters. Their apparent high status in society served to legitimize the ball as not simply a party but one attended by the elite. However, Cuéllar makes it known that women like the Machuca sisters were the lowest of Mexican society even though their clothing made them look elite. Cuéllar portrays the Machuca sisters as illegitimate elite women because the money they lived off of came from their corrupt brother who was portrayed as only having money because “he knew people in high places.” Concerning the sisters’ physical appearance, Cuéllar states, “they appeared to belong to the Caucasian race, as long as they wore gloves…” because once they took them off, they would reveal their dark skin. He continues by stating that even though “they appeared to be beautiful at night, or in the street…in the morning at home, the Machuca sisters were nothing more than dark skinned girls who had been slightly washed, that’s all.”

Cuéllar makes it clear that the rapid force of modernization created people who appeared to be modern in the way they looked through the goods they were able to purchase. His criticism shows, however, that individuals like the Machuca sisters were dangerous because in his view they were not legitimately refined women, they only appeared to be that way because of their use of beauty products to alter their image. Additionally, the portrayal of the Machuca sisters helps

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8 Cuellar, 13.
9 Cuéllar, 28.
10 Cuéllar, 29.
define feminine beauty by identifying what they are not. They were not legitimately beautiful in society’s eyes because they benefitted from their brother’s corruption, and because their skin was not light.

To solidify the point that modernity was creating illegitimate people, especially women, Cuéllar describes one of the Machuca sisters as a drunk and gambler and ultimately shows how society’s gendered views contradicted Díaz’s push towards becoming modern. Cuéllar’s negative depiction of one of the Machuca sisters demonstrates the anxieties people like him may have felt when “illegitimate” individuals rose up in class status. People like the Machuca sisters disrupted the structure of the family that was meant to establish order, but Cuéllar suggests that the seemingly fast pace of modernity caused women to get out of control, leading them to become drunks and gamblers instead of being “proper” ladies. While Díaz sought to thrust Mexico’s progress by becoming a modern society, Cuéllar illustrates that modernity gave rise to a perceived illegitimate high class that subsequently disrupted the order Díaz sought to establish because of their rambunctious behavior.

Moreover, in “Having a Ball” Cuéllar is keen on question in the form of satire Mexican elite’s appreciation of characteristics associated with Europeans. For example, Cuéllar discusses the relationship between a notary, who experienced economic hardship, his wife, and friend, Don Gabriel. Once the notary’s issues were resolved thanks to a “shady operation,” he began buying gifts for his wife, which included elegant dresses and cosmetics. He conveys that the notary’s wife “had never been so happy; she was much happier than when she had a dark complexion.” However, he also states that once the notary’s wife’s “skin tone took on its Germanic whiteness…she became conceited, especially about her shoes.” In this instance, Cuéllar indicates that the goods of modernization manifested in cosmetics that lightened a woman’s skin tone to appear more European negatively altered a woman’s attitude by becoming conceited. It is important to note, however, that it was the presumed lover of the notary’s wife, Don Gabriel, who helped the notary resolve his economic hurtles at her will. Don Gabriel, by economically helping the notary, indirectly economically sustained the notary’s wife and two daughters. Therefore, in addition to demonstrating that modernity was causing women to alter their

\[1\] Cuéllar, 21.
\[12\] Cuéllar, 22.
\[13\] Cuéllar, 22.
\[14\] Cuéllar, 23.
behavior in a negative manner by lightening their skin to look more European, Cuéllar continues to show the disruption in the nuclear family, a contradiction to the order Díaz sought to establish.

As Díaz pushed toward modernizing the country, it is also important to consider what happens to the female body during this period of time. Cuéllar’s “Having a Ball” provides us with a few glimpses demonstrating what was happening to the female body during this period of fast-paced modernization. In describing the measures women had to take in an attempt to appear beauty, the body becomes compartmentalized. For example, when Cuéllar discusses the Machuca sisters, he highlights their hands covered by gloves to hide their dark skin. When he mentions the notary’s wife, it is telling that he focuses on her face and her feet. Later in the short story, Cuéllar also mentions the extreme measures a couple of girls had to take to get ready for the ball. Rebecca and Natalia were two sisters who were poor and could not afford to buy extravagant dresses for the gathering. Most importantly, their body figure did not resemble what was fashionable at the time. Cuéllar states, “…these girls had noticed that today’s woman should display a protruding curve in the region of the coccyx…” He continues by explaining, “Paris has taken charge of correcting her figure, of enlarging, whittling, and streamlining it in order to distance her more and more from our first mother in Paradise.” In this instance, Cuéllar demonstrates how a woman’s body, her bottom to be exact, was more acceptable to society based on fashion trends dictated by France. Additionally, he points out that women’s bodies were being transformed to look less like the “first mother in Paradise,” or Eve. Like Eve, this religious differentiation Cuéllar makes suggests that Mexican women during the Porfiriato were turning away from the purity Eve was believed to have held in favor of sin, or in this case modernity. Since the sisters belonged to a poor family, Natalia could not afford a bustle to make her bottom appear rounder, so they improvised and used instead a birdeage, which was placed under her dress, to modify the appearance of her body. The way in which Cuéllar focuses on the notary’s wife’s face and shoes, the Machuca sisters’ hands, and Natalia’s bottom indicates that the rapid force of modernity in relation to feminine beauty required women to focus on their bodies one body part at a time.

Political and Ideological Thought during the Porfiriato

15 Cuéllar, 34.
16 Cuéllar, 34.
17 Cuéllar, 35-36.
In addition to the societal norms that affected the Porfiriato’s conception of feminine beauty, there were ideological and political views that also affected the development of interpretations of beauty. The same way that Mexicans adopted European culture in relation to ideals about femininity, Mexico’s political appropriation of Auguste Comte’s theory of positivism illustrates the ideology that dictated Mexico’s ways of thinking with respect to its population. During Díaz’s dictatorship, there was a group of individuals who held powerful positions in the Mexican government known as científicos (scientists). Most of the elites in power were mestizos, meaning that they were the European descendants of conquistadores who had mixed with native women, and they differentiated themselves from Mexico’s indigenous population that they perceived as inferior. These elite men were believers of the philosophical theory of positivism, which affected Díaz’s leadership politically and ideologically. For example, this ideology was not beneficial to Mexico’s indigenous population. They were perceived as uncivilized since they retained their pre-Hispanic customs; however, it was believed that once they became “modernized,” their inferiority would decrease. Becoming modern did not eliminate their second-class status, but it meant that they were more valuable to the Mexican state since they could become workers of lands that would ultimately create revenue for the country while also turning them consumers.

Mexico’s positivism also involved a Social Darwinist frame of thought, and as a result, científicos and the Mexican bourgeoisie viewed Mexico’s indigenous population as inferior, which suggests that the elite may not have considered indigenous women as beautiful due to their perceived inferiority. The Social Darwinist outlook that circulated among the elite demonstrates Mexico’s preference of whites, as it was perceived as superior. Viewing Mexico’s indigenous population as inferior and as one of the reasons holding the country back from achieving economic success, Mexican liberals offered a solution by welcoming European immigrants as the answer to the indigenous “problem.” The intermixing of European blood with

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18 During the 19th century, Auguste Comte posited that there was a true set of natural laws that explained how society functioned. In Mexico, positivism was implemented as a “political theory that advocated economic progress and social planning under the control of a technocratic elite and bolstered by an authoritarian government.” Michael S. Werner, *Encyclopedia of Mexico: History, Science, and Culture* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), 407.


20 Weiner, 37.
the indigenous “would improve the quality of the Mexican race.”

When applying these principles to feminine beauty, one can conclude that beauty was not a concept applicable to the masses because, from the point of view of elite, Mexico’s indigenous population was an inherently substandard race that could only be improved by mixing with “better” European blood since it would subsequently dilute the indigenous’ perceived inferiority. Mexico’s prominent ideology during the Porfiriato before the revolution illustrates the foundational elements that show how the Mexican elite viewed Europeans as superior and indigenous as inferior, a feature that will persist during and beyond the revolution despite strong effort to overturn this frame of thinking and exemplified in feminine beauty.

The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920)

The Mexican Revolution brought about various changes to the political and ideological arena. Diaz’s dictatorship marginalized most of Mexico’s population, and the benefits of modernization only benefitted a few. Rural unrest grew, especially since the government privatized large parts of the land. When war erupted, the revolution lacked professionalized soldiers so many women known as soldaderas and Adelitas (female soldiers) joined the revolution, playing an active role in battle. In addition to the country’s political unrest, scholarly ideology conceiving the way mestizos viewed Mexico’s indigenous population also changed, but it maintained the status quo expressed during the Porfiriato. Even though feminine beauty ideals and elitist ideologies altered during the revolution, exclusionary values expressed during the Porfiriato endured.

One scholar who sought to redefine Mexico’s negative views toward its indigenous population during the Mexican Revolution was archeologist Manuel Gamio. His reconstruction of Teotihuacán elevated Mexico’s pre-Hispanic past in the same high standing as the pyramids in Egypt. He also heavily relied on the work of Franz Boas who posited that races were not inferior to others and instead focused on the concept of culture. This is particularly important

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21 Weiner, 41.
because this way of thinking was completely different than that of Social Darwinism, which, in Mexico, elites used to convey that the country’s indigenous population was inherently inferior. With the help of Boaz, Gamio helped introduce a frame of thought in Mexico that offered an alternative to falling victim to the Social Darwinist trap of biological determinism. This shift in ideology was critical in uniting the country during and especially after the revolution because Gamio favored the incorporation of indigenous culture in Mexican nationalism. This is important within the context of feminine beauty because, to a certain extent, it allowed Mexican elite to consider other ethnicities as beautiful rather than the limiting Anglo-Saxon beauty ideal. Gamio acknowledged the importance of Mexico’s contemporary indigenous population by explaining that they maintained a form of their ancestors’ culture. He advocated for the importance of indigenous art as “one of the great bases of nationalism.” Nonetheless, one of Gamio’s main weaknesses is that he seemed to mostly value the aesthetic significance of the objects the indigenous populations created and little more.

Even though Gamio demonstrated that Mexico’s indigenous population was an important element in Mexico’s society by conveying that their culture was important to Mexican nationalism, his incorporation of the indigenous culture into Mexico’s nationalist ethos resembled the power structure under Díaz that preferred a cultural resemblance to that of Europe. Gamio found value in the indigenous population’s artistic abilities. He believed that indigenous art was valuable in developing a sense of nationalism; it carried a pre-Hispanic essence that could draw Mexicans together, indigenous and mestizos, together in sharing a common past. Despite this, Gamio, like Díaz, did not find much value in the indigenous beyond their role for nationalistic purposes. Gamio believed that contemporaries could not learn much from the indigenous population because he characterized their way of living as “archaic” and “culturally backward” peoples. Instead, he wanted the indigenous population to dispose their “traditional clothing” and superstitious beliefs in order to “contribute in a positive manner to the conquest of the material and intellectual well-being to which all humanity ceaselessly aspires.”

Gamio is different than Díaz in the sense that Gamio found value in Mexico’s indigenous population through their artistic abilities whereas Diaz largely ignored them. However, both have in

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24 Brading, 78.
25 Brading, 79.
26 Brading, 83.
27 Brading, 84.
common in their perceived inferiority of indigenous people rooted in Social Darwinism. Within the context of feminine beauty, indigenous beauty had to adopt contemporary and Europeanized ideals of beauty, but this action was not reciprocated. Mestiza women would not adopt the ideals of beauty that indigenous women perceived as important. Theoretically, Gamio subscribed to Boas instead of Herbert Spencer’s Social Darwinism by believing that no race was superior to another. Nonetheless, in practice, Gamio wanted Mexican indigenous to assimilate into the mestizo culture he perceived as more advanced. Despite the weaknesses in Gamio’s efforts to develop an inclusive Mexican society, his work is still valuable because he highlighted Mexico’s ethnically diverse population.

In addition to Gamio, José Vasconcelos, who was a writer, philosopher, and politician, is most famous for his work *La raza cósmica* (*The Cosmic Race*). He shares similarities with Gamio in that both sought to incorporate Mexico’s indigenous population but whose exclusionary tones diminished their efforts. Vasconcelos envisioned the cosmic race as one that was white and enhanced by adopting the best-perceived characteristics of Indigenous, Black, and Asian peoples. 28 “Mestizaje was the ultimate answer to the age-old ‘Indian problem’ in that it would erase—or at least dilute—indigenous populations under the guise of integration.” 29 Unlike Gamio who found value in indigenous art, Vasconcelos conceived a heterogeneous race composed of an amalgamation of races and was not interested in incorporating or retaining indigenous cultural diversity. 30 Vasconcelos sought to do this when he became Secretary of Ministry of Public Education from 1920-1924. He implemented educational programs that would serve as a tool of assimilation. His goal was to educate Mexico’s indigenous populations by assimilating them into the mestizo culture; and in the process of doing this, he hoped that the indigenous peoples would ultimately abandon their indigenous culture. 31

When applying Gamio’s concept of inclusivity and Vasconcelos’s idea of a cosmic race to feminine beauty, the goal of developing a more ethnically inclusive Mexico turns into a slight paradox. In theory, a beautiful woman would embody a sense of inclusivity in the extraction of characteristics considered to be the best from most races around the world. What makes this a

29 Varner, 18.
31 Beezley, 423.
paradox is that despite this all-encompassing view, the prevailing skin tone is the one often associated with Europeans. In placing light skin at the top of the racial hierarchy in the linear advancement of the human species, Vasconcelos indicates that the culmination of this cosmic race would express a European aesthetic. His preference for a European skin tone diminishes the potential of creating an inclusive Mexico because his interpretation of a cosmic race continues to assert power on those perceived as inferior by making them assimilate into a standard developed, not by the marginalized themselves, but by an elite group who thought of themselves as superior. A woman would have had to take drastic measures to be considered beautiful since the color of her skin would not fall to par with the standard set, subsequently causing further divisions because she would find it severely difficult to conform to those standards. The association of light skin with the pressure to progress into becoming racially superior could have made it socially acceptable for Mexican women to lighten their skin whereas before, under the Porfiriato, some such as Cuéllar would have ridiculed women who attempted to appear to have a lighter skin tone.

**Cultural Revolution After the Mexican Revolution? (1920-1940)**

Thanks to Gamio and Vasconcelos, appreciation for Mexico’s indigenous community began to grow publicly, and no other example best illustrates this than “La India Bonita” beauty contest of 1921. The contest was created by Mexican urban elite, which included intellectuals, such as Gamio himself who served as a judge in the contest, and commercial enterprises. This included individuals such as the owner of the newspaper *El Universal*, Félix Palavacini as well as architects Rafael Pérez Taylor and Hipólito Seijas. These elites were among the many who embarked on a journey to find a “legitimately beautiful Indian” woman. They developed a beauty contest to find this beautiful woman to celebrate Mexico’s centennial year of independence. It is important to note, however, that the Mexican government was not included in this contest. Post-revolutionary political figures did not adopt this new discourse concerning the importance of Mexico’s indigenous population to the country’s identity until the popularity of the beauty contest became evident.\(^\text{32}\)

\(^\text{32}\) Rick A. Lopez, “La India bonita Contest of 1921 and the Ethnicization of Mexican National Culture” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82 no. 2 (May 2002), 298.
“La India Bonita” Beauty Contest demonstrates that although the Mexican elite actively attempted to create an ethnically diverse Mexico, their efforts may be perceived as superficial. The elite in Mexico thought that the revolution had fragmented the country and sought to unite it. As a result, they thought that the country’s Indian culture would be central to recreating Mexico’s identity. A new definition of Indian beauty emerged where the media, such as El Universal newspaper, educated the public about what Indian beauty looked like by using visual images in their newspaper. El Universal defined a beautiful Indian woman as “a young pleasant-looking girl of humble position, with dark skin rounded facial features, heavy eye-lids, and with little or no formal education.” This description illustrates that the men in charge of the newspaper began developing an identity for Mexico’s indigenous population based around their own perceptions of what they thought a beautiful Indian looked like. El Universal indicates that a beautiful Indian incorporated class and intellectual abilities; she was one who belonged to a lower class and lacked education.

It is important to note however that El Universal’s description of a beautiful indigenous woman seemed to paradoxically complement and reject European beauty ideals. Indigenous women, like colonial Mexican women, were given shared characteristics manifested by domesticity, or in the Latin American context, marianismo; both were considered beautiful if they were humble and submissive. However, when considering intelligence, class, and ethnicity, these two forms of beauty come at odds with each other. European feminine beauty manifested by elite mestizas was characterized by virtue whereas the image of an indigenous woman created by El Universal depicted them with little to no education, a dichotomy that can also be interpreted in terms of civilization and savagery. European beauty was associated with light skin and hair while indigenous beauty was its antithesis in expressing beauty with dark skin and hair. The characteristics that El Universal assigned to indigenous women demonstrate that during the 1920s, feminine beauty in Mexico was still closely associated with women expressing behavior that was passive and obedient to male authority regardless of their ethnicity. Even though women of any class or ethnicity were expected to behave the same, aesthetically, elites like the ones in charge of El Universal continued to place elite women with light skin at the top of the beauty hierarchy by dichotomizing women’s intellectual abilities, class, and ethnicity.

33 Lopez, 298.
34 Lopez, 303.
35 Lopez, 301.
For example, the elite’s efforts in showing appreciation for indigenous beauty were superficial because they created a definition of beauty solely fit for indigenous women, which meant that indigenous beauty was not on the same level as white beauty. Although scholars like Gamio attempted to show that no race was better than the other, elites such as the creators of the 1921 “La India Bonita” beauty contest indicates that they still believed that some races were better than others in having to create a new definition of beauty for Mexico’s indigenous population. This differentiation demonstrates that indigenous beauty was incomparable to white beauty, subsequently illustrating that Mexico’s elite still seemed to prefer white beauty. This preference seems to diminish Mexican effort to be more inclusive of the indigenous population because beauty appears to have a “separate but equal” undertone, where white and indigenous beauty are not mutually inclusive.

Additionally, elites’ efforts to create a Mexico that was more inclusive were limited because they failed to consider that indigenous culture was different than their own. For example, it was common for indigenous women to have children out of wedlock. María Bibiana Uribe was pregnant when she was elected winner of “La India Bonita” beauty contest, a fact that was not known at the time she was crowned. Uribe could not obtain the education she was promised because her pregnancy went against the long held belief of female purity and chasteness. Moreover, Uribe was not asked to teach the public about her indigenous life, which implies that the public was not interested in learning about the people they sought to incorporate in the ethos of Mexico’s national image. This resembles the same attitude Gamio had in suggesting that contemporaries of his time could learn little from these “backward” people. In the instance of the “India Bonita” contest, Mexico’s indigenous people did not have a say in the creation of Mexico’s national identity discourse that affected perceptions of beauty.

In addition to “La India Bonita” beauty contest, Natasha Varner, a Latin American historian, argues that feminine beauty was an essential component of Mexico’s developing identity of mexicanidad or “mexicanness.” Mexicanidad was a unique concept created by the elite, such as Gamio and Vasconcelos, in an attempt to unify the country after the revolution by identifying “…rural Mexicans as Indian and [placing] their culture at the center of...

36 Lopez, 305.
37 It is important to note here that the term mexicanidad does not have a uniform definition. It can be thought of as a form of identity that values indigenous whereas mestizaje seems to have a stronger racial connotation.
postrevolutionary national identity.” Varner illustrates that the evolving meaning of *mexicanidad* turned into an amalgamation of indias bonitas, which included: women who were perceived to be indigenous, flower maidens, who were working-class flower vendors, and chinas poblanas, who were ethnically white women dressed in a manner according to their geographic region who often times incorporated modern traits such as a bobbed hair and strappy shoes. The creators of events such as beauty contests and pageants solidified a dichotomous identity portrayed in an “us versus them” manner in which the “us” were the majority of mestizos and “them” were the indigenous people. In identifying the characteristics that supposedly defined *mexicanidad*, “judges and journalists alike held the contestants up like specimens and scrutinized the quality of their dress and performance.” By “otherizing” women in attempting to classify them as indigenous women, the elite reinforced ideas about race that continued to view the masses as separate–indigenous or mestizo–instead of unified peoples.

Additionally, it is clear that the preoccupation with identifying an “authentic” individual was a continuation of anxieties expressed during the Porfiriato. In “Having a Ball,” Cuéllar demonstrated how beautiful women such as the Machuca sisters were perceived as illegitimate because their brother obtained his source of income in a dishonorable manner. Cuéllar pointed out that their aesthetic look appeared beautiful, but only because they were able to afford commodities that allowed them to hide their “true” identity as “nothing more than dark skinned girls who had been slightly washed.” Cuellar shows that beauty was not only skin-deep; economic status also played a prominent role in identifying a beautiful woman. Additionally, in the case of identifying a beautiful Indian, similar attitudes that permeated the Porfiriato were applied when identifying a beautiful indigenous woman. A beautiful Indian woman was identified according to her low class and low intellect. Mexico’s effort to establish an inclusive nationalist ethos via *mexicanidad* was limited; the social Darwinist impulse present during the Porfiriato that applied an all-encompassing form of categorization in an effort to implement order paradoxically developed disorder when this scientific methodology was applied to the realm of ambiguous socially constructed identities.

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40 Varner, 102.
41 Cuéllar, 29.
Moreover, views about feminine beauty were also influenced by space, especially when examining Deco bodies and camposcape. Ageeth Sluis describes a Deco body as a slender body that epitomized the “aesthetics of the machine age.” A Deco body embodied modernity by nourishing her physical beauty with the use of cosmetics and personal hygiene products. Additionally, Sluis coined the term camposcape and defined it as “a distinctive form of orientalism that equated exotic landscapes of the countryside with indígenas, the past, and national identity.” A Deco body emerged in Mexico during the 1920s and 1930s and was the form of feminine beauty preferred within the city. When combined with camposcape, a trait often associated with mexicanidad, a Deco body located in an urban setting could perform the exotic nudity associated with camposcape and be considered acceptable and attractive. Additionally, it is important to note that the city is particularly important during this time period because many from the countryside found themselves without economic means to support themselves and their family. As a result, many migrated to the city in search for a better opportunity to make ends meet. This transformed the social fabric within Mexico City because it was increasingly becoming populated with working-class peoples, which resulted in the increasing intermingling of different social classes that made the elite anxious since there were instances when it was difficult for them to tell social classes apart. This spatial movement of the lower classes into the city made it possible for a cross fertilization of cultures between the urban elite and suburban working class; however, this interchange of cultures ultimately benefitted the elite the most, subsequently cultivating exclusivity rather than inclusivity.

Ideas about feminine beauty were not uniform; Deco bodies and women performing camposcape in the city are two examples demonstrating the lack of uniform conceptions of beauty. For example, the physique of the Deco body emphasized “length, height, and androgyny” while also being “sophisticated, independent, and stylish.” The behavior of a woman with a Deco body was characterized by bataclanismo, a theatric show put on display in an urban setting. Performing with a certain amount of nudity was not something innovative in Mexico. Nonetheless, Mexico adopted bataclanismo, an originally French form of performing that was popularized in South America, because it “refused to stay behind the European avant-

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43 Sluis, 17.
44 Sluis,18.
45 Sluis, 62, 68.
Bataclanismo was performed in a manner where nude Deco bodies were tolerated since the audience observed and associated them with Greek beauty. Instead of viewing women as obscene, their performance in the city was considered a form of “moral entertainment.” The dramaturgical aspect involved in bataclanismo allowed women to behave in ways that society would have deemed unacceptable if displayed outside the theater. In Mexico, bataclanismo exhibited a strong expression of female sexuality often coupled with political satire that contested the city’s destitute conditions of poverty-stricken neighborhoods.

The bare female Deco body of a bataclana not only altered views about femininity, as it became acceptable for women to expose their bodies in an urban setting within the context of a theatric performance, but it also emphasized the shape of the body rather than skin color. In theory, anyone, regardless of ethnicity or spatial context, could become modern and be perceived beautiful by transforming their body to look slim. Democratizing the slender shape of the Deco body coincided with Mexican revolutionary goals during the 1920s in two ways. As Mexico sought to modernize, the Deco body signaled that women’s beauty ideal was also becoming modern, and it brought a sense of unity within the country after a turbulent revolution since every woman was, in theory, able to obtain a Deco body.

In addition to Deco bodies and bataclanismo, indigenous women in camposcape also allowed feminine beauty to be acceptable of nudity. Camposcape can be conceived as a characteristic pertaining to mexicanidad and was associated with Mexico’s indigenous population and its romanticized past. The idealization of camposcape can be traced back to Mexico’s colonial period during the eighteenth and especially during the nineteenth century when the Mexican elite looked up to French modernity through Art Nouveau. This trend depicted women as “symbolic of a dreamy, highly irrational, erotic nature…which elaborated the exotic, the ethereal, and the natural—the very qualities believed to invoke femininity.” Camposcape was a romanticized and “idealized countryside” filled with “national authenticity, origin, and beauty.” The countryside “equated the exotic with the feminine and articulated the desirability of healthy and often nude indigenous female bodies with nostalgic longing for a lost,
Mexican Eden: its roots and true nature.” ⁵³ Within the countryside, it was acceptable and even glamorous for indigenous women of Mexico to be nude. However, it is important to note that an indigenous woman would not have been able to be nude on stage the same as women with Deco bodies, subsequently demonstrating how different body forms were acceptable in different spaces.

Nonetheless, the characterization of feminine beauty during Mexico’s post-revolutionary period in relation to the city and camposcape ultimately undermined Mexico’s efforts to become a more inclusive country by considering their indigenous population. Elites perceived as beautiful the nude body of an indigenous woman in the countryside as they associated it with “mexicanidad, authenticity, and indigenismo.” ⁵⁴ However, when this indigenous body was taken out of its camposcape and placed in the city, indigenous women were no longer considered beautiful. Their “mexicanidad” and “indigenismo” no longer seemed to fit in an urban setting that sought to modernize by adopting the latest fashions.

Most importantly, indigenous women who “belonged” in the countryside but moved to the city made elites anxious, as they were perceived as corrupt bodies because their presence in the city could not be distinguished from a market woman or a prostitute. ⁵⁵ Elite women, on the other hand, could take the beauty expressed in camposcape and appropriated it in the city. “Faux indígenas wearing fabricated costumes and sporting bobbed hair, headbands, and dark lipstick” were often photographed in a recreated world that was supposed to represent the countryside. ⁵⁶ Women who belonged to the higher classes could navigate between both spaces and be accepted as beautiful. However, indigenous women could only be considered beautiful in their “natural” space. Once they left the countryside to the modern world in the city, indigenous women had to assimilate as modern Deco bodies or they ran the risk of being seen as degenerate women, something that was considered unacceptable, as it contradicted the notion that women had to remain pure.

**Visual Media Between 1920-1950**

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⁵³ Sluis, 102.
⁵⁴ Sluis, 103.
⁵⁵ Sluis, 115.
⁵⁶ Sluis, 123.
During the 1920s through the 1940s, the media played an important role in educating the public about what it meant for women to be beautiful. In *Imagining la Chica Moderna*, Joanne Hershfield analyzes the role that visual media played in informing the post-revolutionary public during the 1920s and 1930s about what it meant to a women to be beautiful. In contrast to Hershfield, Sluis does not seem convinced in the importance that Hershfield places on images as educators of feminine beauty. Instead, Sluis argues and prioritizes the Deco body spatially located in the city as the vessel that allowed different manifestations of feminine beauty. Sluis still finds visual media as important, however, especially since images published by magazines such as *Vea* associated women’s sexuality to civic space, thus making the city a location where female sexuality was contained. Additionally, Varner’s work contains an overarching argument that the elite used visual media “to measure their own identity in and progress against the Indigenous other.” To Varner, the 1920s through the 1940s was a period when Mexicans were exposed to images that expressed ambiguous forms of mexicanidad, as they included a mixture of working-class flower vendors, indias bonitas, and chinas poblanas, and they were used to differentiate mestizos and Indigenous.

Various forms of visual media were available in Mexico during the post-revolutionary period that had already been present for decades. Newspapers and magazines were fairly available to the majority of the Mexican public during the first half of the 20th century. The introduction of new technology such as film also helped reach a larger audience, one that was illiterate, and the inexpensive price of attending movie screenings made it possible for people of all income levels to participate in this form of entertainment. The still images illustrated in print as well as motion pictures helped people understand the world surrounding them; it informed them “how to act, to move through particular spaces, and how to dress, as well as how to relate to other individuals and material object and spaces.” The proliferation of images about beautiful women depicted ideals that women were encouraged to aspire to while also training the male eye about which characteristics to look for in a woman.

Within the context of Mexico’s post-revolutionary period, the use of images reflected the nation’s continuing desire to participate in modernity while also seeking to create a united

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57 Sluis, 17, 97.
58 Sluis, 138.
59 Varner, 33.
national identity. Mexico’s emphasis on modernity, via its government officials and intellectual elites, was reflected through depictions of women in images. To the bourgeoisie, being modern meant being a *chica moderna*, or a modern woman. Closely related to the flapper in the United States, *la chica moderna* in Mexico engaged in modernity by wearing the latest fashions from Paris and New York. “She [was] middle class, tall, slender; she [smoked] cigarettes, and [wore] make up.”

Although *la chica moderna* was ethnically white, the Mexican elite sought to adopt modernity on its own terms by characterizing their own form of modernity as hybrid. Hershfield explains that hybridity, or mexicanidad, in Mexico functioned in two ways: “the first, motivated by the growth of the middle class and the resulting expansion of European and U.S. ideals of capitalism, liberalism, and democracy; the second, an effect on the ‘interweaving’ of local indigenous cultures and practices with modern, global social and economic institutions.” As previously discussed, this sense of hybridity, or mexicanidad, had originated during the 1920s thanks to Gamio, Vasconcelos, and other elites such as the creators of *La India Bonita* beauty contest. In depicting women in images as modern while also adopting the hybrid aspect in mexicanidad, post-revolutionary elite applied images of women as a nation-building tool that sought to fulfill two needs with one deed.

Additionally, film also helped disperse ideas about feminine beauty. In depicting indigenous women, films portrayed them with a submissive demeanor while also employing the constructed trope of the *india bonita* seen during the *India Bonita* Beauty contest of 1921. According to Varner, during the 1930s the *cine folclorico* genre developed and sympathized with social Darwinist views concerning indigenous peoples. This outlook was evident under the Porfiriato between 1876 and 1910 when the elite viewed the indigenous as inherently inferior. After the revolution, perception towards the indigenous changed in that there was an effort from various anthropologist to diminished the perceived inferiority of non-Western cultures as being...

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61 Hershfield, 5. Notice the similarities that *la chica moderna* has with the Deco body that Sluis discusses. Sluis conveys, “Hershfield posits that through a Mexicanization of the transnational flapper, la chica moderna was able to modernize a number of female roles available to Mexican women in the 1920a and 1930s…Yet, I would argue that it was through the transnational vehicle of the Deco body that these various type of femininity were able to coexist and map onto each other and the city.” See Sluis, 97.

62 Hershfield, 12.


64 Varner, 107.
naturally inherent and instead focused on the differences between cultures. Others like Vasconcelos posited that indigenous peoples needed to assimilate into modern culture and abandoned their indigenous culture altogether. Film during Mexico’s post-revolutionary period seemed to have sided with Vasconcelos. The ciné folclorico genre illustrated the perceived backwardness of indigenous people and showed them a positive future if they adopted modernity.65

The exclusionary values expressed in feminine beauty in Mexican film diminished the revolutionary efforts to create an inclusive society. For example, in the late 1930s the film, La India bonita was created and attempted to tell the story of the 1921 beauty contest. The main character playing the role of Uribe, the winner of the contest, appears to be mestiza, not indigenous as the color of her skin is evidently lighter. In casting Anita Campillo to play an indigenous woman, the film appears to favor the feminine beauty ideal associated with the eradication of characteristics associated with Mexico’s indigenous that included their dark skin in favor of a lighter skin tone. Varner keenly notes that whereas two-dimensional media associated with beauty pageants expressed a main concern for identifying an “authentic” indigenous woman, motion pictures favored a feminine beauty that took the form of mestizaje manifested by Vasconcelos’s idealistic and exclusionary view of a cosmic race that diluted the negative aspects of indigenous peoples, in this case that aspect was their dark skin.66

The contradictions between elevating Mexico’s indigenous culture while attempting to become a modern nation are evident in their interpretation of feminine beauty. Advertisements showed that women in Mexico seem to have been considered beautiful in their use of naturally made products that connected the natural with the romanticized nature imagined in camposcape. However, celebration for Mexico’s connection with its indigenous and mestizo population seems to have been restricted since a lighter skin tone was favored. Similarities are also evident when considering film. Even though print visual media demonstrated a concern for identifying an authentic indigenous woman, the casting of lighter skinned women to play an indigenous woman indicates that the film preferred a European aesthetic form of feminine beauty.

Conclusion

65 Varner, 108.
66 Varner, 133.
A small glimpse at Mexico’s cultural background as a former colony sheds light on the gendered representations that women in Mexico were expected to practice to have been considered attractive. The country’s political and ideological environment demonstrates the adoption of European philosophies that, when adopted in a Latin American setting, resulted in forms of prejudice that favored interpretations of female beauty based on Europeans aesthetic traits. The favoritism of these European attributes began to slightly shift during and after Mexico’s revolution when elites such as Gamio and Vasconcelos began to emphasize the importance of Mexico’s indigenous population. However, the noticeable continuation of exclusionary values that the elite held throughout the Porfiriato and well into the first half of the 20th century manifested in feminine ideals of beauty suggests that the disruption of the Mexican Revolution was not as drastic as commonly known. 67 Mexico’s commercial enterprise developed and used the image of a beautiful Indian to not only gain profit but also to redefine what it meant for a woman to be beautiful. Nonetheless, these efforts to incorporate Mexico’s indigenous population fell short because elites seem to have failed to consider the indigenous’ opinion in defining beauty.

These endeavors were also diminished when lighter skinned women could express their nakedness, which was associated with nature and indigenous women in the countryside, in an urban setting and still be considered beautiful. However, indigenous women could not have done the same since they were expected to shed their traditions to become modern. Moreover, advertisements were also a form of media that reflected Mexico’s attempt in adopting a path towards modernity while also maintaining its seeming appreciation for its indigenous population. Women’s aesthetic beauty regiments that emphasized the use of naturally made products can be traced back to the romanticized natural look given to indigenous women in camposcape.

67 See Adam David Morton, “Reflections on Uneven Development: Mexican Revolution, Primitive Accumulation, Passive Revolution,” in Latin American Perspectives 37, no. 1 (January, 2010): 7-34. Morton discusses how, in Gramscian terms, the Mexican Revolution was a passive revolution. This chapter would support Morton’s claim because, when considering the social structures that aided the various forms of Mexican feminine beauty, the evidence seems to suggest a preference for Europeanized forms of beauty. As a result, Mexico’s political realm may have arguably experienced a strong break from Diaz’s dictatorship, but a cultural and social break is less evident when analyzing Mexican feminine beauty. Preference of European beauty it evident during Diaz’s dictatorship and well beyond the revolution, which does not appear to reflect the strong ideological break expressed by post-revolutionaries that sought to place genuine importance on Mexico’s indigenous populations. Indigenous populations were, in fact, placed at the center of the country’s nationalist ethos, but it seems to have been done so in a manner that mostly benefited the elite rather than the indigenous. For more on the Mexican Revolution being a passive one, see Chris Hesketh, “From Passive Revolution to Silent Revolution: Class forces and the Production of State, Space and Scale in Modern Mexico,” in Capital & Class 34 no. 3 (September 2010): 383-407.
However, the adoption of beauty traits associated with Mexico’s indigenous population was limited since women were still encouraged to lighten her skin. Similarly in films, the portrayal of indigenous women in the big screen favored a European aesthetic form of feminine beauty by casting a mestiza instead of an indigenous woman.

This chapter has argued that even though some post-revolutionary individuals attempted to incorporate Mexico’s indigenous population into the country’s social fabric, those efforts were diminished in the prevailing acceptance of a feminine beauty ideal that favored traits often associated with Europeans. This chapter briefly examined Mexico’s evolution of beauty ideals since its colonial period to establish the cross-cultural foundation between the Spanish, who later became mestizos, and indigenous populations. In doing so, this chapter established a foundational set of values that persisted into the 20th century, although in modified forms. An examination of the Porfiriato helps contextualize how societal norms conceptualized beauty in a compartmentalized manner during a period of time that was characterized by Diaz’s rapid introduction of modernization.

Additionally, addressing ruling ideologies under the Porfiriato helped contextualize the elite’s intellectual way of thinking that extended to how they perceived feminine beauty. The turmoil of the Mexican Revolution destabilized Mexico’s political and ideological arena and allowed the introduction of alternative ways of conceiving feminine beauty thanks to Gamio and Vasconcelos. However, the break from previous ideologies expressed during the Porfiriato was not a hard one, as lingering prejudices continued to favor European forms of beauty. In lieu of these changes, the post-revolutionary period conveyed ambiguous forms of feminine beauty that attempted to come to terms with the modern and Indigenous. Yet, the continuing preference for a feminine beauty ideal that continued to disregard indigenous peoples diminished the post-revolutionary goal of inclusivity. This chapter claims that two dimensional media and film expressed ideas of beauty that were not all the same but still seemed to express an exclusionary element that disregarded the Indigenous. In attempting to historicize feminine beauty ideals from Mexico’s colonial period through the 1940s, this chapter establishes the construction, although problematic, of *mexicanidad*, a characteristic that I will argue transformed radically by the 1950s in the following chapters.
Chapter 2: The Unbroken Female Body in Post-Revolutionary Art and its 1950s Dismemberment

_Mexicanidad_ is a concept that scholars have engaged with in various manners. For example, Ageeth Sluis has eloquently conveyed the spatial element involved in _mexicanidad_, especially in relation to camposcape and an urban setting. When considering visual media in relation to business culture and advertising, Julio Moreno keenly identifies how depictions of _mexicanidad_ and women were often visualized in dichotomous terms such as of virgins and whores, which represent two important figures in Mexican history: the Virgin of Guadalupe and “La Malinche,” who supposedly betrayed her people by helping Hernan Cortez’s conquer Mexico.¹ Joanne Hershfield describes _mexicanidad_ by stating,

> ‘Revolutionary machismo’ was part of a two-decade period in which successive admirations promoted versions of a nationalist campaign to mold a modern nation and a coherent national identity that came to be known as _mexicanidad_. Mexicanidad was formed and solidified through a set of discourses, stereotypes, myths, and histories that were disseminated through state-controlled publish education and through numerous official cultural projects…²

Hershfield makes it clear that the Mexican government played a strong role in developing _mexicanidad_. While it is important to acknowledge the role that the government had in creating _mexicanidad_, Sluis, Moreno, and Hershfield identify the importance that visual media had in spreading the idea in Mexican society.

Additionally, during Mexico’s post-revolutionary period (roughly from the 1920s through the 1930s), art was a prominent medium that the state used to disseminate ideas about the country’s re-making of its national identity and its _mexicanidad_. One school of art that was popular included the muralists, to which artist like Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco belonged. Like the name implies, their artwork consisted of murals, which often times was sponsored by the government. The role of the government is particularly important when considering the art that muralists created because government officials were the ones who had a

tremendous say in dictating how and what the artwork needed to exhibit. The Mexican government sought the help from artists and employed them to create visuals that would educate the population about what it meant to be Mexican throughout the country’s nation-building process. In contrast to the muralists, there were other artists known as the Contemporáneos who opposed the way muralists interwove art with nationalism. Instead, Contemporáneos illustrated images of *mexicanidad* that continued to pay attention to racial diversity by painting indigenous people but without nationalist undertones. Even though muralists are a group of artists highly remembered for their work, the Contemporáneos help to usher in a new generation of artists and ideas that expressed a stronger cosmopolitan, international worldview rather than the one confined by nationalism, which is reflected in the images of the 1950s.

This chapter will examine the expression of *mexicanidad* through depictions of women’s bodies in art created during Mexico’s post-revolutionary period, and it will be contrasted to beauty columns and advertisements found in magazines during the 1950s. This analysis will establish how muralists like Rivera and Orozco and Contemporáneos like Julio Castellanos and Rufino Tamayo expressed *mexicanidad* in their depiction of the entirety of women’s bodies. It is important to note that muralists depicted women’s bodies with a strong sense of nationalism whereas Contemporáneos mostly rejected it; but despite this difference, both schools of art illustrated women’s bodies in their entire form. Paying attention to the way in which women’s complete bodies were painted in post-revolutionary art is important because during the 1950s, the female body appears to have been broken into pieces; images and articles addressing women’s bodies only focus on specific body parts rather than their whole body. As the female body is broken down, other elements related to *mexicanidad* expressed by the muralists are also missing such as the emphasis on nationalism and racial diversity. This chapter will ultimately demonstrate that the decimation of the promises of the Mexican Revolution was also evident during the 1950s by examining how the female body was broken down into pieces.

**Women’s Complete Bodies in Art During the Post-Revolutionary Period**

Mexican feminine beauty during the 1920s through the 1940s expressed *mexicanidad* in art that exhibited women’s bodies in their complete form. In doing so, artists such as muralists and Contemporáneos also connected women’s bodies to be representatives of the Mexican
nation. They used the female body as a metaphor for the nation, which was illustrated as native and agricultural productive. For example, Sluis conveys that Mexican art exhibited strong ties to camposcape, which “championed indigenous—and at times mestiza—nudity as aesthetically refined, pure, healthy, and authentically Mexican.”

She uses as an example Diego Rivera’s *The Liberated Earth with the Natural Forces Controlled by Man* (1926) to assert how it was representative of Mexican women. Located at the Chapingo Autonomous University in Texcoco, Mexico, Sluis analyzes the image by stating, “Modernist ideas glorifying the machine age, which replaces female generative power with male technology, surface in Rivera’s work where the man-machine dominating female camposcape clashed with the dark powers of the woman-machine, or the metropolis.” In other words, modernity’s technological developments seem to contradict camposcape. What is most important about the image, however, is the way in which the women are depicted. The women do appear to be illustrated in a passive manner as they are laying or sitting down. In contrast, the man in the middle is standing upright receiving the gift of fire by another seemingly strong man.

Figure 1. Diego Rivera: *The Liberated Earth with the Natural Forces Controlled by Man*. Fresco, 1926. Chapel, north wall, Autonomous University of Chapingo, Mexico

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3 Sluis, 125.
4 Sluis, 127.
Even though the women in the painting appear passive, their bodies represent a complete form of the female body. The illustration of the women’s entire bodies does not render them incomplete or fragmentary. The completeness of their bodies may be connected to the unity that post-revolutionaries sought to create during this time. According to Adriana Zavala, the woman on the lower right hand corner “represents maternal fecundity rather than sexually awakened womanhood.”5 The woman on the lower right hand corner is connected to her male counterpart, who is the receiver of fire—or enlightenment—by their presumed male child that uses wires representative of technology to liberate mother Earth, at the top center of the image, “who symbolizes the post-revolutionary nation.”6 Rivera’s painting demonstrates how he places mexicanidad at the center of his narrative by placing Mexico’s indigenous at the center of the painting’s narrative. Additionally, Zavala helps explain how Rivera continued to ascribe to the discourse that viewed women and their fertility in terms of motherhood. Nonetheless, this depiction is important within Mexico’s post-revolutionary context because motherhood was an important characteristic in Mexican nationalism. Many believed that women’s maternal instincts would make them strong educators, which was important in the process of assimilating indigenous populations to modern Mexican society.7 The integrity of the female body, the centrality of Mexico’s indigenous people in the image’s narrative, and the woman on the lower right’s sexuality, which is then connected to her fertility in terms of motherhood within the context the country’s post-revolutionary stage, appears to reinforce mexicanidad.

In addition to The Liberated Earth with the Natural Forces Controlled by Man, The Burial of the Revolution (1926), is another work Rivera created showing a similar element that highlights how he interprets women’s bodies in their entire form. Located in the Ministry of Education in Mexico City, The Burial of the Revolution illustrates the “heroic sacrifice in the revolutionary struggle.”8 In this instance, four images of women’s bodies appear in the sky as representative of the nation, and by looking at each individual image from left to right, it becomes evident that Rivera may be conveying a message of progress as the darkness from the left side of the image gradually turns light as the viewer looks to the right. The woman in the far

6 Zavala, 198.
left appears dark, perhaps signaling a period of time before the revolution that Rivera may have interpreted as “uncivilized.” In the middle, two images of women appear to be gaining their consciousness as if they had been in a deep slumber, which could be interpreted as the Mexican nation being awakened by the sacrifices of the revolution. Rivera illustrates the last woman to the right with relatively bright colors, and her open palm points to the right of the image with a welcoming gesture, which suggests that Mexico is ready for progress after having been awakened by the revolution. *The Burial of the Revolution* shows how the entirety of women’s bodies were strongly tied to represent the whole nation as one that had risen from darkness into the progress that light had to offer.

Figure 2. *Top* Diego Rivera: *The Burial of the Revolutionary*. Fresco, 1926. North wall stairwell, Court of Labour, Ministry of Education, Mexico City.

Figure 3. *Bottom* Diego Rivera: *Tropical Mexico and Xochipilli and his Votaries*. Fresco, 1926. North wall stairwell, Court of Labour, Ministry of Education, Mexico City.
The importance that Rivera places on women is also evident in *The Mechanization of the Countryside* (1926) and *Tropical Mexico* and *Xochipilli and his Votaries* (1926), which are two additional artworks also located in the Ministry of Education. In *The Mechanization of the Countryside*, Rivera depicts women in two forms. First, the woman on the left is the one overthrowing Mexican landlords, and the other woman in the middle represents the agent grasping the fruits of the land, suggesting that she holds the future of the nation in her hands. The use of indigenous people as the ones overthrowing the landlords and as the ones using modern tools to work the land shows that as the countryside is modernizing while holding on to its imagined essence. Rivera does not focus on a specific body part as a representation of the nation; instead, he seems to place value on the presence of women’s body as a whole. The image depicts women in a heroic manner as the destructor of Mexico’s landlords. Additionally, she appears to be the vehicle of progress as evidenced by the woman in the middle holding on to the country’s future represented by her sitting on fertile ground that produced corn and wheat. In *Tropical Mexico* and *Xochipilli and his Votaries*, Rivera paints an idealized pre-Hispanic past where two women focus their attention on Xochipilli, an Aztec god, as they are surrounded by nature.\(^9\)

Whereas *The Mechanization of the Countryside* illustrates women as the destructors of evil and bearers of the future, Rivera places women in Mexico’s pre-Hispanic past. By looking at these two images together and considering women’s role, Rivera indicates in *Tropical Mexico* and *Xochipilli and his Votaries* that women were the ones paying close attention to the Aztec god, thus making women the carriers of Mexico’s pre-Hispanic culture while additionally demonstrating in *The Mechanization of the Countryside* that women were also the just beings overthrowing the unfairness of the landlords and the guardians of the future.

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\(^9\) Rochfort, 61.
Rivera was not the only muralist who found women’s body important to *mexicanidad*. José Clemente Orozco was another artist who lived and painted during the same time as Rivera. Located in Mexico City’s National Preparatory School, *Cortez and Malinche* (1926) exemplifies women’s representation in art in a different manner. Desmond Rochfort, Mexican art expert and scholar, eloquently described the image by stating, “The image of Cortez and Malinche symbolizes synthesis, subjugation and the ambivalence of her position in the story of the nation’s history of colonial intervention.”¹⁰ He points out that Orozco’s painting places importance on the body of an indigenous woman, which in this instance is the body of the Malinche, within Mexico’s colonial history. The image illustrates a Spanish conquistador as the main male figure in the painting united with the Malinche by holding her hand while his left hand demonstrates that he is also controlling her. Additionally, the conquistador seems to overpower indigenous

¹⁰ Rochfort, 45.
men by placing his foot on the man lying on the floor as if to keep him down. More importantly, the presence of a female body in Orozco’s artwork exhibits the important role that women had during colonialism. Similar to how Rivera placed importance on women by depicting them in a pre-Hispanic setting and as the agents of the future, Orozco situates the image of a woman’s complete body in another crucial point in time during Mexico’s history. This is particularly significant because in 1950, Octavio Paz, who was a poet an essayist, published *The Labyrinth of Solitude* that helps transform how the public culturally accepts la Malinche as having a stronger role in Mexico’s conquest. Paz’s work demonstrates how la Malinche’s body is the one used to create the entire mestizo race.11 As a result, the study of her entire body as representative of a mestizo nation is important to consider.

Figure 5. José Clemente Orozco: *Cortez and Malinche*. Fresco, 1926. National Preparatory School, Mexico.

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The nationalistic art that artists like Rivera and Orozco created was not the only type of art produced during Mexico’s post-revolutionary period. In contrast to the muralists, there was another group of artists known as the Contemporáneos who did not entirely agree with the use of art as a nation-building tool. Unlike the muralists who created art that was strongly influenced by the Mexican government, Contemporáneos were not employed by the state. Being a faction of artists that had little to no association with the government meant that their art reflected a different picture that showed how they conceptualized their world around them, including mexicanidad. Adolfo Best Maugard, a Mexican painter who had been Franz Boaz’s assistant ethnographer, influenced artists known as Contemporáneos such as Julio Castellanos (1905-1947) and Rufino Tamayo (1889-1991). Jose Vasconcelos hired Best Maugard in the 1920s where he became the director of the Drawing and Handicraft Department, which was a division of Mexico’s public education program. Best Maugard developed the Best Maugard Drawing Method, which combined “seven graphic elements (the spiral, the circles, the half circles, the S shape, the wavy line, and the straight line).”

12 Best Maugard believed that art should express mexicanidad, and recognizing indigenous art was the first step in doing so. He stated, “If any nation abruptly takes from another or others the elements necessary for expressing what it feels, what it thinks is beautiful… it will never be able to obtain the harmonious and genuine expression of its national spirit.”

13 In other words, he seems to support expressions of mexicanidad in art because he thought that if Mexico looked elsewhere to identify beauty and took that idea as its own, the country’s national spirit would not be well reflected; therefore, it was important to acknowledge Mexico’s own beauty that could be found in its indigenous population.

Even though Best Maugard inspired Contemporáneos like Castellanos and Tamayo, both artists broke away from illustrating mexicanidad with strong nationalist undertones. The Best Maugard method was the one that Castellanos and Tamayo learned as they came of age in the early 1920s. To the Contemporáneos, the Best Maugard Drawing method was important because it offered an alternative to “muralism’s hegemonic discourses…”

14 In other words, they found value in the method, but they were not fond of using the method with nationalist goals as the

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13 Berg, 181.
muralist had done. Contemporáneos did not entirely agree with the Mexican Revolution since they viewed it as an act of barbarism that had disrupted the order that Porfirio Díaz sought to create in the 19th century. Unlike artists such as Rivera and Orozco, Contemporáneos wanted to use art in a nationalist manner that prevailed the rural as well as indigenous and peasants, Contemporáneos viewed the city as representative of Mexico and modernity. This difference in ideology could help explain why some muralists worked for the Mexican government while Contemporáneos did not. Muralists wanted to stay true to the revolution’s goals by maintaining their distance from foreign economies and championing the proletariat, but Contemporáneos carried on the legacy that strongly favored Europeans by hoping to restore relations with European cultures to move beyond the discourses about identity that were prominent after the revolution.

Additionally, Contemporáneos’ choice of medium and patronage illustrate their opposition to nationalist art. Instead of creating murals, their work included smaller works such as easel paintings and images published in “journals, magazines, and illustrated novels.” Contemporáneos promoted foreign works, as they believed that art should illustrate the individual and not be tied to agendas. That way, it would allow for the creation of “pure art” that did not seek to “homogenize Mexican identity but instead to express universal human truths and thus draw Mexico further into the cosmopolitan world.” In contrast, Rivera and Orozco expressed their artwork in murals, which were often times sponsored by the state. It may be easy to come to the conclusion that Rivera and Orozco’s art was an “authentic” form of art because their art reflected the values and goals of the revolution, which could have been at the command of the Mexican government. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mid the artist’s agency in this case; Rivera was, after all, a strong supporter of the revolution. It is important to keep in mind, however, that there were even quarrels within muralists, which Orozco reflected since he “opposed Rivera’s utopian political mythologizing of revolutionary struggle and his folkloric indigenismo. For Orozco, the struggle for ideals and their betrayal by the fallibility of human beings that leads to greed, power, exploitation, and superstition dichotomized the human

15 Velázquez, 293.
17 Velázquez, 295.
18 Castro, 312.
19 Castro, 313.
character, dooming it to tragic repetitions of failure…”

Art for Orozco did not have the same idealist goal that Rivera imagined, and Contemporáneos represented an alternative point of view where their perception of the role of art was also different.

Various artworks that Contemporáneos created include Castellanos’s *Two Nudes* (1929) and *Three Nudes* (1930). *Two Nudes* resides in Mexico City’s Museo de Arte Moderno, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art currently has *Three Nudes*. In *Two Nudes* Castellanos painted two dark skinned women sitting on two green chairs. The woman on the left has her back facing the viewer while the woman on the right faces the viewer. The background is plain and white with orange tile for floors. The women appear to be indigenous due to their dark skin and hair. Art historian Adriana Zavala states, “Their volumetric bodies classicize Indian womanhood, and thus Castellanos constructs the female body as a sign that carries forward the idealization of *indias bonitas* within the post-revolutionary as well as generalized desire.”

In this instance, Zavala contextualizes *Two Nudes* within Mexico’s post-revolutionary context and makes the connection demonstrating how the women in the painting share similarities with the discourse of beautiful Indians.

Nonetheless, even though Castellanos appears to illustrate *mexicanidad* in the images by focusing the viewers’ attention on indigenous women, his interpretation takes a different shape. In his analysis of Castellanos’s *Three Nudes* (1930), art historian Mark A. Castro states, “Although this painting recalls nudes by Picasso, the artist underscores the scene’s Mexican setting, depicting the dark skinned women within the white plaster walls of a typical Mexican home.”

Even though Castro says this about *Three Nudes*, the same can be said about *Two Nudes*. Castellanos could have easily placed the women in a rural setting, but it appears that he chose not to do so since he was a Contemporáneo, which meant that he did not agree with the muralists who championed rural Mexico and campesinos. Being a Contemporáneo, Castellanos’s painting demonstrates how he’s moving away from campescope and concentrating his interests on engaging in international trends such as those exhibited by Picasso rather than giving his art nationalistic undertones. The medium itself that he chose, oil on canvas, and the size of the

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21 Zavala, 216.
22 Castro, 315.
painting, only about 39 by 35 inches, further indicates his rejection of the Mexican muralist movement. Therefore, even though Castellanos exhibits *mexicanidad* in his use of indigenous women, the emphasis on national identity is largely missing. What is more telling, however, is that his interpretation includes the use of women’s entire body. As *Two Nudes* shows, even if one side of one women’s body is absent, the other woman is there to illustrate and complete the missing parts.

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Figure 6. Julio Castellanos: *Three Nudes*. Oil on canvas, 1930. Philadelphia Museum of Art.
Three Nudes also emphasizes women’s bodies while continuing to de-emphasize nationalist undertones. Created in 1930, a year after Two Nudes, the painting highly resembles Two Nudes. Both women are sitting down, the woman on the left shows her back to the viewer while the one on the right is front facing, and the plain gray wall remains. Some of the differences include the addition of a male child drinking from a white bowl with the help of the woman on the right who is sitting behind him. In addition to the white bowl, there is and a bright white vase, which appears to be the object drawing the viewer’s attention away from the nude indigenous people. Like Two Nudes the element of camposcape as a way of projecting nationalism is missing, as the women appear to be indoors rather than the countryside. The characteristic of a caring mother is present since the woman on the right is helping a young child drink from a white bowl. However, even though the painting appears to express mexicanidad by
using indigenous women’s bodies, removing the focal point away from the indigenous people and placing it into the brightness of the vase decentralizes the attention of the viewer away from the indigenous people. The focus on the material objects rather than the indigenous bodies could have suggested Castellanos’s favoritism for the modern rather than traditional.

Additionally, expressions of *mexicanidad* did not always deem it acceptable to paint nude males.\(^{23}\) Only being able to paint nude indigenous women also demonstrates how *mexicanidad* was gendered. Even after considering gender, Sluis shows how race and ethnicity also played a role in determining which bodies occupied which spaces. Similar to how Mexican elite deemed it acceptable for indigenous to be seen nude in camposcape but not in the city, and how middle to high class women could be nude in camposcape as long as they performed the role of an indigenous woman while also being able to be nude in the city as long as they were within the context of a theatric show such as bataclanismo, it was not completely acceptable for nude male bodies to be seen in art. In the instance of *Three Nudes*, Castellanos may have tactically drawn a child rather than an adult male as to not call too much attention to his nudity; a nude child would have been perceived as less threatening. The brightness of the vase and bowl could have also been strategically painted to further take away the attention from the boy’s nudity. Making the bright white vase and bowl the focal point of the painting mirrors the Contemporáneo in Castellanos; *Three Nudes* did not ascribe to the popular nationalistic discourse that placed indigenous people in the revered countryside as the center of attention. Instead, the vase and bowl actually took attention away from the presumed indigenous individuals in the painting. Castellanos also carefully went against societal concerns over male nudity by painting a male child, but he seems cautious in having done so since the bright white vase and bowl drew the viewers’ attention away from the nudity involved in the painting.

In addition to Castellanos, Tamayo was another Contemporáneo whose paintings illustrate a different form of *mexicanidad* without strong nationalist elements and emphasizes the use of women’s entire bodies. When considering Mexican feminine beauty, his *Nude in Red* (1930), which was created using oil on canvas, serves as an example that may shed light as to how Tamayo conceptualized women in Mexico. In *Nude in Red* Tamayo appears to paint an indigenous woman who is kneeling down looking away from the viewer as she holds a long

\(^{23}\) Castro, 315. Castro explains that depictions of nude bodies were considered a taboo subject in modern Mexican art. Natasha Varner also explains how *mexicanidad* was largely gendered and mostly embodied by women.
white cloth that covers her midsection but bears her breasts, which are supported by one of her arms. Her gaze appears stressed. The viewer can easily imagine her looking at something or someone that causes her to be in a hurry to stand while using the white cloth to cover her body. Unlike Castellanos’s women, Tamayo places the woman in his painting outside since there seems to be several trees behind her. Zavala adds by interpreting the image as a “rendition of the classical bather.” In this instance, it is clear that Tamayo seems to be engaging with artistic techniques originating from Europe, and like Tamayo’s later work Song and Music (1933), Nude in Red also shows that “while their dark skin signifies racial differences, the figures’ rounded bodies derive from the modernist reduction of form rather than contemporary folk culture.”

Nude in Red does not associate Mexico’s indigenous women within romanticized ideas of the country’s past; instead, Tamayo focuses on the European custom to illustrate bathing women, and he pays attention to the form of the woman’s body, that form being one that is almost fetal-like due to the curve of her body caused by her kneeling position and embrace of the white cloth.

The art that Rivera, Orozco, Castellanos, and Tamayo created illustrate the importance that women’s bodies had in their artwork while also demonstrating the diverse goals that each had in adding meaning to their creations. Rivera and Orozco represent the muralists who, despite their differences, expressed a sense of nationalism—one that was heavily influenced by the revolutionary government. In contrast, the Contemporáneos such as Castellanos and Tamayo exhibit the beginning of an alternative art form that rejected nationalist art and favored a cosmopolitan, globalized worldview. Despite these differences, Rivera used the complete female body to express a message of progress in The Burial of the Revolution, The Mechanization of the Countryside places women in powerful positions as the deliverers of justice and bearers of the future, and his Tropical Mexico and Xochipilli and his Votaries depicts women as the agents of Mexico’s pre-Hispanic culture. Additionally, Orozco’s Cortez and Malinche placed importance on women’s role during colonization because she was the mother of the mestizo race, which resonated during the post-revolutionary period when the elite viewed a “cosmic race” one that would be superior. In contrast, the Contemporáneos focused on women’s bodies without overtly emphasizing nationalist undertones.

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24 Zavala, 217.
**Mexicanidad in Beauty Columns, Beauty Advice, and Advertisements During the 1950s**

During the 1950s, the ruling ideology that Mexican elites held changed from concentrating on Mexican nationalism towards becoming more sympathetic towards a Western-oriented consumer culture and strengthened it ties with international countries in an effort to modernize. *Mexicanidad*, being an element often used to evoke Mexican nationalism dramatically changed due to this change in ideology. One aspect of *mexicanidad* that muralists and Contemporáneos had in common that radically changed in the 1950s was the sense of completeness in depictions of women’s bodies. During the 1950s, women’s bodies appear to have been broken into pieces. The breaking down of the female body is not something new in Mexican history. As evident in the previous chapter, José Tomás de Cuéllar’s description of women demonstrates that the phenomena that broke women’s bodies into pieces in relation to feminine beauty was also present during the Porfiriato when Díaz also sought to rapidly modernize Mexico during the late 19th century.

One example during the 1950s that depicts the female body in a broken manner is an article written by a man named Pedro Armando Martínez. Martínez wrote the article for the magazine *Jueves de Excélsior* where he examines feminine beauty and sets out to describe the most ideal beautiful woman. He identified the most beautiful body parts of Mexican movie stars, which he then took to assemble a completely new woman composed of those parts (Figure 1). First, Martínez established his methodology. He conveyed to the reader that he created a poll where painters, sculptures, film directors, plastic surgeons, art critics and many more people were involved in helping visualize the woman of their dreams. It is important to note that women’s participation is missing. Despite this, they took it upon themselves to consider various female movie stars to form a foundation since they were easily recognizable to the public. When the participants’ opinion in the poll was divided, they decided to take a tally to identify the majority who believed a particular body part belonging to various stars was more appealing.26

Martínez and the participants in the poll took on the role of Dr. Frankenstein and created, in their imagination, the most beautiful woman. She would have the hair of María Félix and Elsa Aguirre, who according to the article also have dark skin. Their ideal woman would also have Chula Prieto’s eyes, Aurora Segura’s profile, Sarita Montiel’s mouth, Rosario Granados’s teeth,

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Columba Domínguez’s neck, María Elena Marqués’s complexion, which Martinez describes it as slightly brown and pinkish, Rosita Quintana’s shoulders, María Antonieta Pons’s bust, Marga López’s hands, Rosita Arenas’s waist, Leonora Amar’s calves, and Dolores del Río’s feet. It is evident that Martinez and the participants took a top-down approach when creating their ideal woman by starting with her hair and moving down to her feet. Not being entirely satisfied with the women they saw, they decided to create the “perfect” one by deconstructing the female body. They identified the body parts they considered worthy of being beautiful such as a woman’s hair, neck, hands, breasts, and feet for example, and then they identified the movie stars who, to them, had the most beautiful body part to use in the construction of their own beautiful woman. 

The woman that Martinez and the participants in the poll created may be seen as superficial rather than illustrating an authentic form of mexicanidad. Like the Contemporâneos who seemed to have illustrated nude women for visual pleasure, Martinez demonstrates that the woman that he and his fellow men created was for their pleasure only. It did not seem to have a greater purpose such as the one that Rivera created where women had a larger role, especially in relation to their position as mothers, in their strong connection to a nationalist message. Their choice in women is also telling. All of the women are Mexican movie stars, but that in it self is problematic because most of them illustrated a very narrow amount of women living in Mexico. The absence of indigenous women is also clearly evident and serves as evidence that they were not a part of the woman that Martinez and the participants in the poll created. Martinez did mention, however, that the most beautiful woman would have a dark complexion like that of Marqués, but it is important to note that her skin tone was hardly dark. Nonetheless, their perception of Marqués’s skin tone is indicative of the ways in which they perceived beautiful women, as it shows that Martinez considered Marqués’s skin tone as being dark. Martinez was clear that a beautiful woman was one with a darker skin tone, but by associating that skin tone to that of Marqués, it indicates that their skin tone preference had limits. Martinez and the men who participated in the poll demonstrate that the ideal beautiful woman they created lack depth in that she was simply created for their pleasure. Her body was reconstructed by using various actresses’ body parts, and despite stating that their ideal woman would have dark skin, they still failed to consider Mexico’s indigenous women.
In addition to Martinez’s article, beauty advice women received via magazines also shows evidence demonstrating how women’s bodies appear to have been fragmented. For example, *Jueves de Excélsior* published in each issue beauty snippets unattributed to a specific author called “Beauty Advice” where the content focused on giving the reader beauty lessons on a particular part of the body (Figure 2). One published on February 9, 1950 addressed how women should take care of their hair by washing it twice and rinsing it with vinegar, otherwise they could not consider themselves beautiful women. Another beauty bit published by the same magazine on February 23rd of the same year focused on women’s face and their application of cosmetics. In “Of Beauty” the unknown author explained that modern cosmetics were no longer worn for indoor occasions such as visits to a theater or indoor parties (Figure 3). Instead, modern

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cosmetics were better suited for the life outdoors where women were exposed to fresh air. It continues by conveying that women in the past used metallic tones, but now copper tones inspired by those worn by “oriental women” were more popular, which the author states were well suited for Mexico’s women. The unknown author quickly reassured the reader that this “exotic” color was not just for darker skinned women but also for blondes.28

These examples demonstrate that when the authors considered feminine beauty, they did not conceive it in terms of their entire body. It is important to note, however, that the magazine may have imposed spatial restrictions preventing the authors from focusing on women’s entire body, which would help explain why they only focused on a particular body part. Nonetheless, the advice did not focus on a particular method that could have been applied or benefitted the entire body; instead, they focused on a body part first, which then dictated the specialized care for said part. Additionally, the advice *Jueves de Excélsior* printed on February 20th also exhibits Mexico’s focus on becoming modern, as it made a clear distinction between the past and the modern present by emphasizing that the current trend at the time was to use a copper palette for the face. Moreover, the advice it gave women also reveal how influences outside the nation helped shape the steps women were advice to take in order to become beautiful, especially since the use of copper tones was a fashion inspired by “oriental women.” The unknown author certainly mentioned how women with dark skin were well suited for the latest cosmetic trend, but they assumed that all dark skinned women would have access to purchase the products. The advice also seems to resemble the same preference that Contemporáneos had towards the city, as the look that the authors discussed appears to be more appropriate for an urban setting rather than an rural one. By ignoring the rural and focusing on the latest modern trends in cosmetics, which seem to be more suitable for an urban life, the view that Contemporáneos held conveying that the city was representative of Mexican modernity appears to be the prevailing narrative in relation to feminine beauty advice that *Jueves de Excélsior* published.

*Jueves de Excélsior* was not the only magazine that aimed its attention at a specific body part. The magazine *Siempre!* was also one that implied that women’s body parts were fragmented from the start. On April 10, 1957, the magazine published an article titled “To Achieve a Brilliant Complexion” where women received instructions about washing their face, treating an oily face, acne, texture, and wrinkles. On April 24 of the same year, the magazine published another article called “Your Friend Rouge: The Secret to Using it” where it included tips as to how to use blush on the face. On May 1, *Siempre!* “The Beauty of the Hairstyle” advised women about different hairstyles for women with different hair textures and facial features while also letting them know that the latest trends could be found by looking at actresses

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29 “Para lograr el esplendor del cutis,” *Siempre!*, April 10, 1957.
30 “Su amigo el rouge,” *Siempre!*, April 24, 1957.
and elegant ladies in magazines and newspapers. A week later, there was an additional article focusing on hair care by giving women instructions about how to brush and wash their hair while also helping them fix problems such as dry or oily hair. On May 15, the same beauty section focused on the care of the hands, and a month later women’s feet were the part of the body that took the spotlight. These examples no longer resemble an authentic form of mexicanidad present during the 1930s that Rivera popularized. Instead, this beauty advice resembles more the form of mexicanidad that Contemporáneos ascribed to because women’s entire body has been fragmented, it is no longer associated with nationalism and a diverse racial make up is evidently absent.

One article that Siempre! published in 1958 deceptively appeared to focus on women’s entire body. It was titled, “Ma’am: Be Beautiful from Head to Toes.” By reading the title alone, the reader assumes that the article will focus on a large variety of aspects relating to the body to become beautiful. However, the content literally focuses on the head and the toes. The first half of the article addresses how women should use artificial products such as hairspray as they style their hair, and the second half instructs women on how to perform a pedicure. Like the content Jueves de Excélsior published, Siempre! also fails to acknowledge content often associated with mexicanidad. Not only did they fragment the body, but the authors also do not seem to mention Mexico’s nationalist undertones, as they did not appear to connect women’s appearance or body as representative of the nation. In asking the reader to use beauty product, the article makes it almost necessary for a woman to be able to have access to these good in order to attempt to achieve a more “beautiful” look.

Additionally, being a magazine whose main audience appears to be middle to upper class women, they failed to consider Mexico’s rural population, as they mostly seem to pay attention to women in urban areas. In its lack of consideration for a rural population, Siempre! assumed that its readers would have economic access to the products it advised its reader to buy in order to improve their appearance. At the same time, it was not only the rural poor who were ignored but also the poor women who lived in urban areas who may not have had access to the goods the articles discussed. For example, the article discussing the use of hairspray assumed that its

31 “La belleza del peinado,” May 1, 1957, pg. 41.
readers would have had access such a product, and the same can be said for its advice on pedicures; women needed to have or be able to purchase nail polishes. As a result, women not only had required the intervention of cosmetics to try to make them feel better about their appearance, but they also had to have the means to be able to access these goods.

_La Familia_ was another magazine among the many magazines that focused on women’s body parts, but one aspect that was different about this magazine is that they published a substantial amount of content responding to women’s concerns. _La Familia_ published, in almost all of their issues, a column called “Tell Me Your Problem,” which according to the magazine a woman named Consuelo was in charge of answering to the writers’ concerns. In one of their biweekly issue published in January of 1953, Consuelo told a woman known as E.C.—D.F that her main mistake was wearing something artificial to enhance her figure. Consuelo conveyed, “Your first mistake was to use artificial enhancements.” Consuelo continues by recommending that, “It would have been better if you had exercised and used baggy dresses that decrease the appearance of a flat profile. That way you would at least had the advantage that a young man would talk to you and like you the way you are.”

The advice Consuelo provided does not explain any specifics about the letter the reader sent. However, it is evident that E.C.—D.F told Consuelo that a guy she was dating found out that she had been using a false object to enhance a part of her body so that it would not look flat.

It is unclear exactly which part of her body the writer enhanced, but the letter she sent Consuelo suggests that her problem was that the man she was dating could have felt deceived and broke up with her. For example, after Consuelo told E.C.—D.F to perform exercises that even the magazine itself featured, she wrote, “That way when you have another boyfriend, you won’t have the same problem that you had this time, and you will be able to marry without being afraid that he will be upset once he finds out he’s been deceived.” Based on Consuelo’s advice, it appears that E.C.—D.F had an idea about what she felt a woman’s body should look like, and she felt so strong about her own body that she took drastic measures to alter the appearance of one of her body parts. Even though it is not clear which body part E.C.—D.F changed, it is evident that the she wanted to modify a specific body part, not her entire image. By refashioning this body

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part to appear a different way indicates that the writer may have received messages about said body part that caused her to think that it needed to be modified.

Some of the information that E.C.–D.F could have been exposed to includes the content that La Familia published. For example, in its second issue in March of 1951, the magazine published an article titled, “A Feminine Concern: the Bust.” The article discussed the importance of maintaining a “beautiful” bust by preventing it from sagging or losing its elasticity by always using a bra. The article conveys, “There are many beauty concerns regarding the bust and here are some of them: there are many precautions that one must take regardless if you are a teenager or recently married in order to prevent your breast from sagging or losing its elasticity. Every woman, young or old, thick or thin, should use a bra (and many also use it while they sleep at night).”36 In this instance, La Familia placed emphasis on the appearance on a specific body part, the bust. In doing so, its readers obtained a massage that this particular body part looked beautiful if it was full and perky compared to one that sagged due to its loss of elasticity. The article conveyed the importance of wearing a bra even at night in order to maintain this body part beautiful. Women reading this type of content may have felt that their breasts were not beautiful if they fit the characteristics that the magazine deemed unflattering. They may have even been compelled to use foreign objects, in a similar manner like E.C.–D.F appears to have done, in order to accentuate their look.

In accentuating a specific body part to make it more aesthetically pleasing, women appear to engage more in attracting the sexual desire in men rather than using their bodies in a nationalist manner that attempts to create or develop a stronger nation. Like the Contemporáneos who found value in the aesthetics of art untainted by nationalism, women like E.C.–D.F and the messages about the maintenance of women’s breasts appear to also have in common the emphasis on an appealing aesthetic look without an agenda while also de-emphasizing mexicanidad. For example, an ad also found in La Familia reinforces the idea that women’s breasts needed to be beautiful. The ad conveys, “The perfect breasts demonstrate youth and grace. Get them with the help of Oriental Pills, which will help your doctor see how well your breast develop.”37 In this instance, woman are not persuaded to use garments like a bra to help

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37 Gracia y juventud demuestran los senos perfectos. Ayúdense a obtenerlas con las pildoras orientales que son un valioso auxiliar al lucio del Médico en el desarrollo de los senos” (advertisement), La Familia, January 1953 (1st quarter), pg. 29.
them become beautiful; instead, they are advised to use pills to actually attempt to change the physical make up of their body (Figure 4). Additionally, the ad shows how Mexico was open to international influences. The pills claimed to be from the Orient, which indicates that the message the advertisement was attempting to convey relied on the stereotype that the “Far East” had natural cures for a large variety of problems. Like the Contemporáneos’ focus on an aesthetic that was not tainted by nationalism, this ad illustrates that women were encouraged to alter their breasts to make them look more appealing by using natural products from an exotically perceived location. Additionally, the ad does not exhibit a sense of nationalism because the product attempts to appeal to consumers by hinting that the ingredients can only be found outside of Mexico.

Figure 11. Advertisement for Oriental pills for larger breasts, La Familia, January 1953, 9. Hemeroteca Nacional de Mexico, UNAM.

But, to whom is this aesthetic beautiful? In the instance of ads, articles, and concerns written by women, they reflect women’s independent reactions to fit the aesthetic mold that focuses on specific body parts as they attempt to accentuate their beauty. Yet, it appears to be for the aesthetic pleasure of men. By the 1950s, as mexicanidad decreases, men’s visual pleasure of women’s body parts becomes increasingly evident, as women appear to be altering their bodies to make them look more appealing to men. As a result, the connection between women’s bodies in relation to Mexican nationalism appears to have been replaced for the individual visual pleasure of men.
Similar to how Contemporáneos depicted women’s dark skinned bodies outside of the context of nationalism, a similar development is evident in the 1950s where dark skinned women exhibit little to no signs of *mexicanidad* to the extent that they are completely absent. For example, the only known front cover that *La Familia* published throughout the 1950s that acknowledged dark skinned women was the one published in May of 1954 (Figure 5). However, the cover does not resemble *mexicanidad*. The woman in the front cover is actually a drawing, which demonstrates that the magazine may have been hesitant to place a picture of a real dark skinned woman and settled for a drawing. The woman appears to be wearing a straw hat, she has hoop earrings, and a necklace made out of shells. Her necklace and what seems to be a fishnet to her right implies that the setting in which the woman is located in a beach. Her dress is white with green borders and looks as though it is being blown by the wind. The woman does not look towards the reader; instead, her seductive gaze looks away towards the fishnet. Nothing in the image suggests that the woman is Mexican. Her dress does not resemble any traditional dress belonging to any of Mexico’s indigenous populations, and she is not placed within the countryside; instead, she appears to occupy a beach. The cover of *La Familia* illustrates that the magazine was comfortable with placing dark skinned women in their front page as long as they resembled the what dark skinned women were suppose to become: middle class, modern women who adopted the latest fashions and vacationed at the beach, not the ones who held on to their traditional customs. This image shows similarities in the ways in which Contemporáneos thought, as it parallels how the international influence of adopting modernity is represented in the woman’s dress and jewelry while also depicting the absent of nationalist undertones.

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Figure 12. La Familia magazine front cover illustrating a dark skinned woman but without hints of mexicanidad. Front cover, La Familia, May 1954. Hemeroteca Nacional de Mexico, UNAM.
Conclusion

The paintings muralists and Contemporáneos created shared in common their depiction of women’s bodies in their entire form. They also expressed *mexicanidad* by paying attention to Mexico’s ethnic and racial diversity by painting dark skinned bodies, but they differed in their incorporation of nationalism in their art; muralist included it but Contemporáneos did not. Yet, the art that Contemporáneos exhibited reflected Mexico’s next generation of people who did not view nationalism in the same way as the previous generation. The Contemporáneos envisioned a Mexico with stronger ties with the rest of the world, as aspect that is evident in the 1950s. However, as Mexican society took the next step towards strengthening their ties with the rest of the world, the sense of uniqueness that post-revolutionaries developed in *mexicanidad* radically changed, and in the process illustrations of women’s bodies and discussions around the female body became fragmented.

During the 1950s, women’s bodies were fractured into pieces in order for them to conform to a consumer culture that fragmented the body in order to sell a product for a specific body part. Additionally, men such as Martinez deconstructed the female body to imagine a “perfect” one by using Mexican actresses’ specific body parts to be assembled into the “perfect” woman. Martinez’s imagination of a “perfect” woman reflected the decrease of *mexicanidad* not only in rendering women’s bodies into simply parts, but he also in failing to consider racial diversity by leaving out indigenous women in his description of a “perfect” woman. The creation of an ideal woman also resembles how Contemporáneos appear to use women in their art strictly for aesthetic pleasure rather than placing them within a larger context such as nationalism. The Contemporáneos, Martinez, and the editors of the magazines and newspapers also have in common in decentralizing the focus away from Mexico’s indigenous population. Instead, the elites in charge of the magazines in the 1950s seem to prefer a European aesthetic. Focusing Mexican’s attention towards a globalized form of beauty may have well been due to the fact that elites’ concerns were less about nationalism and more about consumption.

Additionally, the beauty advice women received displays how women themselves were concerned about specific parts of their body, which they tried to modify by using foreign objects to make their body seem more appealing. Women’s concern over a particular body part could have been affected by the messages the magazines they were reading printed such as the ones advising them to make sure their breasts were firm and perky. Additionally, the article Martinez
authored, where a group of men created the “perfect woman” by using Mexican actresses’
specific body parts that they considered beautiful, serves as evidence that they thought that no
complete woman was perfect; instead, she was one that could only attempt to attain certain
beautiful features. Ads reinforced the messages magazines sent by attempting to sell pills to alter
a specific body part, which in this case was a pill that promised to enlarge a woman’s breasts. In
the end, as *mexicanidad* decreased, so did the integrity of women’s bodies depicted in visual
media.
Chapter 3: Advertising the “Natural” as a Method of Selling Global Beauty

Joanne Hershfield points out a crucial element that is of great importance when engaging with *la chica moderna*. She defines *la chica moderna* that was popular in Mexico during the 1920s as one characterized by hybridity resulting from the “growth of the middle class and the resulting expansion of Europeans and U.S. ideals of capitalism, liberalism, and democracy…” while also adding the importance of the “‘interweaving’ of local indigenous cultures and practices with modern, global social and economic institutions.”\(^1\) To Hershfield, *la chica moderna* in Mexico illustrated the mixture of international and national influences that Mexicans were exposed to after the revolution. When looking through the lens of beauty, *mexicanidad* becomes even more difficult to decipher because feminine beauty in Mexico took many shapes and forms, especially with the growing strength that economically interconnected countries around the world. Mexican society was exposed to ideas about beauty predominantly coming from Europe and the United States, and even though an abundance of different forms of beauty proliferated around the world, post-revolutionary elites in Mexico appeared to have developed a foundational image that represented *mexicanidad*. The way in which elite society imagined indigenous women—as erotic beings that dressed in their traditional clothing and lived a much simpler life surrounded by the nature that the countryside offered—became an essential characteristic that represented *mexicanidad*.

It is important to keep the idea about *la chica moderna* in mind when discussing *mexicanidad* as an element that was prominent in advertisements selling beauty products during Mexico’s post-revolutionary period. During the 1930s, a women’s aesthetic beauty was characterized by the use of “natural” products. During this decade, methods of achieving beauty favored “the use of natural products, and promoted homemade cosmetics and beauty regiments.”\(^2\) This preference can be traced back to the idealization of camposcape and its association with nature as well as the purity that characterized the Virgin of Guadalupe. The use of naturally made products to create a beautiful woman appears to follow the elites’ aim to attempt to incorporate the natural aspect found in camposcape that indigenous supposedly

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embodied and tried to apply it in a modern urban setting. *Mexicanidad*, and its emphasis on Mexico’s indigenous culture, was incorporated in the aesthetic appearance of women in the post-revolutionary period by encouraging women to become beautiful by using naturally made products. However, it is important to keep in mind that Mexico also sought modernize, and thus have its population engage in consumerism. Companies such as Palmolive caught on to this demand and subsequently insisted that their products were made out of “a mixture of natural palm and olive oils that produced soft and attractive skin.”³ Well into the 1940s, ads selling cosmetics emphasized a natural look and conveyed that their products “would discover, uncover, or elevate already-existing beauty.”⁴ As a result, women could express their *mexicanidad* by using natural products because in doing so, it enforced the connection of the traditional, romanticized past that Mexico’s indigenous supposedly embodied in camposcape while also helping propel the nation into modernity by purchasing products that brought out women’s natural beauty within.

However, advertisements in newspapers and magazines selling beauty products to women ultimately diminished the revolutionary efforts to create an inclusive Mexico. Many advertisements attempted to sell skin-lightening creams for women. For example, Colgate advertised face creams and soaps that not only softened a woman’s face but also lightened it.⁵ The ads selling these products informed women that in order to be beautiful, they had to have light skin. Therefore, appreciation for Mexico’s indigenous population was limited. The way in which elites imagined indigenous women, as one that placed them in a romanticized natural setting such as camposcape, was similar to the one that elites adopted when conceptualizing beautiful women in Mexico. The real women, however, not the ones imagined, were the ones that seem to have been rejected as unfit to illustrate beauty due to its ethnic characteristic manifested by her darker skin tone. The naturally dark skinned indigenous woman was absent in advertisements; instead, there was pressure to lighten her skin.

By the 1950s, the popularity of feminine beauty that expressed *mexicanidad* continued to diminish. The media, in the form of advertisements and beauty columns, exhibited a preference for a globalized form of beauty rather than the previously appreciated one that reflected ethnic or racial diversity, or *mexicanidad*. The globalized style of beauty conveyed that beauty was
universal, a “one size fits all” type of approach. Ultimately, this chapter will explore how mass media, in the form of cosmetic ads as well as beauty columns and articles, may be interpreted as a tool that weaved *mexicanidad* into the fabric of a Western-oriented consumer culture, diluting it in the process.

First, this chapter will establish the strong presence that the concept of the “natural” during Mexico’s post-revolutionary period and its relationship with *mexicanidad*. Determining this strength is important because I will trace how *mexicanidad* gradually decreased as an international form of beauty strengthened. Then, I will focus my analysis on the 1950s. I will examine visual media such as advertisements as well as beauty columns to examine the remnants of *mexicanidad* are hardly recognizable at all. This chapter will end with a close analysis of indigenous beauty and will identify similarities and differences that it had with global beauty.

**Expressions of “Natural” Beauty in Pageants and Advertisements**

Historian Natasha Varner helps demonstrate how post-revolutionary elites began associating the concept of the “natural” to *mexicanidad*, which is evident in discourses about feminine beauty. By analyzing beauty pageants, Natasha Varner posits that *mexicanidad* was developed on the basis of gender and race. Additionally, Varner conveys that in Santa Anita, a small region in Mexico City, elites during the early 1920s decided to revive a 19th century tradition, a festival called “Fiesta de Flores.” In staying on par with the revolutionary trend, the elites in Santa Anita sought to “symbolically incorporate marginalized populations, much as Vasconcelos had attempted to do in commissioning his public murals.” The elite decided to crown a queen of the festival, which turned out to be a young 19-year-old woman dressed in *china poblana* clothing. The name of the pageant and its associated meaning with flowers seems to suggest that the elite were associating beauty with elements found in nature such as flowers.

The pageant selecting the queen of the Fiesta de Flores festival evolved. By 1931, the pageant placed emphasis on agriculture. Varner states, “this new effort to celebrate horticultural productivity was part of an effort to revive the festival’s ‘traditional element,’ to motivate those

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6 Natasha Varner, “La Raza Cosmética: Beauty, Race, and Indigeneity in Revolutionary Mexico” (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2016), 68.
7 Varner, 73.
8 Varner, 75.
who grew vegetables and flowers, and to give visitors an appreciation for all the progress that had been made in agricultural production." This demonstrates that elites placed women alongside the agricultural gains that resulted from the revolution as a nationalist tool illustrating the growth that the country experienced. In 1936, the Santa Anita community continued to embrace the agricultural undertones expressed in 1931 by giving the pageant a new name, “La Flor más Bella del Ejido.” Varner explains that the association of the beauty contestants as beautiful flowers “equated Indigenous women with rural, agricultural bounty.” The connection of not only women, but women who appeared indigenous alongside the positive strides that the post-revolutionary government sought to make in relation to agriculture indicates the ways in which elites sought the help of women in recreating Mexico’s identity as one that was inclusive and agriculturally productive.

By synthesizing Varner’s connection between agriculture and beauty along with Sluis’s concept of camposcape, it becomes evident that concepts such as the natural and sexual were cornerstones of mexicanidad. Varner investigates how the pageant developed strong horticultural overtones, which alludes to the spatial context of camposcape. It was in this imaginary place where nature fulfilled the promises of the revolution, as the proletariat would harvest the goods that would feed the country. Additionally, Varner’s case study illustrating how women were selected to represent the countryside also shows how sexuality was an important element of mexicanidad that is also evident in camposcape. The agricultural fertility of the countryside became equated with women’s fertility, thus making them excellent candidates to symbolize nature, and sexuality was the thrusting force. Sluis illustrates the importance that sexuality had in the ways in which indigenous women, specifically tehuana women, were imagined by 19th century writers and artists by stating, “…the tehuana emerged as an enigma, an ambiguous figure who embodied seduction, unbridled female sexuality, independence, beauty, and strength but also represented the soul of southern, indígena Mexico.” This description highlights how sexuality was an essential element in the way in which indigenous women were conceptualized in camposcape. In her analysis of beauty pageants in Santa Anita, Varner helps contextualize the important role that nature had in mexicanidad because the natural is visible in the connection

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9 Varner, 89.
10 Varner, 93.
between agriculture and fertility, which is accompanied by the sexuality that Sluis identifies in campo.

The natural aspect associated with campo was also apparent in ads about cosmetics and beauty advice that promised women to enhance their looks. For example, some manufactured cosmetics conscious of Mexico’s heightened attention to the rural did not ignore the country’s national context. In the 1940s Palmolive sponsored a radio program that emphasized the romanticized rural life by playing ranchera music. Palmolive was one of those companies that considered *mexicanidad* and engaged with its Mexican audience by appealing to those within the rural spatial context evident in campo. Additionally, beauty advice during the 1930s emphasized a natural look with the use of homemade rather than manufactured products. *La Familia*, a magazine that catered mostly to middle class and elite Mexicans, recommended its readers to use non-manufactured products to combat beauty concerns.

Companies such as Palmolive, and magazines such as *La Familia* showed hints of considering Mexican beauty by incorporating characteristics associated to *mexicanidad* like Mexico’s romanticized rural life and the strength found in natural homemade products.

The different messages that beauty columns and ads sent appear contradicting. *La Familia* published ads that urged women to buy manufactured beauty products that claimed to be natural, but the magazine’s beauty columns also advised women to use natural homemade products. The apparent contradicting messages between the magazine’s ads and beauty columns illustrate opposing views that the public may have had regarding the means through which women could become beautiful. Clearly, one of the main goals that cosmetic ads had in mind was to sell the products to increase their profit. Additionally, *La Familia*’s advice telling women to continue to hold on to what some may have viewed as old fashioned methods of achieving beauty by way of using homemade products in the wake of a rise in manufactured goods also hints at a reluctance or anxiety to the changes modernity brought.

The messages that beauty columns and ads attempted to convey may seem contradictory, yet they do have something in common: the emphasis on the natural. To continue the discourse of natural beauty, ads selling beauty products “added a ‘nature spin’ by marketing cosmetics as

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12 Moreno, 140.
13 Moreno, 143.
products that would discover, uncover, or elevate already-existing beauty.”

Companies like Palmolive adapted their message by announcing that their products were made with palm and olive oils to appeal to consumers. Even though using manufactured and homemade products may seem contradictory, the underlying theme was how the final product, manufactured or homemade, was presented as being made of natural ingredients. In other words, the natural, one of the foundational characteristics that constituted *mexicanidad*, was still present. By associating their products with the natural, ads did not draw a clear break from Mexico’s heritage that emphasized its romantic, naturalistic past to the goods modernity created. By continuing to use the discourse of the natural, ads could navigate within the fast pace of modernity while catering to Mexico’s past.

**Advertisements Selling “Natural” yet Manufactured Beauty Products**

It is true that various companies preferred a globalized form of beauty and may have purposefully avoided incorporating elements of *mexicanidad* in ads. Historian Julio Moreno posited that during the 1920s and 1930s, companies such as Max Factor and Pond’s “showed less concern for Mexican beauty than Palmolive or *La Familia* columnists.” Although I largely agree with his statement, it is important to consider the different ways in which Mexican beauty was conceived. Moreno conveys that global beauty was a form of cosmetic advertising that mentioned European as well as American celebrities and depicted “white Anglo-Saxon women as the ultimate expression of beauty.” According to Moreno, companies such as Pond’s and Max Factor did not strongly associate feminine beauty with *mexicanidad* and preferred a globalized view of beauty. Nonetheless, globalized beauty that placed an Anglo-Saxon aesthetic at the top of the beauty hierarchy had, despite their differences, various elements in common with *mexicanidad*. Those similarities were the appeal to the natural and sexual.

During the 1950s, *mexicanidad* may not have been strongly nor purposefully expressed by ads attempting to sell Max Factor or Pond’s products because after all, they did not entirely embrace Mexican beauty. Yet, the similarities between globalized beauty and *mexicanidad* in

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14 Moreno, 142.
15 Moreno, 142.
16 Moreno, 137.
17 Moreno 137.
relation to the natural and sexual demonstrate how these different discourses intersected. When analyzing various cosmetic companies such as Max Factor, Pond’s, Richard Hudnut, and Tangee with this conceptual framework in mind, there is evidence that *mexicanidad* was present in various manners and to different extents.

By analyzing the text that Max Factor and Pond’s used in their ads, it becomes evident how the meaning behind the use of “natural” products changed yet attempted to hold on to a romantic past that favored a “natural” look. For example, Max Factor advertised their product by stating in their ad, “The Max Factor lipstick ideally complements your natural beauty.”\(^{18}\) Additionally, Pond’s Angel Face foundation was advertised as giving the face a “natural” look (Figure 7).\(^ {19}\) The ad states, “[The foundation] remains on your face as natural as powder, but the velvety shade lasts much…much longer!”\(^ {20}\) The importance that ads placed on a natural look exhibits a connection with *mexicanidad* since they continued to use words whose meaning is associated with camposcape and its idealized natural environment.

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\(^{18}\) Max Factor, “Haga suyo el encanto natural de una boca fresca, incite… con el lapis labial Max Factor” (advertisement), *La Familia*, February 1953, pg. N.A.

\(^{19}\) Pond’s, “Angel Face. Hechicero maquillaje en seco” (advertisement), *La Familia*, March 1953, pg. N.A.

\(^{20}\) Pond’s, “Angel Face. Hechicero maquillaje en seco” (advertisement), *La Familia*, March 1953, pg. N.A.
Figure 13. *Above.* Max Factor cosmetics evokes the concept of the natural in the ads for lipsticks. *La Familia,* Feb., 1953. Hemeroteca Nacional de Mexico, UNAM.

Figure 14. *Below and Left.* Pond’s Angle Face foundation also mentions how the foundation leaves your face feeling natural. *La Familia,* March 1953. Hemeroteca Nacional de Mexico, UNAM.
However, when looking at the ad, there seems to be nothing Mexican about it. Unlike camposcape or *mexicanidad*, there does not seem to be any association to Mexico’s national identity or ethnic plurality. Even though the characteristic of the natural is faintly there, other characteristics that made *mexicanidad* unique such as an emphasis on national identity with mixed cultures and ethnic identities is evidently absent. The ad appears to favor the concept of global beauty because it has extracted out characteristics foundational to *mexicanidad*; yet, it keeps other characteristics important to *mexicanidad* such as the concept of the natural, but the remnants of *mexicanidad* that stayed ultimately seem to benefit the concept of global beauty because they could be applied anywhere in the world.

The use of the word “natural” may have invoked in the consumer’s mind how post-revolutionaries used similar language to connect the natural feminine beauty found in camposcape to the post-revolutionary endeavors to unite the country after the revolution. Like the citizens of Santa Anita who changed the name of the beauty pageant to be associated with Mexico’s agricultural efforts, the meaning of natural beauty that ads conveyed was a familiar message that Mexican society had heard of before during Mexico’s post-revolutionary period, but the context had changed. During the first half of the 20th century, the Mexican elite strongly associated *mexicanidad* with camposcape and national identity. By the 1950s, the emphasis on national identity and ethnic diversity was diluted, and stronger ties to modernity and a consumerist economy became more evident. Mexican society may have welcomed the ad’s message since the “natural” appeal may have resonated with them, which could have made it acceptable for them to adopt stronger consumerist habits.

In addition to Max Factor and Pond’s, an ad published by the newspaper *El Universal* in 1951 by Richard Hudnut illustrates another example where a company from the U.S that adopted the global concept of beauty but was conscious of the importance of the natural while also alluding to feminine sex appeal. Richard Hudnut developed a shampoo called “Egg Cream,” and the ad claims to have been made with egg powder. The ad also states that the consumer’s hair would turn soft and shiny if they used the shampoo. The ad does not explicitly convey that it was made out of natural products, but it appears to imply it in its emphasis on containing egg powder, an ingredient the ad claimed would make women’s hair shiny. Even though the ad implies that it is made with natural products, the fact that it is a powder demonstrates that the consumer is still engaging in the modernity because the product required a certain amount of technological
intervention, which subsequently allowed the consumer to purchase the product as a commodity. The product attempts to gain credibility by explaining that the most distinguished and elegant women around the world that visited the Richard Hudnut beauty salon located in New York’s 5th Ave used the shampoo as well. The ad places a woman with long, blond, wavy hair looking away from the viewer and turns to the man behind her. The image hints at a women’s sexuality, as it appears to suggest that women using the product would make their hair so irresistible that it would catch men’s attention. In this instance, Richard Hudnut’s shampoo uses egg powder to have consumers associate it with natural products and thus the concept of the “natural,” which implies that the product may been thought of as better because of its association with nature.

Figure 15. Richard Hudnut advertising its shampoo and suggesting it is made with natural ingredients such as eggs, El Universal, Jan. 20, 1951, 3 section 2. Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada.

A manufactured product such as Richard Hudnut’s shampoo claiming to use natural ingredients indicates that companies catering to feminine beauty might be responding to a market that demands naturally-made goods. This is quite possible, especially when there were beauty columns advising women to make their own shampoos from scratch.22 The Richard Hudnut ad combining a woman’s sexuality to the beauty regimen she was advised to participate in does not stop there. Mexicanidad is also largely absent in the image. The natural aspect that associated mexicanidad with feminine beauty is there, but it has been pulled away from being centered on a woman’s body to the products being sold to women. Careful analysis demonstrates how a component of mexicanidad is still evident in the manifestation of the natural, but cornerstones such as ethnic and racial diversity as well as national identity are mostly absent. As these foundational building blocks of mexicanidad were being pulled out, others such as the idea of the natural remained, but the one that appears to be at the forefront seems to be sexuality, a concept that mexicanidad also included but would become more beneficial to an expanding consumerist society since it could be easily applied in different countries without having to worry about ethnic or cultural differences.

In addition to the appeal of the natural, the sexualized characteristic of mexicanidad is also evident in ads during the 1950s. For example, Tangee, a cosmetic brand from the U.S., predominantly known for their lipsticks, attempted to appeal to Mexican women by expressing that women who used Tangee lipsticks would be irresistible to men. One advertisement states, “While you speak of love, he will gaze upon your lips.”23 The message in the ad continues by encouraging women to make their lips say, “I love you” by ultimately using Tangee (Figure 9). This ad illustrates that a woman’s sexuality in relation to men’s visual pleasure became the focusing message. The tones associated with sexuality appear to invoke the ways in which indigenous women were sexualized in camposcape, which indicates that a strain of mexicanidad remains. However, almost everything else associated with mexicanidad appears to have been

22 “Renove su cabellera,” La Familia, February 28, 1953, 84-85. La Familia tells their readers that to eliminate the damage done during a vacation (the magazine assumes the reader went to the beach), a cheap shampoo would not eliminate well residue from the scalp. They suggest the use of a natural shampoo made out of the mix of three egg yolks with warm water, two tablespoons of rum, and one tablespoon of castor oil. To soften the scalp, the magazine recommends massages. To give new life to hair, they advised the use of melting bone marrow from a cow in hot water. The water needs to be filtered before massaging it into the scalp and hair. Also see, “Consejos de Belleza,” Jueves de Excélsior, February 9, 1950. In this column, Jueves de Excélsior readers were told that using vinegar as a conditioner would make hair shine.

23 Tangee, “Cuando usted hable del amor ‘El’ Contemplara sus Labios” (advertisement), La Familia, February 1950, 77.
extracted out; there is no association to rural life, agriculture, or ethnicity. Even though women’s sexuality is not a characteristic unique to *mexicanidad*, it is one that is highly adaptable, therefore; it seems like sexuality was one characteristic associated with *mexicanidad* that global beauty held on to due to its universality and flexibility, thus making it easier to adapt to an international message of beauty.

Figure 16. Tangee lipstick illustrates little to no association with *mexicanidad*. *La Familia*, Feb. 1950, 77. Hemeroteca Nacional de Mexico, UNAM.

Additionally, the made up look that the woman in the Tangee lipstick ad exhibits does not fit the spatial context with which *mexicanidad* was associated. The woman in the ad was not placed in camposcape or in rural Mexico. Instead, the image and text suggests that she might be getting ready for a night out in the city with a gentleman she finds attractive. The woman appears to have an intricate hairstyle, and her eyebrows, eyelashes, and lips are cosmeticized. The image of the woman seems to reassemble more la chica moderna. Her revealing dress the woman in the ad wears shows a connection to la chica moderna’s emphasis on sexual liberation, but it still does not resemble any “tipos” with which *mexicanidad* often associated. There is no emphasis on dark skin or traditional ethnic dresses that *mexicanidad* embraced. From the point of view of cosmetic
companies, the woman’s beauty may have been enhanced, but it has been done to a point where *mexicanidad* is no longer recognizable.

A similar lipstick to Tangee was one by Bouquet-Colgate called Audaz, which also seemed to adopt a globalized form of feminine beauty ultimately demonstrating the decrease of *mexicanidad* (Figure 10). Bouquet-Colgate was another brand from the U.S and was in competition with Tangee. The ad shows a heart shape around a woman’s lips, and a picture of the Audaz lipstick is placed at the left hand side where the tip of the lipstick barely touches the lips, demonstrating that it is ready to be applied. The heading states, “Make him fall in love using Audaz.” The small print at the bottom of the ad states, “Audaz is the subjugating shade that places on your lips an irresistible invitation for a kiss…” Like Tangee, Audaz also places women’s sexuality as the center of the message by indicating that if women used the lipstick, men would certainly want to kiss them. Both brands also convey that by wearing their lipstick, they would gain a certain amount of control of men by making them fall in love, say “I love you,” or acquiring a kiss. Nonetheless, even though the ads make it seem like the use of their products would make women irresistible to men, women continue to hold less power because the ultimate decision that determines whether a woman is attractive is men.

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Additionally, *mexicanidad* is almost non-existing in the ad selling Audaz lipsticks. There are no hints of camposcape, ethnic diversity, or emphasis on national identity. All the viewer sees are lips surrounded by a heart, the lipstick, and text. The ad appears to have embraced the international definition of beauty rather than appealing to the discourse of Mexican beauty that incorporated *mexicanidad*. In essence, the ad selling Audaz lipsticks conveyed that if you were a woman who had lips and wanted the attention of a man by attempting to obtain a kiss from him, all they had to do was to buy and use Audaz. At first, this appears to be an all-inclusive type of ad because any woman, whether she was mestiza, Indigenous, or European, could wear the lipstick. Nonetheless, this apparent all-inclusive approach was so overreaching in attempting to appeal to all that *mexicanidad* became so diluted that its unique characteristics seem to disappear, leaving the element of sex appeal at the forefront of the message.

The Audaz lipstick ad helps illustrate how *mexicanidad* has changed because instead of placing a sense of nationalism or racial diversity as the core message, the ad places courtship as the central message. Hershfield explains that during the 1920s and 1930s the state was concerned
with modernizing spaces that women occupied such as the home.\textsuperscript{25} As a result, magazines such as \textit{Revista de Revistas} added a section called “El hogar moderno,” which included articles about the “modern kitchen,” “the modern bedroom,” and “the modern living room.”\textsuperscript{26} This example demonstrates the paradox in which the country found itself attempting to be modern while also creating a nation that attempted to incorporate its pre-Hispanic past. What is more important is that the country was modernizing the space women occupied because “what was good for the family was good for the nation, and vise versa.”\textsuperscript{27} Therefore, it is evident that during Mexico’s post-revolutionary period, modernization had strong nationalist undertones. In contrast, the 1950s Audaz lipstick ad does not place Mexican nationalism as its core message. Instead, it shows that women are responsible to taking additional steps to alter their image using cosmetics to appeal to the sexual appeal of men. During the post-revolutionary period, making the home modern was done with a nationalist goal, but in the 1950s, modernizing women’s image was done with the goal of obtaining a sense of sex appeal to would draw men’s attention. Women’s role in relation to courtship and sexuality no longer seems to benefit the nation; instead, it benefits the men’s sexual desire.

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\textbf{Absence of \textit{Mexicanidad} and Anxieties Towards Modernity in Beauty Columns}

\textsuperscript{25} Hershfield, 77.  
\textsuperscript{26} Hershfield, 77.  
\textsuperscript{27} Hershfield, 77.
Ads were not the only form of visual media that exhibited the absence of Mexicanidad. In her article, “From Chinas Poblanas to Silk Stockings: The Symbology of the Female Archetype in the Mexican Ranchera Film,” Kerry T. Hegarty traces how Mexican national identity changed from revolutionary nationalism to global capitalism from the 1930s to the 1950s. She conveys that films in the 1930s often reflected a class struggle between farmers and landowners in the film genre known as comedias rancheras. By the 1940s, films continued to celebrate Mexican rural life, but in reality, President Manuel Ávila Camacho sought to industrialize the country, which caused the growth of urban areas and placed less importance on rural populations. In the 1950s, President Miguel Alemán continued to modernize Mexico via industrialization and overturned many revolutionary reforms. During this period, Mexican films started to reflect the changes the country was experiencing. For example, Hegarty conveys that the last ranchera film, Medias de seda, illustrated “the demise of the genre, and of Mexico’s agrarian myth…” She explains that the film exposed anxieties of having the country revert back to “pre-Revolutionary US imperialism with the erosion of agrarian reform and the advent of capitalist modernity that characterized Mexico in the 1950s, under both Alemán and his successor, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958).”

The anxiety that Las medias de seda shows towards the uncertainty of the rapid changes of modernity are also evident in the beauty advice women received in the 1950s. Ads urged women to become modern by turning them into consumers of beauty products that promised them to improve their appearance. However, many beauty advice columns and articles continued to recommend women to develop their own homemade beauty products. Even though magazines and newspapers were saturated with ads attempting to sell beauty products, the large amount of information instructing women to use homemade products rather than manufactured ones demonstrates that there was a push back against the goods produced by modernity. For example, in January of 1950 Jueves de Excélsior, a magazine distributed by the newspapers Excélsior, printed a column called “Home Advice.” In the section dedicated to beauty, the column advised women to use a facemask made out of pure honey for one minute and wash it off with hot water. According to the column, the purpose of the mask was to rejuvenate the skin and obtain a better

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29 Hegarty, 106.
30 Hegarty, 107.
31 Hegarty, 112.
complexion. The column also added that as a food, medicine, and a beauty method, honey should be consumed in abundance.\textsuperscript{32} Instead of advising women to use manufactured products brought on at the onset of modernity, the column appears to prefer women using natural products such as honey. The column certainly encourages women to consume, but it does not seem to want women to consume modernity via manufactured products. Instead, it appears to suggest that women should hold on to the natural, an aspect of \textit{mexicanidad} that invokes a romanticized past where revolutionary promises were not threatened by modernity.

The column published by \textit{Jueves de Excélsior} was not the only one. In July of 1950, \textit{La Familia} published an article titled “Old Methods are Always Modern.” The article states, “No luxurious bottle holds the secret of beauty the same way that the velvety skin of a peach or honeycombs do.”\textsuperscript{33} In other words, it is the nature and the goods it naturally produces the ones that hold the secret to beauty, not manufactured products that come in a luxurious bottle. The statement the article makes appears to clearly reject the goods that resulted from modernity and prefers the natural alternative because, for the magazine, it was the genuine place that held the real secret to beauty. The message the article conveys looks as though it is attempting to hold on to \textit{mexicanidad} and the natural characteristic found in camposcape by urging women to chose natural remedies rather than the ones that comes in a fancy bottle.

Even though beauty advice appears to show a link to \textit{mexicanidad} by holding on to aspects associated with the natural, this was not the only narrative present in the 1950s. In contrast, there was just as much beauty advice for women persuading them to adopt modernity. These conflicting views demonstrate a push and pull Mexican society may have experienced in coming to terms with the expansion of modernity; some may have been weary of the fast changes they felt, so they may have wanted to hold on to the traditional that invoked \textit{mexicanidad} while others may have been ready to move on from the romanticized past and adopt a different way of life.

\textit{La Familia} magazine is a clear example of a source conveying conflicting views urging women to continue using natural products while also asking them to adopt modernity, which is especially evident in the apparent partnership between the magazine, Max Factor, and Hollywood. As Mexico became more interconnected with the rest of the world, especially with


the U.S., the presence of Hollywood appears to have gained authority over what it meant to for a
to be beautiful. In March of 1953, La Familia printed an article called “Beauty Advice
from Hollywood” by Wally Westmore, a makeup director for Paramount Pictures (Figure 11).
The article conveyed that the questions proposed in the article simultaneously answered beauty
concerns. For example, one question asked, “Did you know that you could obtain softer lips by
giving them as massage at night with olive oil?”34 Another question asked, “Did you know that
powdered foundations that have strange particles are not well made?”35 The reputation of
Hollywood as a place that created beautiful stars, and Westmore, an individual that can be
assumed to have been an expert on beauty since he is the makeup director at Paramount Pictures,
sends the message that these are the places and people who should be trusted when it comes to
beauty due to their reputation and expertise. Ultimately this demonstrates that Mexican beauty
considered less and less its mexicanidad and was exposed to the perceived legitimacy from those
abroad.

Figure 18. Article published by La Familia
giving women beauty advice. La Familia,
March 1953, 81. Hemeroteca Nacional de
Mexico, UNAM.

35 Westmore, 82.
In May of 1953, La Familia published an article titled “Beauty Chronicles” in which Max Factor Jr. showed his authority on knowledge about beauty and how it could benefit Hollywood (Figure 12). “Beauty Chronicles” claimed that Max Factor Jr. himself exclusively wrote the article for La Familia. In the article, Max Factor Jr. argues that when searching for beautiful future movie stars, Hollywood should not limit itself to looking for women already in the city. Instead, Hollywood should go to universities and colleges to find future stars. To demonstrate the potential that universities and colleges had in being bustling hubs for beautiful women, Max Factor Jr. held a beauty contest across collegial institutions in the U.S. to find the “Max Factor Girl” and crowned Sharon Lee Curtis from Northwestern University.36

![Image of La Familia article](image)

**Figure 19.** La Familia publishes an article where Max Factor Jr. argues that beauty can be found in college campuses, not just in Hollywood. La Familia, May 15, 1953, 84-85. Hemeroteca Nacional de Mexico, UNAM.

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The presence of Max Factor Jr. exclusively writing to *La Familia* arguing how Hollywood could find beautiful women in colleges and universities, and holding a contest where he actually crowned a young woman as “The Max Factor Girl” legitimizes him as an authority figure who could dictate feminine beauty. The increasing interconnectedness between Mexico and the U.S. due to an expanding consumerist society demonstrates that revolutionary nationalism no longer established the feminine beauty characterized by *mexicanidad* and camposcape. Instead, successful moguls who specialized in cosmetics that worked with Hollywood stars were the ones that appeared to have the authority over what it meant to be beautiful.

The following June, *La Familia* featured another Max Factor Jr. article where a woman received a make over from Max Factor cosmetics (Figure 13). Florence Johnson was the winner of “Sioux City Sue,” a beauty contest held in Sioux City, Iowa. The contest appears to have been held in honor of the song “Sioux City Sue” written by Ray Freedman in the 1940s. According to the article, miss Johnson, as the winner of the contest, received a makeover in order to help her achieve her dream of becoming an actress. The article states that, to make miss Johnson look more beautiful, her hair needed to become blonde.\(^3\) Mexicanidad is clearly absent from this example, but the message about feminine beauty that *La Familia* subscribers were exposed to is one that prevailed a European aesthetic. In the case of “Sioux City Sue,” Mexican society learned that Max Factor and Hollywood, two authoritative entities in the world of feminine beauty, considered blond hair as more beautiful. In this case, Mexican beauty characterized by *mexicanidad* is largely absent because it seems that the globalized form of beauty was favored by influencing entities such as *La Familia* in presenting Max Factor and Hollywood as trustworthy.

\(^3\) Max Factor Jr., “El Maquillaje de Max Factor ayuda a una muchacha en sus aspiraciones,” *La Familia*, June 15, 1953, 34-35.
By 1955, *La Familia* made it clear that Hollywood and Max Factor were, in fact, the authoritative figures that governed the magazine’s interpretation of feminine beauty (Figure 14). In a small article called, “Miss Max Factor Hollywood 1955,” the magazine informed its readers that Jean Moorhead was “Miss Max Factor Hollywood,” and that she had visited the magazine’s offices in Mexico. The article described her as the “Beauty ambassador of the makeup magician.” It conveys that “Max Factor, supreme authority in the art of makeup, was himself the one who elected her to hold the title of Miss Max Factor Hollywood.”*\(^{38}\) *La Familia* makes it clear that *mexicanidad* had very little say in what constituted beauty. Ads, various beauty columns, and articles associated beauty with the use of cosmetics, and Max Factor, being the “supreme authority figure” regarding the use of makeup, subsequently became a figure that may have well influenced feminine beauty in Mexico. This ultimately shows that the individuals who defined Mexican beauty were no longer the post-revolutionary elite. The expanding consumer

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culture extracted a certain amount of power from those who had the ability to dictate feminine beauty and was superimposed by the insertion of beauty ideals coming from Hollywood and Max Factor.

Figure 21. *La Familia* stating that Max Factor is the authoritative figure in feminine beauty. *La Familia*, May 1955, 127. Hemeroteca Nacional de Mexico, UNAM.
Indigenous Beauty

Even though advertisements and beauty columns largely ignored Mexico’s indigenous populations, at least one periodical, a magazine called *Mañana*, attempted to shed light on indigenous beauty. In March of 1954, *Mañana* published an article called “Cuetzalan, a Mountain Jewel.” The author, Jorge Villarreal along with photographer Julio Mayo, focused on the indigenous population living in northern Puebla in a city called Cuetzalan, which is located on the Sierra Madre Oriental mountain range near the Gulf of Mexico (Figure 15). In contrast to magazines like *La Familia*, *Mañana* had in mind a general audience rather than being a periodical that strictly catered to women. The magazine also discussed national and international politics. In publishing “Cuetzalan, a Mountain Jewel,” *Mañana* paid attention to a domestic topic that involved an indigenous population living in Mexico’s east coast. Villarreal describes the inhabitants of Cuetzalan as mestizos, as he conveys that they are a mix of Aztec, Totonaca, and Spanish. He describes the family structure as patriarchal and characterizes the men as strong, able to adapt to any climate, and as excellent hard workers. He continues by explaining that Cuetzalan’s indigenous are mostly agricultural, but they also herd sheep, hunt, and fish. Additionally, Villarreal reveals that they “exploit small industries such as wool, pottery, and artifacts made out of rubber.”

Villarreal depicts Cuetzalan’s indigenous women in a fairly romantic manner. For example, he conveys that they are “truly men’s companions and collaborators…” and he describes them as “honest, sensitive, and romantic…” This characterization of Cuetzalan women continues to conjure similar romantic sentiments associated with camposcape. He adds that even when dressed in their indigenous clothing, their aesthetics reflects one of cleanliness that maintains the purity of her Totonaca characteristics. In describing their cleanliness, Villarreal appears to associate an inherent sense of purity that Cuetzalan women embodied in their clothing. In describing their hair, he points out that it resembles the colorful feathers of a quetzal, a bird that the town was named after, due to the colorful ribbons that women incorporate in their hair (Figure 16). This association appears to connect and depict Cuetzalan indigenous women to a past that they embodied in the expression of their hair. The way in which Villarreal portrays

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40 Villarreal, 37.
indigenous women illustrates that even in the 1950s, many continued to romanticize a past that remained concentrated around a woman’s indigenous body.

Figure 22. Writer Jorge Villarreal and photographer Julio Mayo focus on one of Mexico’s indigenous populations. Mañana, March 1954, 36-37. Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada.

Moreover, the way in which Villarreal depicts Cuetzalan’s indigenous people is still problematic. The images clearly look staged, as Cuetzalan women and men are illustrated posing for the camera. One woman, who happens to be wearing earrings and pearls, is seen brushing and doing her hair and also includes pictures of her final look. Other indigenous women are completely dressed up and walking barefoot on a rugged road holding baskets. It is unclear weather Cuetzalan women dressed this way every day or for special occasions, yet the article makes it seem as though this was their every day look since the pictures illustrate the women casually walking in the middle of the road, holding a baby, and going to the market to shop for groceries. Nonetheless, the women’s hair alone appears quite heavy, thus most likely making it difficult to perform every day tasks. This ultimately begs the question whether this was how they dressed daily or whether this is how the photographer wanted to depict them. The latter serves as
evidence that Mexican society may have purposely wanted to view its indigenous population in a
cstatically romanticized form of beauty.

One element that indicates that the indigenous women’s clothes and hairstyle were not
worn daily involves the caption written below one of the images. The caption conveys that many
women who used these dresses for ceremonies and festivals spent more than three thousand
pesos buying them, and it adds that Cuetzalan women themselves were the ones who, with their
primitive ways of weaving fabric, made the dresses for sale. 41 The caption does not specify who
the women were buying these attires for, but based on the amount of money they had to spend, it
seems like they had a strong economic status. It is unlikely that indigenous women wore these
expensive outfits daily as the images and text suggest, which means that the photographer and
the authors decided to illustrate a particular form of indigenous beauty they deemed acceptable,
one that was made up with expensive clothes and jewelry. By writing and photographing the

41 Villarreal, 39.
Cuetzalan indigenous in a way that made them seem like they have been dressing the same way since Spanish conquest, Villarreal and Mayo portray Cuetzalan people as ahistorical, primitive, and unable to modernize.

Additionally, Villarreal continues to express the ideas of Vasconcelos, which sought to assimilate indigenous populations into Mexican society. Villarreal conveys that Cuetzalan couples marry and have children at a really early age. He continues by depicting young children’s lives as harsh, especially since they were put to sleep on a maguey leaf to build their character. However, the author makes it known that this “primitive” form of education has been suppressed; children were switched to sleep on cribs and assured the reader that their strong characters needed to survive their harsh future would not be affected. Describing the Indigenous’ customs as primitive, evidenced by the replacement of the maguey leaf for a crib, clearly demonstrates the process of acculturation that Vasconcelos supported. Additionally, Villarreal explains that Cuetzalan’s rural school would extract the “primitive” out of the children and replace it with “modernity” via games and sports. He ends by writing that even though the children carry a mark of sadness due to their ancestry, the influence they would obtain from school promised them a bright future because little by little, they would incorporate themselves along with their Mexican bothers as part of Mexico. Villarreal shows that Cuetzalan’ indigenous people were not entirely Mexican but eventually would once they become acculturated by the school’ sports and games.

Even though Villarreal exhibited several ways in which Cuetzalan people were being assimilated into modern Mexican society, the agency those in the photographs exercised cannot be ignored. Textually, it is evident that the indigenous are depicted in a romanticized manner, the prevailing narrative is the one of the writer and the photographer, and their voice is completely silent. There is even an image of Villarreal posing next to three Cuetzalan men, but he includes nothing about what transpired during this meeting (Figure 17). The caption simply conveys that Villarreal exchanged glances with three typical men from the region. Nonetheless, the simple fact that these individuals appear in the images is an indication that they agreed to participate. At the same time, there is also no evidence of force, or if any of the Cuetzalan participants received any kind of payment. The three women walking on a rocky road appear to be smiling, and a

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42 Villarreal, 37.
43 Villarreal, 40.
young man standing behind the same three women but this time at a market also appear to have a happy expression. Of course, their smiles could be fictitious, but they could also be expressing a sense of pride in their culture. Even if they did not wear their hair and attire as it is shown in the images on a daily basis, this may have been an opportunity for them to express to the rest of Mexico that they are also part of the country and not afraid to reveal their uniqueness.

Figure 24. Jorge Villarreal is seen talking to three Totonaca men in the lower left image, but he does not include content about the exchange; the captions only discuss the way the Totonacas dress. Mañana, March 1954, 40-41.

The beauty embodied by indigenous populations as seen in the case of Cuetzalan takes on a different form compared to the mainstream beauty found in other magazines and newspapers; yet, they share in common the ways in which cultural characteristics are extracted and replaced with something else. Indigenous beauty appears to continue to embody *mexicanidad* and camposcape, as it takes the form of one that illustrates a strong connection to the indigenous peoples’ past and their heritage. That is, at least, the way in which Villarreal and Mayo depict it. In contrast, ads about cosmetics and beauty columns appear to hint at *mexicanidad* in the ways in which they utilize aspects about nature and sexuality that seem to resemble those characteristics of camposcape. However, this resemblance does not completely take the form of *mexicanidad*
because the advent of Mexico’s expanding consumer culture helped strengthened the idea of global beauty while extracting out *mexicanidad*. Similarly, the indigenous beauty expressed in Cuetzalan contains strong ties to the Indigenous’ heritage that is especially evident in the way in which women do their hair to simulate the feathers of the *quetzal*. But, what is extracted out from the Cuetzalan indigenous population does not seem directly related to feminine beauty but it is in relation to their way of life that is evident, for example, in the replacement of the maguey leaf as a bed for a crib. Indigenous and mainstream forms of beauty have in common how various elements are extracted while inserting others that seem to be dictated by outside factors. Nonetheless, the depiction of an indigenous form of beauty along with its association to their heritage accentuates its one-of-a-kind feature that deems it exceptional while globalized beauty does not seem concerned with an ethnic past and is instead focused on a radicalized aesthetic that places whiteness at the top of the beauty hierarchy.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has exhibited the ways in which *mexicanidad* appears to be absent during the 1920s through the 1940s, but especially during the 1950s. Varner’s analysis demonstrates how the idea of the natural was important to *mexicanidad* as it was expressed via feminine beauty’s association to agriculture. In synthesizing Varner’s findings along with Sluis’s concept of camposcape, it becomes evident how strong the natural sexual was in defining *mexicanidad*. This connection is important because characteristics associated with the nature and sexual are apparent during the first half of the 20th century in ads and beauty columns, subsequently showing how *mexicanidad* was still prominent. By the 1950s, these concepts continue to be present, but they have changed to the point where *mexicanidad* is largely absent. Ads, beauty columns, and articles reveal a support and resistance to the goods brought on by modernity; some supported women’s use of manufactured goods, others advised women to use naturally made products, several incorporated women’s sexuality in various manners to appeal to women. Additionally, individuals such as Villarreal writing about the indigenous people of northern Puebla indicate that Mexican society in the 1950s continued to view strongly associate indigenous to camposcape. Nonetheless, even though the globalized form of beauty expressed by ads, beauty columns, and articles seems completely different than indigenous beauty, both have
in common that characteristics foundational to each are being extracted while also inserting or accentuating other attributes due to outside factors that a growing consumer culture helped introduce, subsequently demonstrating how *mexicanidad* was becoming diluted and woven into the increase of international interaction.
Conclusion

During Porfirio Díaz’s dictatorship, it would have been difficult for the Mexican elite to conceptualize a form of beauty that was not European in origin, but the Mexican Revolution helped break that mold to a certain extent. The Mexican Revolution marked a seemingly strong political break where the realm of politics attempted to move away from a dictatorship and towards a stronger sense of democracy. Mexico’s culture also changed to emphasize its *mexicanidad*, as many like Miguel Gamio and Jose Vasconcelos attempted to strongly appreciate the nation’s past and incorporate its indigenous population into the country’s national identity. Nonetheless, their endeavors were limited since both sought to assimilate Mexico’s indigenous, and Vasconcelos’s “cosmic race” would ultimately express a European aesthetic. Additionally, the space women occupied during the 1920s and 1930s was segregated; light skinned, rich elite women could be seen nude in the city during their theatrical performances, and dark skinned indigenous women could only be nude in the countryside. Elite women could pose in the countryside in addition to the city, but indigenous women could not be nude in an urban city since they would be considered prostitutes or degenerate women. Similarly in film, the women who took on the role of indigenous women were light skinned actresses, not dark skinned indigenous women. When examining skin color, it becomes evident even though the nation went through a strong political break that attempted to reject imperialism, the elites’ every day lives continued to place a stronger value on women with a lighter skin tone.

*Mexicanidad* continued to play a strong role in developing Mexico’s national identity during its post-revolutionary period. Muralists such as Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco had contrasting outlooks about Mexico’s future after the revolution, but their expression of *mexicanidad* and their portrayal of women’s bodies in their artwork made it evident that the entirety of women’s bodies was an important element in using it as a metaphor that reflected the nation. Additionally, another group of artists known as the Contemporáneos, which included Julio Castellanos and Rufino Tamayo, also reflected *mexicanidad*, but their conceptualization of art did not agree with their works reflecting a message that was strongly connected to Mexican nationalism. They still reflected a sense of *mexicanidad*, but one that was more in tune with a sense of international connectedness.

Additionally, the concept of the natural is another element that composes *mexicanidad*, as the natural was associated with agriculture, the space that revolutionaries fought to democratize.
Ads, beauty columns, and articles during the 1950s evoke words and messages that are associated with the idea of the natural, but *mexicanidad* is largely absent because there is little to no attention on Mexico’s indigenous people. Instead, these mediums placed women with light skin at the heart of their message. The article published by *Mañana* provides a glimpse as to how non-indigenous Mexicans may have conceived of indigenous beauty. Yet, the article continues to illustrate Mexico’s indigenous in the 1950s as ahistorical and unable to modernize.

Examining Mexican feminine beauty sheds light on the legacies colonialism left, demonstrating that many elites in the country continued to favor a European form of beauty throughout centuries. This case study shows that the elites’ ongoing frame of thought that placed Europe and the United States as the countries to emulate in order to be considered economically successful was a key factor in Mexican elites’ acceptance of a form of beauty that mostly favored a European aesthetic. Even though after the revolution, the country looked inwards towards its indigenous people to re-define its national identity, sympathies towards other societies and a lighter skin tone remained, as evidenced by their continuing preference of light skinned feminine beauty. Therefore, it is no surprise that as Mexico expanded as a consumerist society in the 1950s, expressions of a global form of beauty that illustrated a European aesthetic persisted.

By paying attention to feminine beauty during the 1950s by means of examining visual media and depictions of women’s bodies, this thesis has added to the current scholarship that focuses on a turning point in Mexican history. During the post-revolutionary period, agents such as the Mexican government, the elite, and artists played an important role in creating a vision of Mexico that they imagined as being best. For example, historian Ricardo Pérez Montfort examines how *mexicanidad*, as an important cultural signifier, played a significant role in the way in which elites and even indigenous people helped develop Mexico’s stereotypical image. My research continues to add to Montfort’s scholarship that examines *mexicanidad* but during a different period of time.

The 1950s are an important decade to consider due to the way in which Mexico moved away from revolutionary policies in favor of expanding as a consumerist society. Alan Knight,

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45 For more on Mexico’s economic and industrial relationship with the United States and how it affected Mexico’s national and international economic policy, see Stephen R. Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development: The United States and Mexico, 1938-1954* (Wilmington, Delaware: SR Books, 1995). For a stronger emphasis on how Mexico’s political realm aided the country’s economic transformation, see John W. Sherman, “The Mexican ‘Miracle’ and Its
another expert on 20th century Mexican history states, “The ardent cultural nationalist of the 1920s and the 1930s, champions of lo mexicano, witnessed a tide of cultural Americanization, of pochismo, which, from the 1940s, flooded the country, defying fragile nationalist seawall.”46 The flood of “cultural Americanization” in the form of mass culture hit Mexico from the 1940s and continued on to the 1950s, and even though many countries around the world experienced this phenomenon, Mexico was different due to its relatively recent social and cultural revolution.

When considering Mexico’s turn away from revolutionary policy towards its active engagement in expanding as a consumerist society, images depicting women’s bodies help shed light on the way Mexico transformed as a country. My research agrees with the current scholarship addressing how the policies of the Mexican Revolution shifted during the 1940s and the 1950s.

Most importantly, this thesis has identified a cyclical pattern in depictions of women’s bodies in relation to beauty. By examining the Porfiriato and the ways in which women sought to appear beautiful in society’s eyes, José Tomás de Cuéllar sheds light on the way women’s bodies become compartmentalized during a period of fast paced modernization. As the country modernized, only a few elite strongly benefitted from this change, but those who belonged to the working-class and indigenous populations did not have the same positive experience as the elite because they were either ignored or considered inherently inferior. When the revolution broke out, new ideas about what constituted feminine beauty were born, allowing for mexicanidad to thrive where indigenous women were chosen to represent the country’s new identity. In contrast to the Porfiriato, the success of proletariat was at the heart of the Revolution and the post-revolutionary period. During this time, the female body was idealized and representative of the nation as evidenced by various artworks illustrating a female body that was complete. Nonetheless, by the 1950s Mexico once again felt the need to modernize, as it had done under the Porfiriato, and once again the female body became fragmented while also ignoring those who belonged to the lower classes and Mexico’s indigenous population. This cycle depicting women’s bodies as disintegrated to complete and back to being broken into pieces reflects a conservative nature in the country’s political realm.

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