

Research paper on reasons women wear makeup: a literature review

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The use of make-up is a common thread throughout a variety of different cultures, although different cultures use make-up for a variety of different reasons. However, the ornamentation of one's face and body for religious or social purposes is an action that is very common. Today, in the Western world, it is mostly common for women to wear make-up outside of certain specific events, like the theater; however, the reasons why women wear makeup seems to be varied based on age, race, and cultural identity.

I. HISTORICAL USE OF MAKE-UP

Make-up can be applied to all parts of the face and body. Historically, women in the United States and Europe have used make-up to enhance the features that are traditionally found beautiful within those cultures, and to minimize the look of undesirable features (Angeloglou, 1970). For instance, make-up initially became popular in the United States and Europe due to the rise of the theater and ballet; the growth of these forms of art encouraged the use of make-up for performers, because the facial features needed to be able to be seen from the stage (Angeloglou, 1970). In opera and theater, for instance, make-up has long been used to make the eyes appear larger and the mouth more prominent, making facial features and expressions more easily identifiable from the audience (Angeloglou, 1970).

Early in the history of Western make-up, lightening the skin became extremely popular. Using lead-based make-up to whiten the face had the side-effect of being poisonous to the individual and causing lesions on the skin, prompting the further use of the lead-based foundation (Angeloglou, 1970). As time progressed, fashion did also; in the United States, the flapper culture changed the face of the average woman yet again (Angeloglou,

1970). During this time, the preference for pale white skin faded, and bright red lips and dark eyes came into fashion (Angeloglou, 1970). These make-up trends were followed only by women, as by the 1920s in the United States, make-up was primarily worn by women. During this era, many of the great cosmetic companies were formed, including Chanel, Revlon, and Elizabeth Arden (Angeloglou, 1970). Angeloglou (1970) postulates that the rise of the popularity of make-up in 1920s America is due largely to the rise in popularity of Hollywood and the film industry (Angeloglou, 1970).

There seems to be a correlation between the rise of the theater industry and the use of make-up, and then again with the rise of Hollywood and the film industry with the use of make-up (Angeloglou, 1970). This seems to indicate that the American public, at the very least, is very susceptible to beauty trends; in the 1920s, the suntan was initially introduced as a fashion statement, and it remains a significant indicator of beauty in American culture today (Angeloglou, 1970).

II. AGE VARIATIONS AND MAKE-UP USE

In the United States, women of all ages apply their make-up differently. There is no specific way that all women apply their make-up, as different types of make-up applications are used based on the social context of its use (Cash, Dawson et al., 1989). There are, however, indications that there are psychological benefits to using make-up for individuals of many different ages. Korichi et al. (2008) write:

Finally, we can conclude that beyond the simple application of colorful products to the face, makeup appears a holistic technique that modifies not only one's appearance, but also helps one to cope with self-image, emotions,

and moods. Therefore, makeup application can be considered as a daily routine to decrease negative affects and/or increase positive effects related to self-image and one's relation to the social environment. Our results provide experimental support to the link between cosmetics and welfare, and further promote initiatives such as the " Look Good. . . Feel Better" program that was developed in 1989 by the Cosmetic, Toiletry, and Fragrance Association (CTFA). Such a program consists in a free, non-medical, brand-neutral, national public service program supported by corporate donors to help women offset appearance-related changes from cancer treatment. This pioneer study, revealing a psycho-behavior background for differences in the use of makeup, urges further investigation in order to determine underlying determinants. (Korichi et al., 2008)

Women of working age, however, tend to use make-up in a professional environment; this means that their make-up tends towards the professional, with minimal drama (Carollo, 2004). For instance, make-up for women in the professional bracket tends to be neutral, with a focus on enhancing natural features; dark, heavy make-up is often seen as inappropriate for a working environment (Carollo, 2004). However, younger women-- even teenagers-- often experiment with make-up as a method for self-expression (Befner, 2009).

Elderly and late-middle-aged women often express their femininity through the use of make-up as well, and there are specific lines of make-up targeted towards these women. These lines are particularly focused on wrinkle minimization and the elimination of the appearance of age; in American society, to appear to be old is sometimes seen as a flaw, and make-up is

commonly used to hide flaws (Carollo, 2004).

III. REASONS FOR MAKE-UP USE

Examining the different reasons women use make-up necessitates investigating the different life stages of women and the reasons they choose to change their appearance (Carollo, 2004). In a professional environment, make-up is largely accepted as necessary in business; Silverman (2013) writes, " Almost 40% said female staff would be much less likely to get promoted if the job entailed meeting people and members of the public. The survey by the beauty retailer Escentual. com also found that more than two thirds of bosses (67%) would take a dim view of female staff not wearing make-up at key business meetings. This attitude appeared to be having an impact on women's confidence, as two thirds of female staff said they would feel much less confident if they were at a high-level meeting without cosmetics on" (Silverman, 2013). Thus, it seems that make-up, rather than being a choice for women of professional age, it is a necessity.

If women are to be successful in their professional lives, they must wear make-up; employers are very open about stating that a woman without make-up is commonly seen as slovenly or lazy (Silverman, 2013). However, it is not only bosses that seem to feel that make-up is necessary for success; Silverman (2013) writes, " Perhaps unsurprisingly, a similar proportion (64%) of female staff surveyed said they would always wear make-up at work, and almost all women (98%) said they would wear make-up to a job interview" (Silverman, 2013). Even women are engaging in the belief and perpetuating it; it is not a belief that is exclusive to the middle-aged and older set, either. Instead, it is a belief that is ingrained and passed down from generation to

generation (Cash and Cash, 1982).

However, there are are non-necessary reasons that women use make-up in the Western world as well. Multiple studies have suggested that women gain self-confidence from using make-up, and that the use of make-up improves their performance in social and business situations (Cash and Cash, 1982).

Although this may be the result of a placebo effect insofar as women are perceiving themselves, it still has a positive impact on their social and professional lives (Cash and Cash, 1982).

IV. PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH MAKE-UP USE

Historically, make-up has been associated with toxicity and poison, because prior to the advanced chemical and medical knowledge that humanity has today, make-up was made out of the most efficient chemicals, rather than the safest chemicals (Angeloglou, 1970). Lead was commonly used in foundation before the dangerous nature of lead was revealed; however, make-up has gotten much safer as different countries put safety standards in place to control the quality and ingredients of makeup (Angeloglou, 1970).

Indeed, in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, make-up was commonly associated with the feminist movement; many prominent feminists decried make-up as a tool that patriarchal structures used to keep women from complete freedom ("Painted Ladies," 2010).

Although today, many of the toxic chemicals that used to be used in makeup are no longer used, make-up can still cause problems for women who use cheap make-up or make-up that does not agree with their personal body chemistry (Ellen, 2009). Make-up use has been associated with acne, both cystic and regular; in addition, it has been associated with animal testing,

and other ethically-questionable practices that are common in the cosmetic industry (Ellen, 2009).

Ellen (2009) also suggests that there are still dangerous levels of lead used in lipsticks. Ellen (2009) suggests, “ On one side are advocacy groups and doctors who insist that, over time, those who wear lipstick containing lead are at risk of absorbing high levels of a neurotoxin that may cause behavioral, learning and other problems. On the other side are the Food and Drug Administration and outside experts who say that any traces of lead that do exist are too minute to cause harm. In February, the debate reared its head again when the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, a coalition of health and environmental groups, issued a plea to the F. D. A. to release information the agency had accumulated on the amount of lead in lipstick. The study was conducted in response to an independent analysis in 2007, paid for by the safe cosmetics group, which found that one-third of 33 lipsticks had lead in excess of 0. 1 parts per million, the federal limit for candy” (Ellen, 2009). Although the actual levels of lead have not been released, it is worrisome to consider that the levels of lead contained in make-up may be higher than the legal limit for other types of substances that are commonly ingested.

V. CULTURAL STANDARDS OF BEAUTY AND MAKE-UP

Different cultural groups have long had different standards of beauty. However, one of the most extreme aspects of globalization is the growth of a single beauty standard; this is commonly seen as the white actress from Hollywood (Bennett, 2009). When this becomes the global beauty standard, other cultures with vastly different looks must take sometimes-drastic measures (such as the growth of the skin-whitening cream industry in Asia)

to appear similar to the international standard of beauty (“ Painted Ladies”). This is a very real problem, and an interesting study in cultural relativity and cultural assimilation.

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