The Psychological Factors that Affect Makeup Usage and the Perception of Makeup in Different Situations

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Abstract

Today 44 percent of American women feel uncomfortable leaving the home without makeup on, no matter the destination: movies, gym, school, work, or even the beach. Makeup has become a source of oppression amongst American women because this population does not feel beautiful without it. The purpose of this research was to study how makeup influences the way third parties perceive particular personality and physical traits. Previous research has found that low self-esteem, low confidence, and high levels of anxiety lead to increased makeup usage; and increased makeup usage positively correlates to attractiveness, femininity, and sexiness and negatively correlates to likeability, morality, and competence. Third party observers' perception of makeup is influenced by the following factors: situation, race, and time. The present research may inform women on how to tailor their makeup choices to influence particular perceptions. In addition, psychiatrists and other healthcare professionals may use this information when diagnosing or treating a patient. Businesses and corporations may use this knowledge to reduce bias.

Keywords: makeup, perception, characteristics

1. Introduction

Everyday women apply generous amounts of makeup. The widespread practice of applying makeup begs the question: How do the majority of people perceive and analyze cosmetic usage and which psychological characteristics affect females' cosmetic usage?

The application of makeup itself is not a modern practice. According to archaeological evidence, cosmetic usage started as early as 4000 B.C. in Ancient Egypt. Egyptian women used Kohl, a concoction consisting of lead, copper, burned almonds, and soot, to line their eyes. Kohl was believed to improve eyesight and ward off dark spirits. Ancient Greeks and Romans also used cosmetics. For Roman women, cosmetics were a symbol of opulence and status; the wealthier a Roman woman was, the more makeup she wore. An elite Roman woman would wear foundation, made out of white paste consisting of chalk, orris root, fat, starch, tin oxide, and white lead (which is toxic), rouge and lip color, made out of plant roots, ochre, and clay, and eye shadow and eyeliner, made out of saffron and galena.[7] Egyptian women believed that Kohl had healing and protecting capabilities. Romans used makeup to display their wealth and status.However, the application of makeup is not necessarily culturally universal nor accessible to all. Makeup has not even always been used to increase attractiveness.

2. Literature Review

Cox and Glick: found that increased makeup usage positively correlates with the perceptions of attractiveness, femininity, and sexiness but negatively or does not correlate with likeability, morality, emotionality, and decisiveness. Also, increased cosmetic usage negatively correlates with women's ability in women-dominated jobs and either negatively or does not correlate with women's ability in non-gendered jobs. In addition, the psychological factors that induce increased cosmetic usage include anxiety, self-consciousness, introversion, conformity, and self-presentation Cosmetics serve as a way for women to become instantly more attractive, feminine, and sexy to third party observers.

The actual purpose of Cox and Glick's research was to determine the relationship between a woman's cosmetic usage and the evaluation of her job application. However, the perceived physical characteristics that positively correlate with increased makeup usage were found in the process. The study used seven females, ages varying from 22-30, that were photographed with different amounts of applied makeup: none, moderate, and heavy. Fifty-nine students then viewed 2 to 3 of the 29 pictures and judged the following qualities of the women: attractiveness, femininity, sexiness, emotionality, motivation, and decisiveness, while their credentials stayed constant. These rating were later used when 150 business students received a job application packet that included a synopsis of the position to be filled, a resume, a photograph of the applicant, and a twelve-question survey that inquired expected job performance and recommended starting salary. Unknown to the business students, each packet was identical except for the photograph.
The results found that attractiveness, femininity, and sexiness positively correlate to increased makeup usage.

Perceptions of females' external characteristics tend to change when they apply different amounts of makeup. Etcoff et al. studied the observer perception changes in the following attributes of women: attractiveness, competence, likeablility, and trustworthiness when viewing photographs of them for two different amounts of time. The different levels of makeup include: "natural" (none), "professional" (moderate), and "glamorous" (heavy).

Makeup usage positively correlated to all the tested factors: attractiveness, competence, likeablility, and trustworthiness. However, when people were given more time to analyze the pictures, perceptions of likeability and trustworthiness did not positively correlate. (8). Natural beauty or perceptions of natural beauty lead to positive correlations with social cooperation and warmth, perceived beauty does not.

The results of this research suggest that women have the option to apply make up in a fashion that is conducive to their desired image. Women trying to receive a job or win over people may choose to apply minimal makeup. On the contrary, a woman trying to impress the opposite sex on a date may choose to wear heavier makeup to appear more attractive, feminine, and sexy.

Females' cosmetic usage typically alters third parties' perceptions of their physical traits. Workman and Johnson conducted research to discover the effect of different amounts of cosmetics on impression formation, specifically attractiveness, morality, femininity, personal temperament, and personality traits.

The researchers found a large difference in perceived attractiveness between a no makeup look and moderate and heavy makeup look. The models wearing moderate and heavy makeup were perceived as much more attractive. However, there is little difference in perceived attractiveness between models wearing moderate makeup and heavy makeup. Perceived femininity followed the same pattern as perceived attractiveness, except that there is a slight increase in perceived femininity when comparing the no makeup look and the moderate makeup look. Makeup usage had no impact on personality traits or personal temperaments. There was a negative correlation between increased makeup usage and morality. [6]

It seems like once a certain threshold of increased cosmetics usage is met the perceptions of attractiveness and femininity stay relatively constant. Specific perceived internal characteristics favor negatively correlating to increased makeup usage. However, there is some dissent, ambivalence, and vagueness between which specific traits actually negatively correlate. Cox and Glick's research supports that there is an indiscrete, neither positive nor negative, correlation between increased makeup usage and perceptions of decisiveness and emotionality. [1] Etcoff's et al. research supports that increased makeup usage causes the perception of likeability and trustworthiness to decrease after 250 ms. [2]

Polished attractive individuals are subconsciously perceived as more deviant by third party observers. According to social psychologists, there are two realms of social perceptions that humans are affected by: social competence

and social warmth. Social warmth is affiliated with social cooperation and power/competence is affiliated with "advantage in social competition" [9] This particular experiment shows "… a robust and positive effect of increased beauty on social power/competence and a generally positive but more nuanced and variable effect on social warmth" [9.] This conclusion is viable because women generally feel threatened by other attractive women. Workman and Johnson disagree with both Cox and Glick and Etcoff et al. because their research supports that increased makeup usage has no effect on personality traits or personal temperament except perceived morality.[5]

Women's cosmetic use generally affects the perception of her ability in a professional setting. Cox and Glick's research discovered several other correlations besides the positive correlation between increased makeup usage and perceived attractiveness, femininity, and sexiness. To reiterate, the purpose of their experiment was to uncover the correlation between the review of a woman's job application and her degree of cosmetic usage. The results found revealed that increased makeup usage negatively correlates with the insinuated performance of women applying for women-dominated jobs. Also, increased makeup usage does not correlate with the insinuated performance of women applying for non-gender typed jobs.

Increased makeup usage can have detrimental effects on the perception of a woman's prowess in the workplace. Kyle and Mahler conducted research to determine if women's hair color and cosmetics affected other people's perception of their credentials and abilities in a professional setting. They found that female applicants wearing more or glamorous makeup were deemed not as capable as female applicants wearing little or no makeup. Also, females wearing no makeup were assigned a higher starting salary than those females wearing light to moderate amounts of makeup.

Stereotypes still play a key role in the workforce today. From this study, one can deduce that women should not apply makeup to job interviews or work meetings to be taken more seriously. A potential source of error in this experiment is that all the participants were college students. This homogeneity in terms of age and phase of life could have caused skewed results. In addition, participants were told that their results would be compared to a reputed standard, thus possibly influencing participants to change their perceptions to match the standard. [4]

There are specific psychological traits that generally correlate to increased and decreased cosmetic usage. Fieldman, Hussey, and Robertson, conducted an experiment that determined which personality traits were associated with different levels of makeup usage: low, medium, and high and why.

They found that people who are extrovert generally use less makeup than introverted people because they are more confident. Conformists are likely to wear more makeup because they want to fit into the crowd, not stand out. People who wear copious amounts of makeup could be trying to compensate for their internal flaws.

From this study, one can conclude that makeup is not a way to receive attention but a way to "fix" insecurities or internal flaws. Makeup can almost be seen as a mask; people want others to perceive them as they look, not as they feel. [3]

Specific internal traits typically induce increased and decreased makeup usage. Scott researched the relationship between makeup usage and explicit situations, and the resulting anxiety levels.

Scott found that anxiety causes increased cosmetic usage. She also found that insecurity and low confidence women feel anxious with lesser amounts of makeup. [10] "

3. Conclusion

Overall, attractiveness, femininity, and sexiness positively correlate with increased makeup usage, and internal traits affiliated with social warmth and cooperation, likeability, morality, emotionality, and decisiveness either negatively or do not correlate with increased makeup usage. In the workplace, increased makeup usage can have detrimental effects. Increased cosmetic usage negatively correlates with women's ability in women-dominated jobs and either negatively or does not correlate with women's ability in non-gendered jobs. The internal psychological factors that induce increased cosmetic usage include anxiety, self-consciousness, introversion, conformity, and self-presentation.

This knowledge may be used in a multitude of ways, especially in the field psychiatry and marketing. To elaborate further, these results could be incorporated into standard mental health tests administered by large companies. These tests may uncover information: personality traits, sensitivities, signs of mental illness, about current and potential employees that could allow company owners to make more informed decisions. Also, psychiatrists could use this

information to help diagnose and treat patients. To be more specific, maybe the lack of makeup or the excessive amount of makeup could indicate signs of a particular illness or sensitivity.

Advertisement companies could use this information by attempting to appeal to individuals with particular mindsets, personality traits, or symptoms to increase the likelihood of this targeted group to buy a certain product. For example, a pharmaceutical company that sells anxiety medication could obtain this research and attempt to target individuals with increased makeup sales.

4. Acknowledgements

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