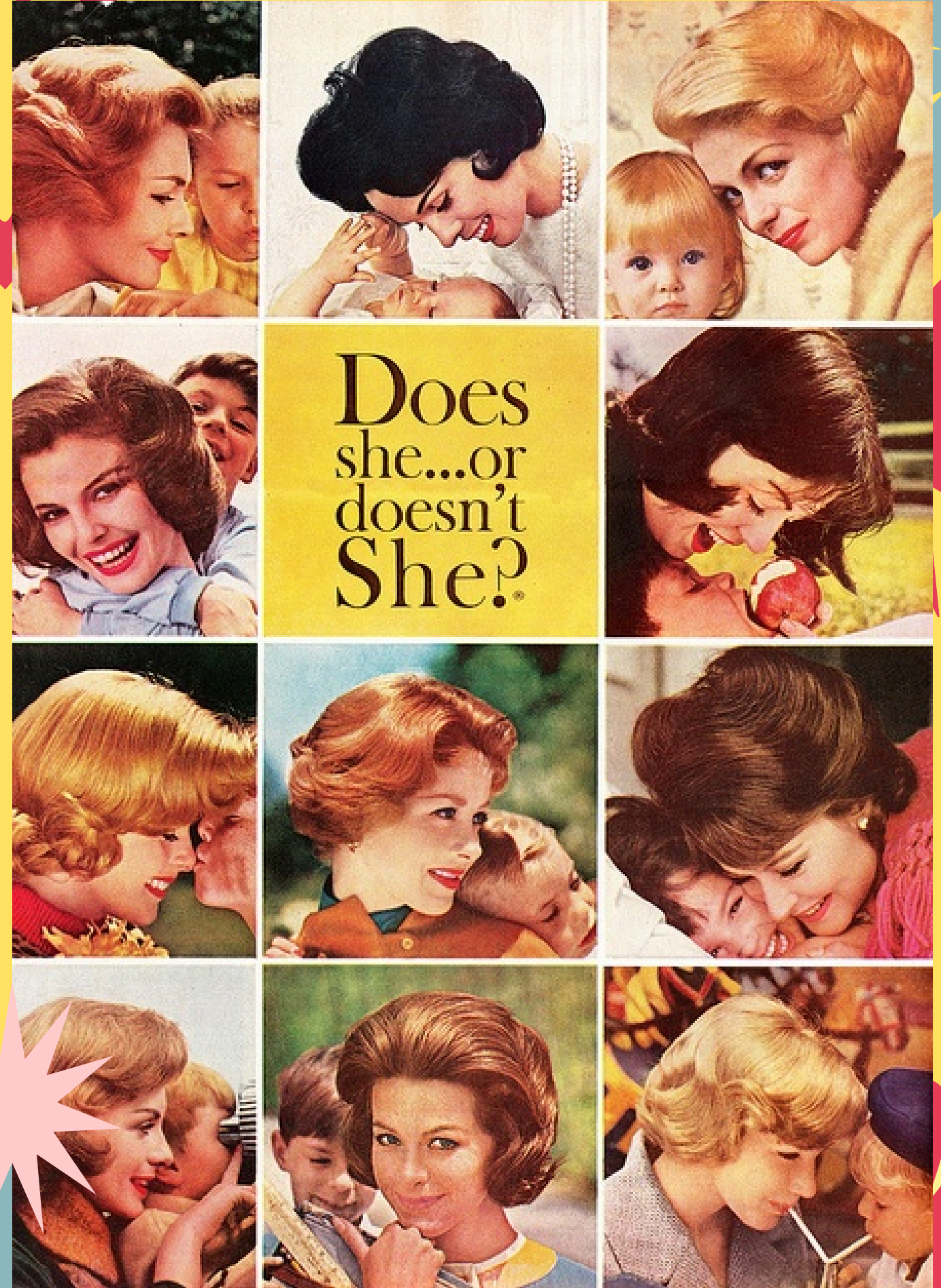


# Does She... or Doesn't She? the Paradox of Feminine Beauty

By: Mia Buchholz



# The Norm:



In the 1950s and 1960s, it was seen as unladylike to color your hair. Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*, famously wrote that the three things a lady should never do was color her hair, smoke in public, or wear long pants. It was thought that only actresses and “fast women” (prostitutes) used hair dye, because being beautiful was an occupational obligation.

# The Product

In 1949, the Miss Clairol Hair Color Bath was introduced to the American salon industry. This product penetrated the hair follicle and left the user with new natural-looking tone to their hair color. It could be used in lieu of a shampoo, only took 20 minutes to work, and had better results than anything that came before it. The product exploded onto the market and within six months of its release, the number of women who went to the salon for hair coloring increased by 500%.

In 1956, Clairol wanted to begin to market the single-step Hair Color Bath as usable at home. It was a massive risk to switch from selling to hairdressers to women directly as a majority of women still didn't color their hair. Women didn't believe they could do it themselves, and marketing to women directly risked upsetting hairdressers and losing their business.



# The Tension

This stigma around hair dye enforced a silent paradox about beauty: that the pursuit of beauty was shameful to admit, as if the effort to look more beautiful meant you weren't beautiful to begin with. But when women were seen as beautiful, society rewarded them for it. This pressured women to feel the need to appear effortlessly beautiful, while pretending the work needed to look effortless doesn't exist. Everyone knew how much effort maintaining beauty required, yet admitting to that effort was taboo.



# The (Wo)man with the Plan



When Shirley Polykoff was put in charge of the Clairol account, she was the only female copywriter at the firm. When she thought of the famous tagline “Does She or Doesn’t She?” she remembered her first introduction to her mother-in-law, who asked this very question in Yiddish to her son about Shirley’s hair color.

The headline insinuates that the result was so natural looking, only a hairdresser could tell if your hair was dyed. It also addresses the negative attitudes towards hair coloring, as the question had historically been posed with a negative tone. She also included the phrase “only her hairdresser knows for sure”, in deference to hairdressers expertise and maintaining the relationship between Hairdressers and Clairol.

# Campaign Examples



Does she...  
or  
doesn't  
she?

**Hair color so natural only her hairdresser knows for sure!**

She has a fresh, young way of looking—and of looking at things. Her naturalness, the way her hair sparkles and catches the light, its depth of color—as though she's found the secret of making time stand still. And in a way she has! With Miss Clairol, it's so easy to keep hair color young and radiant... to keep gray from ever showing! And this is why more women use it than all other haircolorings combined.

Hairdressers everywhere prefer Miss Clairol and always recommend it because it truly lives up to its promise. Not only is it the most beautiful, most effective way to cover gray but it keeps hair in wonderful condition—so silky, lively, completely natural-looking. Its automatic color timing is most dependable. So try Miss Clairol yourself. Today. Takes only minutes. Creme Formula or Regular.



**MISS CLAIROL® HAIR COLOR BATH! THE NATURAL-LOOKING HAIRCOLORING**



Does she...or doesn't she?®

**Hair color so natural only her hairdresser knows for sure!™**

Are mothers getting younger or do they just look that way! She, for one, has the fresh, wholesome quality, the bright and shining hair that just naturally keeps a woman looking prettier, younger—as though she's found the secret of making time stand still. And in a way she has. It's with Miss Clairol, the most beautiful way to cover gray and to revitalize or brighten fading color.

Keeps hair in wonderful condition—so soft, lively—because Miss Clairol carries the fresh color deep into the hair shaft to shine outward, just the way natural color does. That's why hairdressers everywhere recommend Miss Clairol and more women use it than all other haircolorings. So quick and easy. Try it yourself. Today.



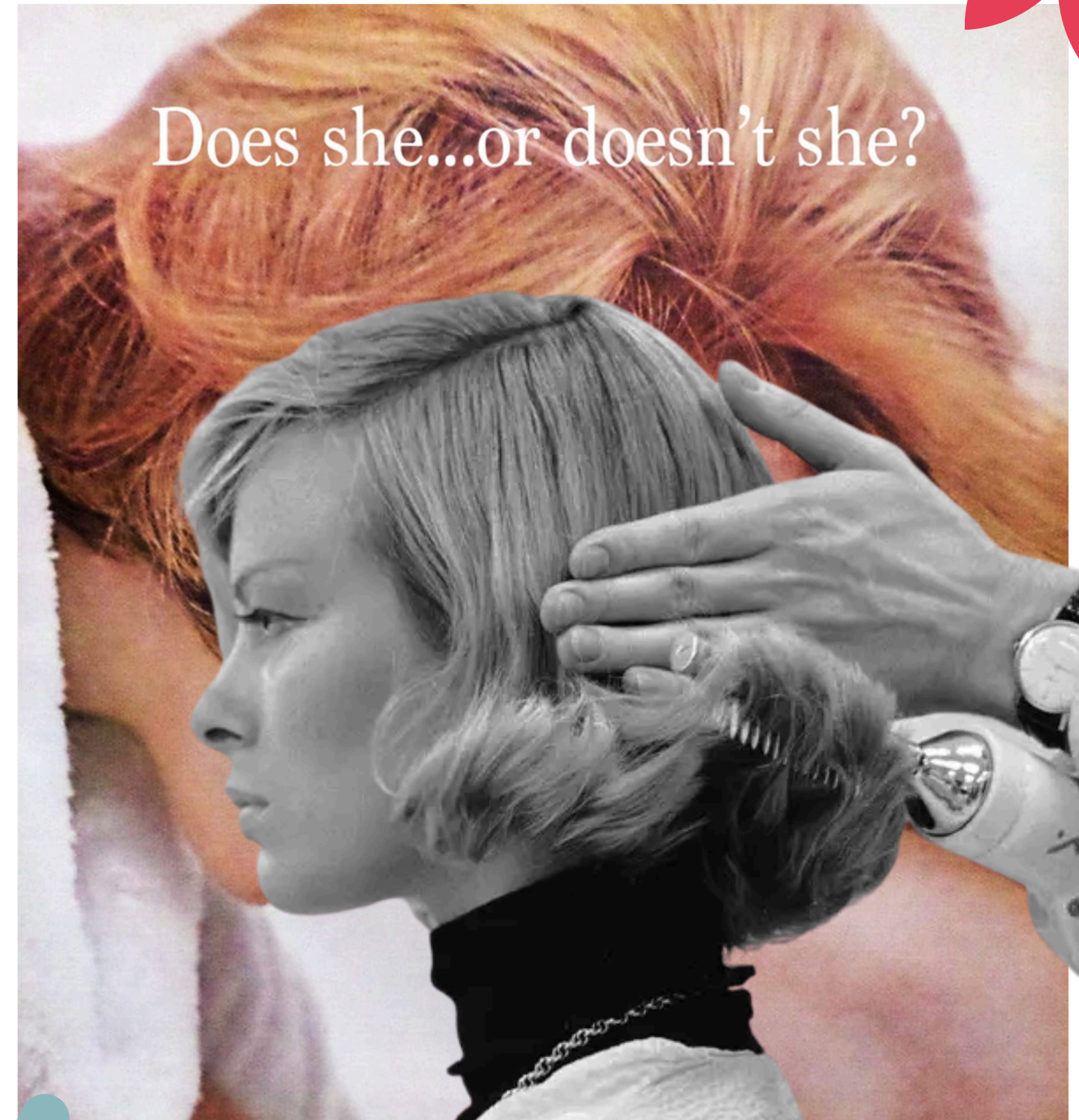
Even close up, her hair looks natural. Miss Clairol keeps it shiny, too. Complete gray with a younger, but lasting color no other kind of haircoloring can promise—and live up to!

**MISS CLAIROL**

HAIR COLOR BATH is a trademark of Clairol Inc. © Clairol Inc. 1963

# The Inside Joke

The tagline also was also a double entendre meant to amuse women. Men, often reacted in shock upon first reading the headline, wrongly placing the phrase into a sexual context. Women, however, ultimately knew the unspoken words found in the ellipsis alluded to the things a lady only shares with her hairdresser. This if-you-know-you-know attitude was what made the adverts attractive to women.





# The Evidence

When Clairol first asked "Does She or Doesn't She?" in 1957, only one in fifteen women were using artificial hair dye. Just eleven years later, every other woman uses hair dye to maintain her color. Now, the hair coloring industry has expanded to be worth over \$20B in 2024<sup>3</sup>. With women using hair dye as a form of self-expression.

In 1967, eleven years after the campaign launched, Polykoff was inducted into the Advertising Hall of Fame for her work. Her insight didn't just sell a product, it fundamentally shifted cultural attitudes about beauty, effort, and authenticity.



Does she...  
or doesn't she?®

When brown hair looks this exciting...what else but Miss Clairol®

She has a feeling for naturalness. Whether it's sharing the simple beauty of a flower...or the way she looks herself. Fresh—and free as a breeze. You can see it in the shining, healthy flow of her hair. Naturally, she uses Miss Clairol. The colors are marvelously sheer so they always look alive and vibrant. And, with Miss Clairol, there are so many beautiful brunettes to choose from. Brunettes with that extra special something that can charge brown hair with excitement. And each completely covers gray—in the nicest way.

Only Miss Clairol comes in two personalized formulas—extra easy Shampoo Formula and extra rich Creme Formula. Try Miss Clairol and see just how beautiful brown hair can be.



Extra easy Extra rich

Color so natural only her hairdresser knows for sure!™

HAIR COLOR BATH IS A TRADEMARK OF CLAIROL INC.

# The Affect

Malcolm Gladwell wrote in *True Colors*, a 1999 *New Yorker* history of a hair dye that: “Clairol captured the feminist sensibility of the day with a shampoo-in hair and memorable advertising slogans. In writing the history of women in the postwar era, did we forget something important? Did we leave out hair?”

Proof that Polykoff’s genius turned a stigma into a status symbol and it forever changed our views on attainable beauty.



# Resources

[Does She or Doesn't She – Clairol Classic Hair Coloring Advertisement – Hook Agency Blog](#)

[Twenty Ads that Shook the World – James Twitchell](#)

[How Clairol Hair Color Went From Taboo to New You– AdWeek](#)

[Advertising: She Does – Time](#)

[True Colors – The New Yorker](#)

Does she...or doesn't she?

**Hair color so natural only her hairdresser knows for sure!™**

She's as full of fun as a kid—and just as fresh looking. And this is a lovely thing in a mother! But staying young is not only thinking young, it's *looking* young too. And the fresh, young, even color you get *every time* with Miss Clairol, makes the beautiful difference. It's like knowing how to turn back time. It certainly is the best way to keep gray hair from ever showing.

Keeps hair in wonderful condition—soft, silky. Because Miss Clairol carries color deep into the hair strand, it shines outward with a clear, all-over even tone the way natural color does. That's why hairdressers recommend it and more women use it than any other haircoloring. So quick and easy. Try it yourself. Today.

**MISS CLAIROL**  
HAIR COLOR BATH™  
THE NATURAL-LOOKING HAIRCOLORING

Even close up, her hair looks natural. Miss Clairol keeps it shiny, bouncy. Completely covers gray with the younger, brighter, lasting color no other kind of haircoloring can promise—and live up to!

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Good Housekeeping