

Can We Please Stop Imposing 'Beauty Rest' on Women?

By Paige Towers • May 5, 2016 at 11:44am

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In 1905, a woman writing under the moniker of “Comrade Mary” dedicated part of her column, titled “In a Woman’s Mind,” to a school in New York where women learned to “fall asleep gracefully.” The article, which

appeared in an April issue of Worker

—

an old labor union newspaper from Australia — listed some of the school’s curriculum, which included sessions where women’s jaws would be strapped shut at night (to prevent them from sleeping with them agape, of course) and learn to smile pleasantly while dozing.

Here’s an excerpt:

"Most women think they know how to go to sleep even when someone is standing by to keep them awake, but it seems that this confidence in themselves is only rivalled [sic] by their conceit. New York has a school for teaching women how to fall asleep gracefully. At this seminary it takes a month with a strap round the jaws to stop a

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woman from sleeping with her mouth open catching flies, and another month for her to fall asleep without an ugly gob, and smiling as if she heard the angels singing. It is a long time before is trusted to fall asleep by herself."

The sheer absurdity of these practices aside, the article, though antiquated, highlights a trend in culture that still exists today: Women should use sleep to work on their appearance; as a time not just to rest, but also to better themselves for the sake of society.

If you've spent any time browsing through women's magazines or, you know, just then you're probably aware of the constant pressure we face to look good — and not just during waking hours. Glossy publications and websites are packed with articles that instruct us how to go to bed looking sexy and wake up looking even sexier. These routines are said to ensure that this pesky little thing called shuteye doesn't prevent us girls from looking beautiful upon waking.

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Now, some of the oft-referenced bedtime beauty routines seem reasonable enough for someone who's interested in maintaining healthy skin: Wash your face, use moisturizer, use night cream. There's nothing wrong with a bit of nightly maintenance.

But things don't stop there. We're instructed to

wear all-night face masks

, which can become so messy (tomato and honey mask, anyone?)

that we need to sleep on a towel to avoid ruining our sheets. As the Huffington Post article,

“10 Ways To Get Beautiful

While you Sleep,”

warns, though, spending the night with your face on that towel comes with its own issues: Resting on towels or even cotton pillowcases can not only cause facial lines, but — gasp! —

also lead to permanent wrinkles. Thus, one should really only rest their head on a high-quality silk pillowcase. (Even then, ladies,

make sure to strategically

arrange your body when you sleep.

)

Applying serum to your eyelashes

before shut-eye, some articles state, makes them thicker and more “fluttery” upon waking. And let's not talk about the

myriad of teethwhitening tips (rub baking soda on your teeth!), all of which tell us not to drink anything afterwards. (But, of course, we're also expected to drink lots of water so our skin looks hydrated upon waking.)

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Were one to compile these tips into a column and place them alongside Comrade Mary's 110-year-old critique, they wouldn't seem so out of place — especially because so much of writing related to beauty and sleep harps on one purpose: to look good for the man in your bed.

Creative strategies are doled out to female readers, like, "Just sneak out of the room in the morning before the sun rises so you can fix your face before he sees you!"

This means that makeup (or the lack thereof, rather) is touted as a serious cause for concern. Cosmetics are

if left on overnight.

Removing them, however, means exposing your true self to the man snoring away beside you. Therefore, creative strategies are doled out to female readers. ("Just wash your makeup off before bedtime and then apply a different, gentler kind before actually getting into bed!"; "Sneak out of the room in the morning before the sun rises so you can fix your face before he sees you!")

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notoriously known to cause
acne, wrinkles and other such irritations

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Comrade Mary, who was described by an editor

of the same newspaper as a “quiet, unassuming, dignified and intelligent lady” who sacrificed her whole life for the benefit of her own sex and the masses in general, would likely not be pleased with the slow evolution regarding sleep and beauty.

To be fair, there are those who disregard these ridiculous expectations altogether: In her song Flawless,

Beyoncé proudly proclaims “I woke up like this” and the phrase gained massive popularity with good reason. Women everywhere took to the Internet to post selfies of themselves right after waking from sleep, thus rejecting the longstanding expectation that women should mold themselves into pretty sleepers and post sleepers. Still, it appears that many of those selfietakers might have read up on how to snap an amazing, perfectly lit photo

of themselves

first. Comrade Mary would not have approved.