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Skin Deep The Art of the Lash Advances

Tony Cenicola/The New York Times



The mascara wand has been transformed. From left, the old-style brush, followed by new models from Chanel, \$27; Clinique, \$14; Max Factor, \$8; Maybelline, \$7; Revlon, \$7; and Lancôme, \$22. (Prices are approximate.)

By [NATASHA SINGER](#)
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BETTE DAVIS once said that she owed her success to brown mascara. But if Davis were alive today, the actress with the famously dramatic eyes might give the same credit to her mascara brush.

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In the last year, a new generation of geometrically shaped mascara applicators has been turning up at department store cosmetics counters and drugstores across the country. Beauty companies contend that these updated wands work better at coating individual lashes and preventing mascara clots than traditional cone-shaped brushes.

Some of the new mascara applicators have unevenly notched nylon bristles that make them resemble corrugated toothbrushes. Other brands are replacing rigid fiber brushes with flexible plastic combs or rubbery prongs.

"Patenting new brushes carves out a niche that distinguishes one brand from another and adds value to the mascara, justifying higher prices," said Briony Davies, a cosmetics and toiletries analyst at

Euromonitor International, a market research firm that tracks nationwide cosmetics sales. "But as soon as one company introduces a different brush, they all have to come out with different brushes."

Earlier this year, for example, Maybelline New York introduced Lash Stylist, a product applied with a comb containing two parallel rows of teeth. On July 28, Clinique is bringing out High Definition Lashes with a split applicator that has both a plastic comb and a brush made of nylon bristles. On Aug. 1, Chanel plans to introduce Inimitable Mascara, which has a wand with rubbery white quills instead of a traditional brush.

Americans spent almost \$1.3 billion on mascara last year, a 71 percent increase over 1997, according to Euromonitor. New products promising to curl, lengthen and fatten lashes by 2 to 10 times are spurring sales. Consumers who were once loyal to particular mascaras now buy a variety of them, Euromonitor said.

The explosion of choices also means that consumers can be less tolerant of products that clump, smudge, cake or flake.

"What's important here is the brush," said Alyssa Wong, a teenager from Brooklyn, N.Y., as she tried on mascaras earlier this month at the Sephora store in Times Square. Out of her silver-sequined purse, Ms. Wong extracted CoverGirl LashExact mascara and opened it to show a rubbery cone-shaped applicator wand spiked like a miniature cactus. "This brush separates your eyelashes so the mascara can make them look longer and thicker."

Because the new brushes are designed to coat lashes from root to tip to make individual lashes stand out, these mascaras are an easier route to the bold eye than false eyelashes, said Sonia Kashuk, a makeup artist whose cosmetics line sells at Target.

"Celebrities like Lindsay Lohan, Hilary Duff and Madonna have made the sexy, glamorous look of false eyelashes popular, but some people are afraid they don't know how to get them on," Ms. Kashuk said.

Women have been using mascara to enhance their eyes at least as far back as the ancient Egyptians, who applied kohl to their lids, lashes and eyebrows.

The modern era of mascara is believed to have begun in 1913 when a chemist named Thomas Williams concocted for his sister Mabel a lash coating made out

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of Vaseline and coal dust; the product led to the founding of Maybelline.

The luxuriant lash helped the fortunes of several well-known cosmetics houses. In 1914, Max Factor, a makeup artist who worked on movie sets, invented a wax eyelash crayon that had to be heated before it could be dripped on. In 1917, Maybelline made putting on one's face a little easier with mascara that came in a dry cake; women applied it with a damp brush.

Helena Rubinstein introduced fluid mascara packaged in a tube with a wand applicator in 1957. Maybelline Great Lash, the perennial drugstore favorite in the hot-pink cylinder, appeared in 1971.

For the last 40 years, most tube mascaras have used applicators made out of twisted wires surrounded by tufts of nylon strands, said Sarah Vickery, a senior scientist at Procter & Gamble, the company behind CoverGirl and Max Factor. But the nylon tufts can cause clumping because they are not very precise, Ms. Vickery said.

"Lashes grow in two to four rows of follicles, not in a straight line, so some mascara brushes that coat only the top of lashes can create more of a mess," Ms. Vickery said. Last December, Max Factor introduced Lash Perfection. With its molded plastic brush with staggered teeth, it is designed to reach between lashes, coating them and detangling them at the same time, Ms. Vickery said.



Call her Jezebel.

Gracemarie Papaleo, the United States director of new product development worldwide for Lancôme, likened eyelash grooming to coiffure.

"Eyelashes are a form of hair," Ms. Papaleo said. "Hair is less defined if you use a brush, while you get more

precision with a comb." In May, Lancôme's new mascara, Fatale, made its debut, complete with an applicator made out of three miniature combs. As the name suggests, the mascara is intended for those seeking a killer eyelash look.

Janet Pardo, the senior vice president of product development worldwide at Clinique, said that mascaras are among the most difficult cosmetics to develop because of the many variables involved in creating them. The length of the wand and the tube, the size and density of the bristles, and the viscosity of the fluid itself all have to work in tandem, she said.

Researchers at Clinique spent two and a half years working on iterations of the brand's new mascara, High Definition Lashes, whose wand has both a comb and a striated bristle brush. The double-tip wand allows the use of either or both, depending on the eyelash definition or thickness desired, Ms. Pardo said.

Dominique Moncourtois, Chanel's international director of makeup creation, explained that to work properly applicators must be complemented by mascara formulas. For the last 15 years, Chanel has been researching brushes made out of rubbery molded bristles. But there was a problem: Standard mascara formulas did not perform well with them, Mr. Moncourtois said.

"You needed new polymers and new materials to work with the new technology," he said. Rice wax, an ingredient that thickens lashes, turned out to be the answer. "With the new mascara brush, it works like crazy," he said. The company's new mascara, Inimitable, will appear next month.

Do these *recherché* applicators really work?

The wands make a difference if the goal is a heavily fringed eye, said Elaine Tsang, a makeup artist in Boston.

"They help deposit a lot of color at the root of the eyelash," Ms. Tsang said. "They can give you a more classic doe-eyed, feathery eyelash look."

But not everyone wants eyes that telegraph artifice.

"Maybe I am a creature of habit, but I want my eyelashes to look soft, full and natural," said Dolores Coletti, a teacher's aide at a middle school in Newton, Mass., who dropped by a CVS drugstore earlier this month to buy Maybelline Full 'N Soft mascara, a product with an old-school brush applicator. "The traditional straight mascara brushes are just easier to handle."

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Injuries Give the Mascara Wand a Black Eye

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DRIVING to work in the morning, Dr. Roy S. Rubinfeld shudders when he watches women brushing on mascara at stoplights.

"I am concerned that they are going to poke themselves in the eye," said Dr. Rubinfeld, an ophthalmologist in Chevy Chase, Md., who specializes in treating injuries to the cornea.

The most common injuries involving cosmetics are jabs to the eye with mascara wands, according to the Web site of the Food and Drug Administration. Dr. Rubinfeld said that scratches to the cornea not only hurt; they can also provide an entryway for bacteria, "especially if you are using an old mascara that has no more preservatives in it so it grows bacteria like a petri dish."

Mascaras can trigger an allergic reaction, causing redness and swelling along eyelids, he said.

Dr. Brian S. Biesman, an ophthalmic surgeon in Nashville, has treated patients whose heavy use of mascara had clogged the drainage systems of oil-producing glands, causing sties.

To be safe, **Dr. Biesman** cautioned against applying mascara "while holding dogs, children or a steering wheel."

To minimize exposure to bacteria, replace mascara every few months, **Dr. Biesman** said. He added that people who have a history of sties may want to forgo mascara altogether.

Dr. Rubinfeld said those who are sensitive to cosmetics may be better off using mascaras that are marked hypoallergenic.

