

A FEMINIST STUDY IN MAKEUP

A Thesis

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Abstract

For a long time, the nature and use of makeup has been troubling feminists all over the globe. While for some it is considered to be a tool of oppression used to control and suppress people (mostly women or female presenting folk), others argue that it has been reclaimed by them and used to self-empower, inspire, and promote feminist politics in the form of art and activism. Lastly, there are also people who view it as nothing but pigments and brushes that are not attached to a certain agenda.

While this argument is partially subjective due to the human factor, and therefore cannot be concluded indefinitely, the aim of this paper is to expand on different perspectives on makeup. This happens through research among the theories of Michel Foucault from the 1970's, other feminist philosophers', writers and academics' who were later inspired by him, as well as young feminist scholars of today. Combined with a makeup project, this research paper aims to extend beyond the opinions of right or wrong and explore the grey area of subjectivity that makes makeup personal to each individual.

After analyzing some existing theories, mainly Michel Foucault's biopolitics theory, I explore different viewpoints that challenge these theories by referencing makeup artists and trends that have made an impact in the online makeup community. Through different hashtags, trends, and individual internet platforms, these artists have been challenging the notions of beauty and gender and raising awareness of topics such as disability, domestic abuse, mental health and LGBTQIAP+ issues. Last but not least, through my makeup project I shed light on my feminist peers in order to examine how their individual opinions play in with the rest of the different viewpoints expressed throughout the paper. I wanted to see how these theories hold up today and whether they are still relevant today.

I conclude with the thought that the conversation about makeup is –and should be– ongoing and constantly evolving with the times. There can never be a certain definitive answer on whether makeup is malicious, provocative, empowering, healing, or oppressive, because it simply is all of the above and much more all at the same time. It is just a matter of perspective and the power of the individual to use this tool as they see fit.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Disclaimer.....	5
Literature.....	6
The online makeup community.....	10
Makeup project.....	18
i. Profile of candidates.....	19
ii. Willemien.....	21
iii. Martina.....	23
iv. Florentina.....	25
v. Svenja.....	27
vi. Asja.....	30
vii. Elena.....	31
viii. Zwaan.....	35
ix. Nicky.....	37
x. Stephanie.....	38
xi. Antonios.....	40
Results.....	42
Epilogue.....	44
Bibliography.....	45

Introduction

Makeup has been one of my passions for many years. Since my early adult years, I have been collecting it, playing with it, even done it professionally on others. I have spent many hours online browsing photos for inspiration, watching tutorials, trying different looks, products and applications, and sharing my love for it with the world. However, I have always recognized that it has certain flaws and/or not-so-innocent intentions behind it. During my one year master's in gender studies at Utrecht University, I was able to come in contact with many feminist theories and the works of various scholars that helped me see makeup from various perspectives and examine it more from a feminist/social standpoint. Therefore, I decided to write my thesis on makeup, in order to dive deeper into theoretical research, as well as utilize the years of accumulating knowledge I already have on it. As part of this thesis, I also wanted to incorporate a research element of interviewing people about their opinions on it, in order to add a necessary element of the human psyche, which –in my opinion- is not really taken into account in the existing literature. The details of this project will be revealed later on.

The thesis starts with a review of the existing theories that either support or condemn the use of makeup, focusing more on Michel Foucault's biopolitics theory, as well as on some other scholars' who were inspired by his work. Every coin has an opposite side, so of course some theories on the other side of the spectrum, that are more positive towards makeup, will also be referenced. The second chapter will feature some of my research on the online makeup community, and highlight certain people (or makeup trends) that have been using it as part of their activism, or in order to shed light on certain issues or personal experiences. The purpose of this is to showcase how makeup can be used positively to empower the user, express creativity or share an important message.

The last and biggest chapter of this thesis will be about the interviews that were combined with a makeup project. This project was created in order to explore outside feminist scholars and online personalities and focus on individuals with varying relationships to and opinions on makeup. To give it a more personal and original touch, I did the participants' makeup as they requested, to have an extra personal element to the project. After describing each session with the participants, I will be drawing conclusions based on the responses. The thesis will come to end with some results, an epilogue, and the bibliography.

The purpose of this thesis is not to absolutely side with any of the opinions that have been researched, but rather to explore what other opinions there are and view certain things from different perspectives.

Disclaimer

It will be noticeable that when describing societal standards in relation to makeup, there will be often a reference to “women”. This is because of the readings that were used, some of which dating over forty years ago. There was no intent of excluding other genders in this essay, and I tried my best to make it as inclusive as possible with the online makeup artists that I referenced, as well as the participants I chose for my project. Makeup is a tool used by people of any and all genders in order to express their own personal truth.

Literature

As a basic framework for this thesis I chose the work of none other than Michel Foucault, a French theorist and historical philosopher whose work has without a doubt had a huge influence amongst feminist scholars throughout the years; his meditations on subjectivity, sexuality, power, and discipline are usually of most interest to feminist analyses. One of his key contributions to the study of world politics has been his focus on understanding the political machinery that is regulating people's lives. That includes all sorts of institutions, including schools, prisons, hospitals, welfare systems, police, and so on. In trying to unsettle embedded and privileged systems of authority, there will always be substantial kickback. In the chapter Incitement to Discourse of his book *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1, Foucault analyzes how a 17th century age of repression was able to enforce a particular regime of sexuality. What has been called *biopolitics* entails a strategy begun by Foucault of understanding and deconstructing the practices and processes through which bodies are governed by various regimes of knowledge, power and authority.¹ Biopolitics is how we are governed. In fact, governance only works by regulating human bodies. A highly intrusive and commanding discourse of acceptable sex (among other things) is a good way of ensuring that the population behaves itself. This entails allowing and disallowing types of speaker, and prohibiting types of discussion. In terms of sexuality and desire of sexual activity, we would only consider the extent to which our bodies must be checked, tested and modified regularly and constantly through opinions, observations, medical advice, plans for ideal institutions and so on.

When it comes to feminism and feminist theory, Foucault never discussed gender directly, nor did he self-articulate as a feminist. He did however hang out with Simone de Beauvoir and is clearly sympathetic towards some feminist ideas in his writings. What he did do is provide a lot of work outlining the generally constraining effects of discourses such as compulsory heterosexuality, and the constitutive and discursively regulated relationship between the identity categories of sex and gender. Foucault's writing was, at the time of its publication, perhaps most controversial because he dared to suggest that sexuality (and therefore heterosexuality) was constructed and deployed in the name of social control by legal, governmental and medical authorities invested in regulating people's bodies. His discussion of the relationship between power, the body, and sexuality has inspired work that has shown how straight, white, discourses of governance have repressed and constrained bodies in various pernicious and totalizing ways throughout history.² For Foucault power is not a proof of institutions or mechanisms, or a single motive subjugation; it is not a general system of domination. It is less the obvious workings of government authority and dominance than a complex invariable, productive and repressive inates an intimate quality in

¹ <https://anthrobiopolitics.wordpress.com/2013/01/21/biopolitics-an-overview/>

² "Liberalism, Biopolitics, and Technologies of Security." Foucault, *Governmentality, and Critique*, 2015, 41-56. doi:10.4324/9781315634609-4.

human relationships. Power is everywhere, and relations of power for Foucault are mobile, they can be modified, they're not fixed once and for all.

Foucault's concept of biopolitics has been applied to various discussions on different topics; but for the sake of this thesis, it will be referenced and used in relation to makeup. Specifically, it will be used as a counter point against the usage of makeup, as it enforces and helps the surveillance Foucault is talking about in his biopolitics theory. For a long time, feminists have been examining the conflict between cultural expectations of women to "manage" their bodies and their right to exist without external intervention. Mayura Iyer describes on a women's blog how women "are often shamed for wearing makeup, and are equally often shamed for not wearing makeup."³ While she does acknowledge opinions like Foucault's biopolitics theory, as well as positivity and self-empowerment through makeup, she chooses the neutral route and sees makeup as completely separate from feminism: "Being a feminist doesn't mean that every act I commit has to be a feminist act. By wearing lipstick, I'm not setting the feminist movement back 10 years. But I'm also not moving it forward."⁴ How do cosmetics fit into feminist practices, if they even do at all? Does investment in beauty culture betray one's commitments to feminism? Women's concerns encourage the examination of the cosmetics/ beauty industry rather than individual people's desires to be beautiful. In this chapter, I will be examining and questioning the arguments of feminists that are for and against the use of cosmetic products such as makeup.

In her book "Sex, culture, and justice: the limit of choice", Clare Chambers, a British political philosopher at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Cambridge, inspired by Foucault, refers to practices such as makeup, hair styling, and skincare, as disciplinary, meaning that they dictate precisely "how the body must move and appear, require constant repetition, which makes them habitual, and are maintained and enforced through (the threat of) surveillance." (Chambers, 2008) According to Foucault this surveillance does not come from a single hierarchical source, but instead from everywhere: from schools (enforcing gendered appearance and uniform), parents (surveilling their 'ladylike' mannerisms and even sitting position), friends (who make comments on appearance, new outfits, skin condition, weight loss or gain, makeup), the media, the cosmetics industry and so on, judge women when it comes to their bodily form⁵. This statement expresses concern over makeup and other ways of grooming (as well as certain social behaviors) of being used maliciously in order to control and surveil people.

³⁴ Iyer, Mayura. 2015. "Makeup, Beauty, and Being A 'Bad Feminist.'" Literally, Darling, July 16. <http://www.literallydarling.com/blog/2015/07/16/makeup-beauty-and-being-a-bad-feminist/>

⁵ Chambers, Clare. 2008. *Sex, Culture, and Justice : The Limits of Choice*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press

Similarly, in her article “Come on feminists, ditch the makeup bag. It's a far more radical statement than burning your bra”, Julie Bindel, an English radical feminist writer, states that “Women who wear makeup spend an average of nine whole days every year of their lives applying it. I have chosen to use that time campaigning against sexist stereotypes, such as the notion that women look better with makeup. When I became a feminist, at the very end of the 1970s, it was a given that sporting a natural look was a radical act. Then, at the end of the 1990s, liberal feminists claimed that wearing makeup was now a radical choice and we were no longer pressured into it because we are now emancipated from patriarchy. What tosh.” (Bindel, 2019) Lisa Adkins and Diane Barthel, social researchers, also claim that makeup mainly imposes patriarchal culture. (Barthel, 1988; Adkins, 1997)

American feminist journalist, author, and activist Susan Brownmiller suggests that feminist fighting women's objectification through grooming processes such as makeup, and on the other hand the recognition of women's reasons for wearing makeup and other grooming products have resulted in one of the most difficult conflicts in the entire women's movement (Brownmiller, 1984). The application of such products has been understood as regulating a script, ways of negotiating pleasurable creative practices and cultural expectations. According to feminist philosopher Susan Bordo, women spend a great amount of time anxiously adjusting their bodies. Through these practices, women become "docile bodies" and are "habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, 'improvement'"⁶.

What all of the above theories, either positive, neutral, or negative towards makeup, seem to be lacking is a more updated, well rounded viewpoint of makeup and similar grooming practices, often failing to take into consideration the people that they are referencing. Even though they are great at setting a concrete base upon which we can expand and explore further, it is important to think about the people that are affected by these theories, and realize that they are not merely “docile bodies” absorbing information thrown at them without resistance, critical thinking, and without hesitation to reproduce what they see and adopt these practices. Liberal feminists Karen Lehrman and Natasha Walter claim that there is nothing wrong with people participating in/ practicing beauty culture. (Walter, 1999; Lehrman, 1997) Many feminists consider makeup to be reclaimed by women and used –both by women and people of other genders- to express creativity, soothe anxiety and stress and as a form of self-expression. (Williams, 2018) Melanie Williams even makes the bold claim that “makeup has become an essential part of the feminist movement”. For example, in their article titled “Escaping into the world of make-up routines in Iran”, Aliakbar Jafari and Pauline Maclaran talk about women using makeup to escape their everyday life, uplift their spirits, and even as a “sign of silent rebellion against the political

⁶ Bordo, Susan. 2003. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

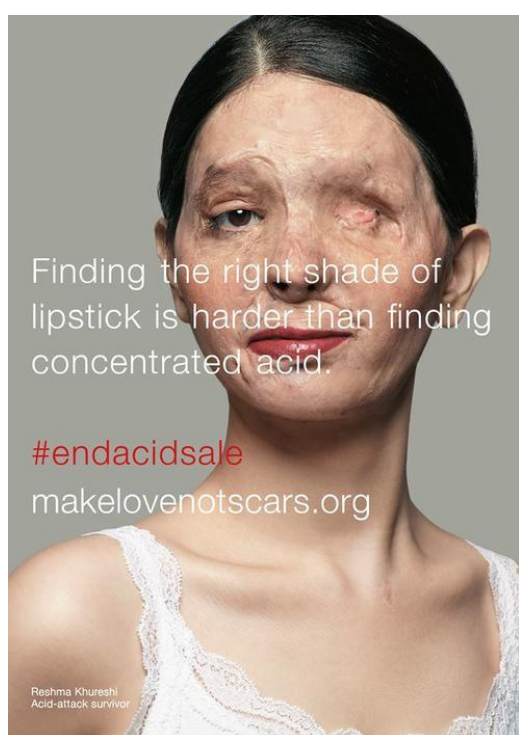
ideology of the state”.⁷ I will be exploring more examples like this in the online research of the following chapter.

⁷ (Jafari, et al., 2013 p. 360)

The online makeup community

It is clear that this concept is dichotomizing feminist scholars, which is why in the following chapters I will be challenging the existing literature by seeking answers in the public opinion, as well as through research on the online makeup community. We shall be receiving answers from people who have varying relations to makeup, as well as take a look at the people who have been using it for their own purposes. Hopefully this will fill in some gaps of the human factor that have been missing from the existing literature, in order to gain a more well-rounded perspective and be able to draw better conclusions as a result of that.

Using makeup as a way to raise awareness over certain topics has been a more frequent strategy over the last decade.



2Make Love Not Scars Campaign photo featuring Reshma Qureshi

legally, vocationally, and psychologically support acid attack victims through regaining their independence and dignity. Qureshi herself was attacked by acid by her brother in law at the age of seventeen, causing major scarring on her face and body as well as the complete loss of her

Regardless of their levels of talent, skill, or makeup knowledge, people all over the world are using makeup as a way to inform the public of certain social and mental issues, either by creating a trend (often in the form of a hashtag) that other people will later replicate in order to spread a certain message, or by showcasing their love of makeup and their artistry as a way to destigmatize certain disabilities, or to bring attention to something that is different about them and talk more about it. I will be providing examples to explain this phenomenon further.

Reshma Qureshi is a 23 year old model and activist who is known for being the face of the Make Love Not Scars charity initiative⁸, who aims to medically, educationally,



1Reshma Qureshi in a makeup video for Make Love Not Scars

⁸ Joshi, Sonam (9 September 2016). "Acid Attack Survivor Reshma Qureshi Steals The Show At New York Fashion Week". Huffington Post. Retrieved 7 October 2016.

left eye. In 2014, she started posting some vlogs as part of a Make Love Not Scars campaign, showing the viewers how she does her makeup and instructing them step by step on how to achieve the same looks. At the end of each video, she encourages the viewers to sign a petition for the end of the sale of acid in India⁹.

21 year old eyeshadow artist Pamela Tellez Coria is a Mexican immigrant living in Atlanta, Georgia. She is known for turning famous paintings into detailed makeup art on her eyes and face. Most of her work is inspired by or fully recreating classic paintings and artwork. When interviewed about her viral photos and videos showcasing her talent, Coria took the opportunity to talk about how makeup has helped her mental health. "Makeup is super personal", she told 60 Second Docs. "I struggle with depression. I combat that by building my confidence through makeup. I use [makeup] as a way to silence those demons. It gives me the freedom to be limitless." When asked about where she draws inspiration from, she responded: "Being an immigrant and having so many struggles and obstacles in life, it really translates into who I decide to do on my face. I find inspiration in my muses and how far they've gotten in life. I apply that to my life, too. I want people to see exactly who I am and I figured, why not do art on my face?"¹⁰



³ Pamela Tellez Coria



⁴ Yasaman Gheidi's #InsideOutChallenge look

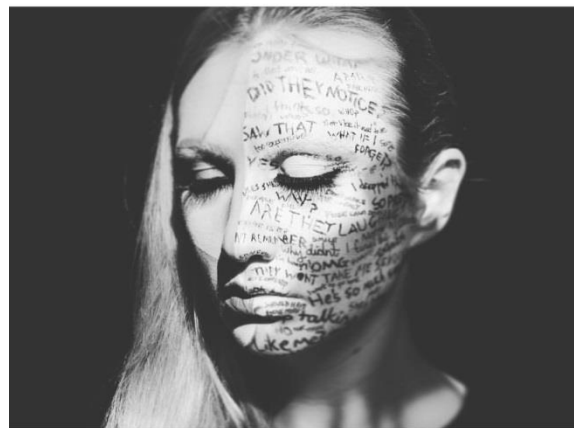
Coria is not the only makeup artist who uses their platform in order to speak up about mental health. Yasaman Gheidi, also known as Li'l Moonchild on Instagram and YouTube, shared a particular makeup look as well as a story on both platforms, in January of 2017. In the video/ Instagram post she opened up about her mental illness in hopes of raising awareness and lessening the stigma surrounding mental disorders. In the video, Gheidi starts off with a glamorous full face of makeup already on. Instead of showing the viewers how she achieved said look, the Vancouver-based artist removes the makeup on the right side of her face, and then proceeds to

⁹ Buncombe, Andrew (8 September 2016). "Indian acid attack survivor walks the runway at New York Fashion Week". The Independent. Retrieved 7 October 2016.

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/60SecDocs/status/1056923618980982784>

repaint it in blue face paint and black tears. That was her depiction of some problems she had been struggling with around the time she posted said look. On the caption of her Instagram post, she described a recent story where she attended a work dinner party, but was forced to leave due to a massive anxiety and panic attack. The following day, she was concerned that her co-workers would have noticed and/or questioned her swift disappearance and thought of lying about it. However, she later questioned her way of thinking. "Why did I have to be ashamed and lie about my anxiety attack? So many wonderful and amazing people suffer from the same mental illnesses that I do on a daily basis. [...] Why can't we just talk about it openly?"

The movie *Inside Out*, known for depicting the many emotions going on inside young people's minds, also acted as an inspiration for this look. Through this, Gheidi created the #InsideOutChallenge and encouraged others to open up about their own mental health issues by using the external medium that is makeup. Indeed, hundreds of makeup artists and enthusiasts online participated in the trend showing their own depictions of their various mental health problems and sharing their stories.



5 Instagram user @bat.barbie's own #InsideOutChallenge look

In May 2019, Gheidi shared another makeup look on her Instagram page, stressing out the importance of mental health awareness. In the caption, she writes: "Until the end of my days I promise to advocate for the importance of mental health. I wish to see a future where both men and women and all non-binary people can openly talk about their emotions and mental wellbeing without stigma or fear of being ridiculed. I wish to see a future where companies and business not only support mental health on paper but openly encourage their employees to check on their mental wellbeing. I wish to see a future where help is available to all those suffering from mental illness without judgement or shame. Depression is not synonymous with laziness, anxiety disorders are not the same as feeling a bit jittery before big events."



6 Yasaman Gheidi's Instagram post, May 13th 2019

In October of 2014, during Domestic Violence Awareness month, the Women's Rescue Center of Beckley, West Virginia initiated an online campaign in order to raise awareness about domestic abuse. They created the hashtag #herblackeyeisOURblackeye, under which community members were posting selfies where they had painted on bruises using makeup.

The use of makeup in order to create such an image could definitely be seen as controversial and risky, which, according to the Rescue Center, was exactly the point. “Domestic violence is ugly,” stated Dee Sizemore, the Center’s public relations/fundraising development coordinator. “The black eye is symbolic .It’s a very visible part of what domestic violence victims are going through. If you see it and it’s right there in your face, then you’re going to notice it.”¹¹

Part of the project’s controversial nature lies in the mimicking of signs of abuse



through the use of makeup; after all, makeup washes off at the end of the day, while bruises do not. This could be seen as disrespectful to the victims of domestic abuse, and could furthermore potentially trigger any victims who come across the images. Moreover, one must consider that makeup, the same tool that was used for this campaign, is often used in real life in order to conceal and hide any signs of domestic abuse on victims. Sizemore argued, however, that “hiding the effects of domestic violence won’t make the problem disappear¹².” In order to avoid being offensive or exploitative, the WRC involved a diverse group of West Virginia locals in the

7 Officials participated in WRC campaign
#herblackeyeisOURblackeye

kickoff portraits as well as in the development of the campaign, including a local sheriff, prosecutor, and three survivors of domestic abuse.

Shedding light on the physical, mental, psychological, and financial abuse of domestic violence victims was the one and only purpose of the campaign. “We want to open up the lines of communication,” Sizemore said. “So many times, victims are embarrassed. They’re scared. They feel like those proverbial questions are always out

^{11, 12} https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/how-makeup-is-raising-awareness-of-domestic-violence-99921754673.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAANepyKs23mzPAQTVyohtALnmUBwDd9GU6gsNE2x17vLmE5vTNd1vQ34HUNTp6367S_yhV51JxmnUJif0NptPhbcfKdWuxlvk_bUmjGBrAGokRpCZGYAuY1hZh1hFH3WdiboOeROIwUP87epEZE9-ZutS8Ufy9qV5C1F_LykMbYcg

there: Why doesn't she leave? Why does she stay? The focus is put back on the victim, not where it needs to be: on the abuser."¹³

Ultimately, Sizemore said she knows that the campaign might be controversial—but that people *should* be upset by such images. “It needs to be upsetting,” she said. “Domestic violence isn't a personal problem, it's a public problem that affects every one of us. We need to be upset about it and talk about it.”

Seansky, more famously known as @seanskyii on Instagram, is a 19 year old makeup artist from Cincinnati, Ohio. During June 2019, he was one of many makeup artists who created some Pride themed looks in honor of pride month; however he took it one step further by creating one Pride themed look for each day of the month of June, showcasing his skills as well as his experience of being a queer person of color, and all of the positive and negative sides that come with it. For the purpose of this thesis, three of his more “negative” experiences and photos will be analyzed.

On June 5th, 2019, Seansky posted a photo which he named “Silence = Pain”. It features him in black and white face paint, with a black X crossing his mouth, as well as some rainbow tears streaming down his face. The caption “Growing up as a black queer individual, I wasn't able to speak my truth around certain people. Those people were supposed to love me unconditionally but that wasn't the case. Not being able to be myself and share who I was and how I felt on the inside with the ones I held closest to my heart made me feel this pain on the inside that was extremely unbearable. It caused me to to feel isolated, alone, and miserable. On the inside I felt the true me screaming wanting to be visible, but because of who I was around, I wasn't able to be my most authentic self.”¹⁴



¹⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/p/ByVI4UQpKo1/>

On June 6th, he shared another powerful image named “Pain Behind the Beauty”. Similar to Yasaman Gheidi’s #InsideOutChallenge, most of Seansky’s face is glamorously painted, featuring colorful eyeshadow and matte complexion, with the exception of an almost shape that covers Inside this black words in white the edges he has skin tearing apart to this artwork represents disguised as Love. as Morals and Values. Acceptance. These are experienced since closet. Family they accept me for who I am, but are disgusted by the fact that I ‘chose’ to be gay. People telling me I’m going to hell for being my most authentic self. People saying they love me unconditionally but throw derogatory slurs my way. These things cannot and will not stop me!”¹⁵



kidney bean-like black about half of his face. ‘hole’ are written swear eyeliner, while around painted pieces of his reveal it. This is what to him: “Hatred Resentment disguised Disgust disguised as things I’ve have coming out of the members telling me

Last photo of Seansky’s 2019 Pride series worth mentioning is the one of June 11th. Reminiscent of the Beckley’s Women Rescue Center #herblackeyeisOURblackeye campaign, this photo features the use of makeup in order to create the appearance of bruises and external such as a nosebleed. features some hearts drawn across 1920’s-esque eyebrows. This metaphorical, as it real life traumas of saddest aspect in my was the physical through by my obscenities and slurs breaking my spirit, throwing me across repeatedly beating me thinking that would stop me from being gay. After this, I had to go back into the closet to spare myself the physical turmoil. For the longest time I thought something was wrong with me. I began to hate who I was because of how other people felt about me...”¹⁶ writes Seansky.



traumas on the face, The photo also colorful broken the face, as well as theatrically thin, sad photograph is less represents the artist’s domestic abuse: “The coming out journey abuse I was put father. Him yelling at me in hopes of him physically a room and

¹⁵ https://www.instagram.com/p/ByYLF5vJJP_/
¹⁶ <https://www.instagram.com/p/BylCrJfpcgl/>

Skye McLaughlin is a multimedia visual artist who mostly focuses on makeup and fashion to create, in her words, living, breathing artworks, and bringing daydreams to life. Her main platform is her Instagram account of currently 145 thousand followers, where she posts her makeup looks, artwork, and few videos of her singing.

She describes her style as ‘living art doll’, although she draws inspiration from many things, such as drag, Japanese Harajuku fashion trends, clowns, and of course, dolls. She started calling herself a living art doll around the age of 15, when she first started using her love of makeup, fashion, and art, in order to create her unique expressive style.

The reciprocation of her look was not positive at the time. McLaughlin had already been bullied, at times to the point of physical abuse, since kindergarten for her weight,



‘weird’ behavior and outsider relationship with her peers. In fact the bullying got so bad she eventually dropped out of high school. At the age of 16, she got sexually assaulted and had to deal with her trauma all by herself; during that time she completely threw herself into her art and used it to help her while healing. She explored her passion for dolls and started sharing her makeup looks more

on Instagram, through which she has regained part of her lost confidence. Now she feels comfortable and confident to walk outside and go about her day in her unique makeup and attire.

Despite the fact that her artistic skills and eye-catching fashion are most definitely impressive, McLaughlin’s most striking feature is perhaps her ability to forgive the people who made her childhood so difficult. “There is a great level of understanding that comes with growing up,” she said during an interview with Barcroft TV’s Joe Roberts. “As your brain develops, you get a better sense of just what things mean and what I learned as I got older is that everyone in high school is suffering. It's not just you. You become their punching bag, but they are toughing it out like you are. I've had a lot of people come to me and apologise for how they treated me. And because we're all growing up, people deserve to be forgiven. Now, when I see somebody make a negative comment, I know that that has absolutely no reflection on me as a person.”¹⁷

From the above chapter we can conclude that the makeup artists and activists around the world are using makeup in ways other than the conventional, every day makeup

¹⁷ <http://www.barcroft.tv/plus-size-living-art-doll-makeup-fashion-clown-harajuku>

user. Some of them are using the platform that makeup has created for them in order to spread awareness of certain issues, such as mental health, disabilities, LGBTQIAP+ discrimination, whereas others, by merely existing, making themselves public online and showcasing their love for makeup, are making a difference by proving a point; that point being that one can still exist, feel beautiful, and function like any other human being in society despite external factors that people often misjudge about them. These factors vary from being a victim of abuse or assault, being over- or underweight, being neuroatypical, etc. Last but not least, through trends and hashtags all over social media, people have used makeup as a form of protest, art, and self-expression. This shows that makeup is not used –in this case- to control, monitor, or contain people in boxes; quite the opposite. Here it is used as a tool of emancipation, free expression, affect and creativity. Therefore, it would contrast Foucault’s biopolitics theory, for the fact that Foucault (and the scholars that were inspired by his work) did not consider that makeup could be used in such a manner. Rather, they only considered the viewpoint of the authorities who are perpetuating societal standards regarding the use of makeup in order to control and monitor human bodies. Hopefully the above research filled some of the gaps in the existing theory regarding the human factor.

In the next chapter of this thesis I will be diving even deeper into the individual human opinion in order to add more perspectives to the already existing ones.

Makeup project

As part of my thesis, I came up with a specific makeup project/interview, in order to extend my research beyond just academic feminists and online personalities. I wanted to hear the opinions of everyday people and what their specific relationship to makeup is like. Therefore I arranged ten makeup sessions with ten different people, some of which I am good friends with, some of which I am acquainted with, and some that I just met for the first time during our time together working for this project. The ten volunteers for this project were found through a Facebook post that I made on feminist group AskAnnabel2.0, as well as mouth-to-mouth when it came to a couple of closer friends.

The project was divided into three parts. During the first part, the volunteer and I would have a consultation over the makeup look that they wanted. I specifically wanted the ideas and inspiration to be all theirs and me having no input on it, because I wanted *their* voices to be heard. The question I posed was the following: “If, right now, you could choose to have any makeup you want done on your face and the lack of skill and/or products is not an issue, what would you ask for?” I wanted to merely be the middle person, the ‘tool’ that would achieve the look that they wish to see on themselves. That way, they would also later (during the questioning part) ask themselves why they made the choices that they made and reflect on their personal relationship to makeup. Some people had arrived to our consultation with a clear vision of what they wanted done, others had scattered ideas of things they liked or photos of people or makeup looks that inspired them, and others did not have a clue what they wanted, so we had to work together in order to find out what they wanted most. Some questions I asked in order to help the undecided people were, “Is there any person whose makeup inspires you?” “If you wear makeup, what look do you usually go for, and do you want to go further than your comfort zone today?” , as well as “How avant-garde do you want to go with the look?” I wanted to make clear that their imagination is the only limit, and that I was in a position to paint anything and everything their hearts desired.

The second part was, of course, the makeup session itself. I took before and after shots with my DSLR camera, which the volunteers knew I would include in my thesis. However, since I am aware that people usually do not like not being in control of photos of themselves, I told them from the beginning that I would take many shots (around 30), so we have a big selection to choose from, email all the photos to them, and *they* would be the ones who chose which shots they were comfortable with me using in the thesis. Therefore, the following photos are the ones that the volunteers themselves felt most comfortable with.

The makeup sessions differed from person to person. I purposely included people with various different relationships to makeup (from an every-day makeup user to people completely new to it), in order to examine for myself what difference that would make in the results of this project. I wanted as many different opinions heard as

possible. Some people, mostly ones who had a clear vision of the look they wanted from the beginning, wanted to “leave their face in my hands” and only look at themselves in the mirror in the end, whereas with others it was more of a step by step process of adding elements that made sense throughout the whole session. These participants would check in the mirror every once in a while, and on the spot decided what should be added next. In the end, some were pleased with the results instantly, and others wanted me to ‘tweak’ or alter something. Both responses were welcome, as I was making it very clear that I wanted them to be a hundred percent pleased with what they saw. The time needed for each session also varied, depending on the complexity of the makeup look that I was asked to do. Half an hour was the minimum (for people like Stephanie and Nicky) and the maximum was around three hours (for more intricate/ drag looks like Florentina’s).

The last part of the project was the questions. I had written down a handful of questions I wanted to ask the participants about their relationship with makeup, as well as what they thought in relation to viewing makeup from different perspectives (as empowering, artistic, oppressive, etc.) I initially intended to ask these questions throughout the makeup session, record the whole conversation and later transcribe it. However, I concluded that I wanted the makeup session to be a relaxing experience for my participants, where they can lay back and leave themselves to my hands, without the pressure of a tape recorder next to their face and having to formulate answers while also looking at themselves in a mirror. Moreover, I preferred that the participants answered the questions after the makeup session, so that they would have had the time to let everything sink in, take a breath and really think about their relationship with makeup. Therefore, I instead conducted a survey online, which I forwarded to the participants along with their photos through email. That way, during the actual makeup session I would ask them some more general questions and have a pleasant conversation that acted more as an introduction that got their gears grinding for when they had to fill in the survey later.

The survey consisted of fifteen questions, some of which were demographical, and the first one being “What is your name?”. The participants were therefore fully aware that their answers were being ‘signed’ instead of anonymous, although I made sure to let them know that mostly their thoughts about makeup would be used next to their names and photos, whereas the more personal questions (age group, gender, etc.) were there mostly in order to be counted together and draw conclusions in the end. I have acquired full consent of all the participants for their names, opinions and photos to be used in this thesis, which will be printed, available in the Utrecht University library, and made available via Igitur.

Profile of candidates

The ten candidates for this project were all young adults (18-34). Specifically, 30% of them belong in the 18-24 age group, and the remaining 70% were 25-34 years old. The gender of the participants does not lean heavily on one over the other; about 50%

of the candidates were (leaning towards) female, 20% were (leaning towards) male, and the remaining 30% found themselves somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. Occupation wise, 70% of the participants were (mainly) students, and in fact their studies heavily involve gender, feminism, and queer theory; therefore, they had a lot of interesting perspectives on makeup. The remaining 30% are working in various positions, including the HORECA industry, social work, and office managing.

It is important at this stage to note that the candidates are not merely random people I picked off the street; therefore, their opinions might not necessarily express the ones of the everyday person, however I am content with that because for the sake of this thesis I wanted more of a feminist perspective, that might either agree with Foucault's politics, disagree or add something new to the table. The point of this project was not to get the general public's opinion, but to hear different perspectives that can potentially add to the conversation. All of the participants identify as feminist or at least support some feminist politics without necessarily using the label "feminist" for themselves.

Furthermore, their relationship to makeup varies. 40% of them are daily makeup users, 10% wear it regularly a couple of times a week, 30% only wear makeup on a couple of special occasions throughout a year and 20% have only worn it a couple of times in their lifetime. 50% of the participants have barely any knowledge about makeup, 20% have found a handful of products that work for them and don't bother with anything else, 10% go to a drugstore regularly and take a look at new makeup items, making them fairly knowledgeable, and only 20% make sure to keep themselves updated on the latest makeup news, trends, and products. I made sure to ask beforehand how much they knew about makeup, thinking that people with varying degrees of appreciation for it should have equally varying opinions (and varying levels of bias).

Without further ado, let us see what the participants had to say.

Willemien



Willemien is very familiar with makeup. She likes going to the drugstore every now and then to see what new products are available, and she has a soft spot for jewel tones, so she asked for a green smokey eye. Since she has tried to contour before but it has never come out like she wanted (mostly because she was not able to find the right shades for her skin tone), she requested that I focused on the skin a lot, as well as on the eyes. She wanted a natural fluffy brow that wouldn't derive attention from the eyes, which would be the star of the show. During our consultation she was excited to see what techniques and products I would use on her skin different than what she is used to. As a makeup enthusiast herself, she had quite a lot of knowledge on different makeup products, application methods and looks, however she was happy to see how I would "experiment" with the look she asked me to do, especially since she is mostly used to neutral (eye) looks.

When asked about how putting on makeup feels in general, Willemien had this to say: "Putting on makeup I see as a part of my getting ready routine, it is not something I have any particular feelings about. I do find it very satisfying to see myself change. It feels almost *meditative* to take the time to put on a little bit of makeup." She also described the feeling of having makeup on as "more expressive, powerful, and grown up. The function of the makeup alternates between a *filter between me and the world* (if I am feeling *vulnerable*) or as an enhancement of my ability to convey expression (if I am feeling *fierce*)."

Seeing the makeup application process as a form of self-care really resonates with Willemien: “When I was in high school I used to do my makeup as a *stress relief* when I needed a break from doing my homework. And then I wouldn’t do natural daily makeup, but like, crazy, all the colors I could find, all at once. It was super *cathartic*. Even now, when I have a stressful day ahead, I take extra time to do my makeup, just as a reminder to myself that I am allowed to *take time for myself* and have some space to *breathe* even if there is a lot on my mind. It feels like *creating space* for the softer things in life, almost: art, color, creativity that is just for its own sake.”



While she recognizes makeup for being liberating, Willemien also sees how makeup can be used as a tool of oppression. “The *pressure to wear makeup* is very intense (varies across countries and social groups, of course). There is such a fine line as to what is considered ‘acceptable’ makeup; that the makeup that is often represented is not creative or fun, but rather a tool to get your face to be “*presentable*”. There seems to be a view of the bare face as “unfinished”. *Makeup is sold to consumers after having convinced them that what they have now is not up to standard.*” Furthermore, she does not consider makeup to be inherently feminist. “Makeup in itself is neither good nor evil; it is just pigments that you can smear on your face and/or body. However, in using makeup in certain way, to *break stereotypes*, to *combat inequality*, to spread a message of fair treatment for all, yes, makeup can be feminist.”

Martina



Martina's experience with makeup is limited. She had not really worn a full face of makeup before, with the exception of mascara, which she puts on rather mechanically on the daily. For her makeup look, she asked for a neutral glam look, often featured on Instagram by many influencers. Said look can be described as neutral/ warm brown tones, mostly matte eyeshadows with a touch of shimmer, bronzed skin, heavy contouring and highlighting, and prominent, full, 'snatched' eyebrows. In those types of looks, the focus is mostly on the skin, which (often as a result of photoshopping and facetuning) looks flawless and almost airbrushed, tan (=healthy) and thin. The contouring brings out the high points of the face, such as the cheekbones, the bridge and tip of the nose, and chin, and the lips and eyes are in neutral tones, almost giving out a 'naturally flawless' effect. Often the goal with such looks is to appear as if you put little effort and did not use a lot of makeup to achieve them, which in general could not be further from the truth. Her reasoning behind choosing this particular makeup style was because "I was curious to see how this style fits my face. I was also curious to feel the sensation of wearing it, since I was quite critical with this makeup that a bit homologates the female appearance."

Throughout our session together, Martina seemed to be in awe every time she would check the mirror and notice the changes I made on how her face structure looks. Especially when I contoured her nose, she seemed enthusiastic about sporting the look that everyone portrays as the 'perfect' look (= thin nose bridge). When she saw her bronzed and contoured cheekbones, jawline, and forehead, she exclaimed enthusiastically "I look like I have another bone structure now! My face looks completely different! I look like I am a different person!" It felt like seeing the actual step by step process of how to achieve the look helped her deconstruct its 'magic' in

her head, and see that the ‘Instagram model’ look is not so unattainable and unreal after all.

Martina’s opinions on makeup are generally contradictory. When asked about her view on makeup as a form of self-care, she responded: “On one hand, I think that considering it as a form of self-care can be easily manipulated. From the media culture, there is a bit of an idea that makeup is healthy and fair for women, and its use is justified as it represents taking care of oneself (with the consequence that those who don't do it don't take care of themselves). But this cannot be dissociated from an *androcentric* and *gendered culture* (at the service of the male gaze). And also in the end this idea is used to sell, and I do not see it so dissociated from the capitalist system. However, On the other hand, I believe that it can be re-signified on a personal level and that it can really represent a form of care for oneself. It has the power to play with one’s appearance. And also it can really be a moment that one dedicates to oneself.” Similarly, when asked about the use of makeup as a tool of oppression, she added: “The media culture bombards us with images, products that say ‘this will help you look nice’. [...] There is a precise idea of how you should do your make up... everything that goes beyond no longer falls within the canons of beauty. But even the idea of a girl using soap and water can be manipulated and at the service of the male gaze. So I think that makeup can also be an instrument of liberation, if I think of when it is used in the way seen as excessive, looking for ambiguity...”



The “tricky” part of my session with Martina was after we were done. It was still late in the afternoon and Martina had plans to go for a drink with a friend. I asked her if she wanted to take the makeup off before leaving and after some thought, she decided to keep it on because it seemed appropriate for a night out and didn’t look unusual. However, she later admitted that she went home and took it off before going out, because she felt uncomfortable about external gazes. She told me that even though

during our session it felt like a safe space where she was comfortable, afterwards her conflicting/ contradictory feelings about the makeup, together with the feeling that she was being stared at caused her discomfort to the point where she didn't want it on any more.

It was very unfortunate to hear that Martina experienced discomfort but I thought I would include it in my thesis, because it is an experience that is equally as important to the experiment I am conducting with this project as any other. It highlights the different feelings one might experience while having on makeup, in relation to one's self and relationship to their surroundings, as well as how external gazes might influence one's perception of themselves.

Florentina



Florentina and I's session was a blast. Being a makeup enthusiast themselves, they came prepared with a concrete idea for a drag 1920's inspired makeup look.

The typical 1920's look, as we think of it today, consists of very arched, pencil thin eyebrows, smokey eyes, small lips, often drawn inside the actual lip line, and pale skin. With all that considered, another element to this look was inspiration from the burlesque scene. Florentina's main inspiration for the makeup look they wanted me to do was drag performer and Rupaul's Drag Race winner Violet Chachki, as well as drag makeup artist Lucy Garland. Violet Chachki is known for her burlesque performances as part of her act. Florentina themselves described their inspiration as follows: "I came up with the idea of doing a drag version of 1920's burlesque. I

wanted to do something out of the ordinary, since natural makeup is something I can do every day. I wanted to really spend time on creating a different face and look. I was particularly inspired by Violet Chachki and Lucy Garland. Since in my everyday life I present more casual and gender fluid, I wanted to go towards a more extreme gender expression, and in this case I chose femme. so specifically I asked for blocked brows, bright eye colours, a super-snatched/ contoured face, gigantic lashes, and a prominent lip.” They even came prepared with some props and long false lashes.

By giving me a very specific point of reference –that I was also very familiar with- as well as their favorite colors really helped me narrow down the makeup techniques that I was going to use on them. Being specific on what you want is very helpful to the makeup artist in order to set some guidelines and create a plan in their head before they even start with the makeup application itself. As it will be clear in further models, their requests were sometimes rather vague, which caused me difficulty in finding the products and application combination that would satisfy them by bringing to life what they envisioned.

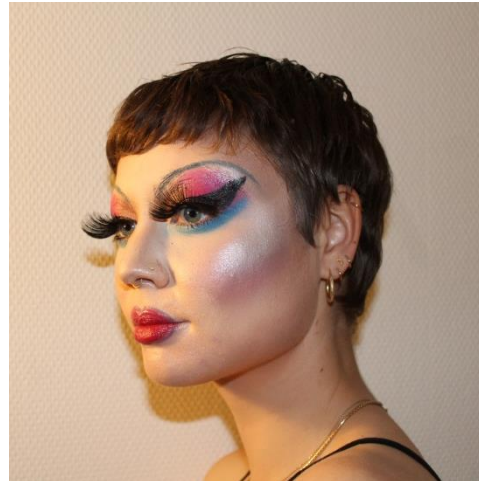


Violet Chachki



Lucy Garland

It was one of the more “extreme” transformations I had to do for this project (because the drag element included completely covering the natural brows to recreate new ones, as well as using shade and light to manipulate and change the face structure). Florentina was very excited about the result and had a noticeably different attitude when I was taking the after-shots. They posed very confidently and seemed really comfortable and playful in front of the camera, and did not need much direction regarding different poses and using their props. I found this worth mentioning because there is often a noticeable difference between how one feels before versus after an extreme makeup transformation. Florentina used the adjectives “fun, creative, *empowering*, energetic, festive” to describe the process of putting makeup on, and the feeling of having it on and being outside as “*safe, protected*, pleasant/ fun”, and “*powerful*”.



Florentina describes their own experience with makeup as “spending time with myself and my own body/ face”, which can be “*healing*” and “empowering”. “Getting to know yourself and be creative/ exploring who you are and can, or want to, be.” However, “in some places/ cases it is expected of people to wear makeup, as if those people need to present themselves in a certain way and are not 'good' enough naturally. The rigid upholding of beauty standards that cannot be attained by certain people has an *exclusionary* and *oppressive* effect.”

Last but not least, they definitely relate the art of drag makeup to feminism: “It can for sure be used in a feminist way, when it *challenges notions of beauty and/or gender*, in the form of conceptual/ drag make up. Makeup has the potential to visualize and materialize new imaginaries of what we can look like.”

Florentina was the first person who got their makeup done by me for this project and our session signified an amazing beginning to start off my thesis project.

Svenja



My session with Svenja was one of the most creative and inspiring makeup sessions I have had in a while. During our consultation, they explained “I feel that make-up is often used as a very clean and neat look and was interested what it would mean to be ‘*messy*’ with it and to draw outside of the lines. I also felt that it was often used for or being *associated with ‘feminine’* aesthetics or feminization, so I was curious in a more (gender) neutral look.” In terms of colors, Svenja chose their favorite color combinations, which were turquoise, purple and blue and later also decided to go for some orange and yellow. After talking to each other about what we would be creating, and as the makeup application was happening, we liked the idea of playing with the fading of colors, while at the same time thinking of a second layer that would play with different lines and shapes that would nicely contrast to the colors of the base. The idea to play with messiness was also inspired by the gender bending queer parties that used to take place in Rotterdam and their theme of ‘gender clown’. “I love the creative and playful process”, Svenja noted.

In general, Svenja only wears makeup rarely and knows barely anything about it. On the rare occasions when they put on makeup, they describe it as feeling “*relaxing, reassuring, and empowering*”, on the context of putting on makeup to go out or on a date. But to them it simultaneously feels “obligatory in order to appear ‘*professional*’” when putting on makeup for a setting like a job interview, which is less of a pleasant experience. “Being read as woman goes with a certain *expectation* of aesthetics and somehow applies different measures, so suddenly being professional implies using make-up.”

Furthermore, Svenja explained that sometimes having makeup on can feel like a mask to them, which can be both nice as a way to jump into different roles but can also feel really *artificial*. They also very interestingly described the feeling of having lipstick on as “on the edge between *uncomfortable, daring* and really *empowering*”. They can definitely see makeup as a form of self-care if it is “freely chosen for and if the process of putting it on is given enough time to be affirming”, however it can also feel “obligatory or even as a way to be ‘stuck’ in gender roles”.



When it comes to makeup in relation to feminism, Svenja thinks that “there is nothing inherent to make-up that makes it feminist, nor is it inherent that it is not. Often femme people are less accepted within LGBTQI+ circles for wearing it, as it is understood as *complying to societal standards*, which makes no sense. Feminism is exactly about having the *choice* to do what feels empowering. So, if make-up is empowering for some, they should feel free to use it. And it definitely is a playful tool to *question common understanding of gender* or aesthetics.”

Despite the fact that their request was very vague at first and thus difficult for me to bring into life, our communication and cooperation made it easier for me to create a look that both Svenja and I were very pleased with. Our goal was to play as much as possible with different textures, lines, overlapping colors, finishes (matte/ shimmer/ satin/ metallic), and use products differently than their intended purpose. For the latter part I found myself using eye shadow as ‘foundation’ powder and blush, liquid lipstick as liner, highlighter as eyebrow tint etc. I also used various makeup brushes in similar techniques as painting brushes (the decade I spent on painting classes finally paid off), with a variety of strokes, patterns, shadows and lights. Svenja fully allowed me to be playful and messy with my makeup application and often doing what ‘felt

right' at the moment. It was a truly liberating experience on my part and it really inspired me to start using faces as actual canvases more often. After all, one must not forget that part of the magic of makeup is that at the end of the day, it washes off and your face/canvas is ready for a different adventure tomorrow.

Asja



Asja is another example of a participant in this project who was already an avid makeup user. However, neither for this session nor for any other would I describe the experience as 'predictable', 'ordinary' or 'mundane', since everyone's view point is different, and so are their uses of makeup. Asja wanted to play with the fact that everyone's perspective and perception of things is different, and asked me to do a look similar to what they usually go for, but only gave me a couple of guidelines and left it to my interpretation in order to execute it as I liked best. They wanted to see my personal interpretation of what certain terms like 'geometry' or 'symmetry' mean and what kind of other 'intervention' my face calls for in my personal taste (what I thought would look good on them): "I wanted to see how someone else would see my face and analyze the lines, angles, surfaces of it. I didn't use a photo or a pre-existing ide of a look I wanted to have, it was more about the giving over control to someone else to do with my face what they imagine fitting." Trusting someone else (in fact, someone you have just met) with your face is both vulnerable and brave. When I first heard Asja's request I felt both lost (because of the lack of precise direction) as well as honored, for the trust they put in me and my skills (that they had not seen before).

When it came to choosing a color scheme for the look, Asja said about the experience: "I initially chose purple, yellow, black and white as the color scheme because they're the non-binary colors and it had recently been the international non-binary day, but

we soon departed from that because I got distracted and seduced by the beautiful eyeshadow palettes and lipstick collection that was there.” As the look was coming together, we made some decisions and ‘corrections’ on the spot, such as white lashes, the dual lipstick colors, and the inner corner eye dots (we initially decided on putting pink glitter there, but after the lipstick application it felt more fitting to create these big dots on the opposite side of where the colors were placed on the lips so we redid that part). The final look came out playful, colorful, and fun –something that both Asja and I were content with and excited for.

Even though Asja uses makeup on the regular, and as a matter of fact in a, similarly to this look, more avant-garde and less ‘conventional’ way, they still have a complicated relationship to it. Despite describing the makeup application process as calming, ritualistic, exciting, playful, and joyful, they also had the following to say about it: “There are days when I realize after putting it on that I’ve put it on out of habit, or because *I don’t know how to feel attractive without it* - those days I feel dysphoric wearing it and am quite likely to take it off, or remake it, or try to forget about the whole thing. Other days, days when I take the time to spend time with my face, days when I’m feeling *daring* and extra, it feels like a *source of power and confidence*. On days when I don’t feel like going out and being social, I make sure to put on extra glitter. It can be like *war paint*.”

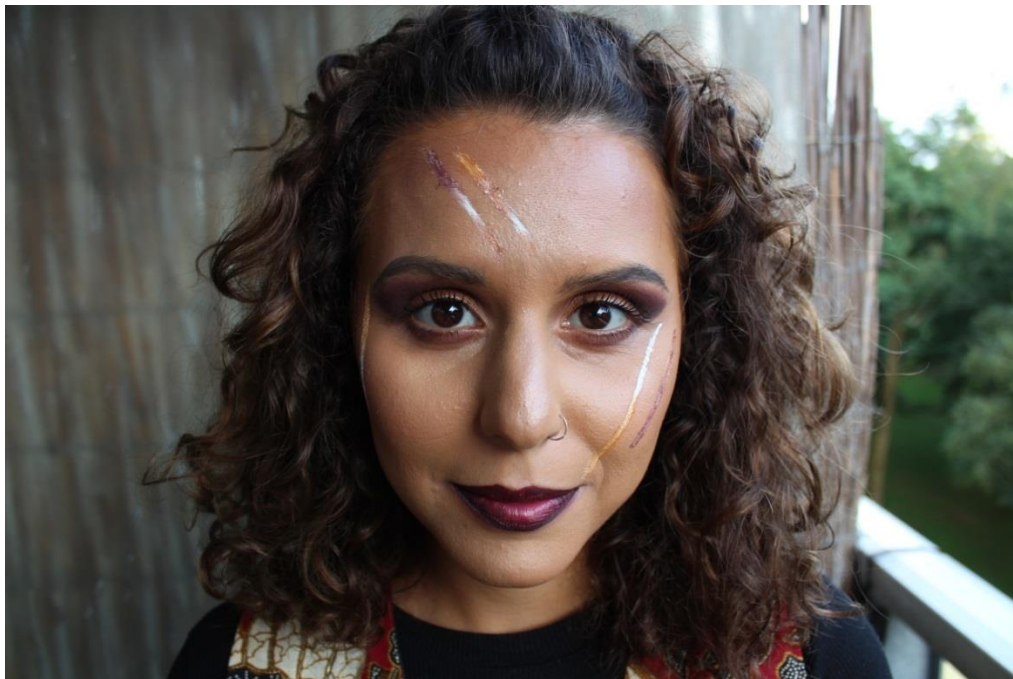


Moreover, Asja definitely sees makeup as a form of self-care: “[...] It has the potential to be a *freeing* and creative experience in which you spend time with your face, examining and honoring its features, playing, experimenting. *Using your own body as a site of creative activity* can feel like a de-alienating process by which you consciously choose to *choose your embodiment*. It can be a site of *intervention into the norm*, and one that brings joy at that. Sometimes it’s about looking and feeling good, but sometimes it’s about looking silly and feeling good, or doing things that make no sense, making and remaking, and finding joy in it.”

On the other hand, according to Asja, “the whole cosmetics industry depends on the systematic devaluing of non-male bodies and the pressures to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards try to leave the majority of the population with feelings of inadequacy that are then in turn promised to be ‘fixed’ if people buy certain products; [...] there is a *double standard* of expectations of grooming between men and everyone else; [...] distribution of access is unequal. It's very tricky. Maybe it's about re-appropriating things for your own benefit or empowerment. But I understand that it functions very differently for different people.”

When it comes to the relation between makeup and feminism, Asja thinks that the process of applying makeup can be used for purposes that align themselves with feminism, but the products themselves and the makeup industry behind them are not. One of the examples that makes the makeup application potentially feminist would be the (previously discussed) self-care, another that it can help people with their gender presentation in ways that make them feel more at ease with their bodies. “I use it a lot in this sense when I try to sharpen my facial features so as to not look so traditionally ‘feminine’ on my dysphoric days”, Asja told me. In general they seem to view makeup as a way of using one’s face like a canvas to express their creativity, all the while not ignoring some negative intentions that can be behind it as well.

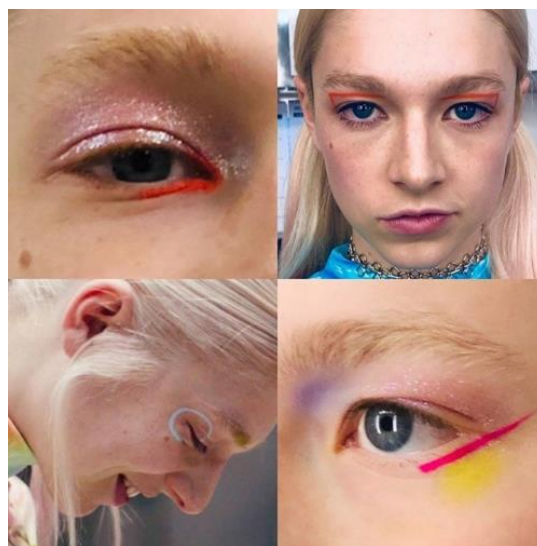
Elena



Elena had some scattered ideas of what she wanted her makeup look to be like when she came for our session. During our consultation, a variety of ideas and photos of inspiration came up. She seemed to be confused about her relationship with makeup

and I feel like our session –both during the consultation as well as when she saw the final result- really pushed her to re think of it. I will let her describe her feelings in her own words:

“I did not really think or prepare beforehand a specific request of style. A few weeks ago I happened to watch an HBO series ("Euphoria") in which one of the characters (Jules) showed a glorious makeup look after another and I proposed that as a starting point. I also, however, really wanted to take the occasion to reflect upon my relationship with makeup and my slightly hidden desire of having ‘proper makeup’ done at least once. Talking to Kat I realized that, while when I was younger I was certainly drawn to makeup, growing up I started to *distance myself from it in fear of being labeled*



8 some makeup looks on Jules (played by Hunter Schafer) from HBO's series Euphoria

"too - stereotypically- feminine" and thus, as the patriarchy would like us to think, somehow of less value. Since feminine things are inherently less - according to the patriarchy - and since makeup is, in our western society, the ‘ultimate’ feminine thing, then I learnt to grow weary of it.

I also had another thought that I found myself reflecting upon during our makeup session. After years of hard and constant work on myself to deconstruct internalized hatred for my body learnt as soon as I have been assigned female at birth, I was afraid of becoming too attached to makeup as a shield rather than a form of self-expression or a tool of disruption. I was afraid of looking at my face with makeup on and loving it because of some - erroneous- connection between makeup and the act of hiding imperfections, of creating illusions, of bettering something that needs to be made better. See, I cannot think of my face as "in need of hiding, of making better", otherwise I'm back where I started: with *shame and self-hatred, obsessed by appearances.*

The look I asked Kat to do was then, quite confused I believe. I wanted something really lush and sexy while also incorporating elements of unconventional, the avant-garde: geometrical shapes and colors that I had seen on the HBO series as well as on pictures from previous participants to the project. These two ideas were then the working concepts that Kat turned into a final look: a look that reflected both my inner desire to see my face with professional makeup and still love it without it; and my attraction towards makeup as a form of *art, of self-expression, of innovation and creativity.*”



We used dark and earthy tones that Elena tends to go for on the occasions where she does wear makeup and feels more in harmony with: brick reds, coppers, mustard yellows. After the initial base of the look was finished (foundation, eyeshadow, lips and cheeks), she asked for lines across her face in groups of two complementing each other and mirroring the colors used for the eyes and the lips. The order of the lines, the length, the distance from certain points of reference were discussed and all thought out. At the end of it, Elena said that she loved the final look and felt like it perfectly represented the confused ideas she was grappling with when she first came to our consultation.

When it comes to her general relationship with makeup, Elena rarely wears it (a couple times a month/ year) and she describes the process of putting it on as “*relaxing*, but nothing more or less ‘special’ for me than any other self-care ritual I engage in”. When asked if she views makeup as a form of self-care, she responded: “If we define self-care as any action or thought that is intentionally geared towards self-preservation, attention towards the self and the self's needs, then yes, makeup can definitely become self-care for some.”

She also had an elaborate opinion about the use of makeup as a tool of oppression: “unrealistic, white-supremacists, ableist, ageist and fat-phobic beauty expectations immersed in capitalist ideas about consumerism as fundamental to identity formation are a tool of oppression. Makeup does play a part in this scheme and it CAN thus become an *agent of the neoliberal ableist, white beauty industry*. It does not, however, always play that part and its inevitable collaboration with that industry does not invalidate its possible radical feminist use.”

Elena would most definitely consider makeup to be a potential feminist tool to fight gender norms and beauty standards. She is a big fan of writer and speaker Jamie Windust’s Instagram page (@leopardprintelephant). She stated that Windust’s use of color and makeup to completely dismantle everything we know about beauty and self-expression is something to reflect upon and celebrate.



9 Jamie Windust

Last but not least, Elena stated that makeup indeed has a very long and established history connected to many different art forms and cultures and she does not see why we couldn't consider it a form of art today. She likes it but definitely recognizes its faults.

Zwaan



Zwaan was very excited to get her makeup done by me. She is the type of person who wears makeup on the regular, but only a couple of products that she has found work

for her. One could say that she has a certain comfort zone that she very rarely breaks out of; she fills in her eyebrows with an eyebrow pencil, puts on some concealer under the eyes to brighten and hide any darkness, and finishes off with some mascara. The process of putting on makeup for her is mostly tedious, but she feels comfortable with it on; for instance, during our session she told me she would feel slightly insecure without her eyebrows on. And to be fair, I have known Zwaan for a while now, and one of the very first things I remember noticing about her the first few times we met was that she always had perfect eyebrows. When you are used to seeing yourself a certain way, you tend to find comfort in that look, and therefore might feel like something is off or does not feel right whenever you do not partake in this daily routine.

During our consultation, Zwaan asked for a sultry, bronze-y glam look. In her words, “nothing too crazy, as I don't like too much makeup on me. I want to still feel like myself, so I asked [Kat] to not go full glam. I wanted to feel sexier than I would on a regular day. I wear very very basic makeup on a daily basis to feel fresh and more **confident**. Anything worn on top of that would be so as **to feel a little more seductive and sensual**. Not to feel 'cute' or 'sweet', for example. That's never the look I'm going for and/or want to give off.”



When asked if she views makeup to be feminist, Zwaan had the following to say: “It can definitely be. Depends on the person using it though. Their intentions. But it can be used as a statement. To **express themselves however they wish, despite expectations or rules**. That in itself is a very powerful thing.” She also views makeup as a form of art, comparing it to painting a canvas, albeit a different one than usual.

That is not to say, she dismisses that makeup can have bad intentions behind it. She stated that it can be oppressive but only by virtue of the person or institution directing someone to look a certain way. “It is the institution thereby forcing someone to

further / keep in place / *reiterate damaging gender rules or expectations* that is hurtful. Not makeup in and of itself.”

Nicky



Nicky was one of the volunteers who had only worn makeup once or twice in his lifetime, and only for dress up purposes (parties, drag). He does not have any knowledge of makeup; however he responds positively to it and admires it as a form of art and self-expression. He asked me for a blue eyeshadow every day look, inspired by beauty influencer Manny Gutierrez and drag artist Naomi Smalls. Inspired by Gutierrez in terms of style of male makeup, and by Smalls in terms of colors (they share similar skin tone).



3 Manny Gutierrez



4 Naomi Smalls

The result was a pastel blue simple eye look with black liner and mascara, some basic complexion makeup and a nude lipstick. I winged the eyeliner out at first, however Nicky wanted something less “feminine” and asked me to keep it short. He seemed pleased with the end result and commented that the photos boosted his confidence.

For the few times he has worn makeup before, Nicky describes the feeling as empowering yet uncomfortable. He only sees the positive side of makeup; when asked about it as a tool of oppression, he argued that he does not think that it is used to demonstrate cruelty but instead to *empower*. Of course, we would have to take his positionality into account when examining this answer. As a cisgender man, he has never experienced any pressure to wear makeup in order to conform to a societal standard. Therefore, unless he had consciously made an effort to step into somebody else’s shoes, for example, a cisgender woman’s, it would be impossible for him to grasp the concept of using makeup as a way to suppress certain people.

Last but not least, Nicky likes the artistic properties of makeup and how makeup wearers use it to express themselves and their creativity. He concluded that he admires it, even though he usually does not partake in the process.

Stephanie



Stephanie is not a makeup user, although she has had her fair experience of makeup. She stopped wearing it about a decade ago, and before that, she mostly wore some foundation, mascara and liner during her high school days. The look she asked for was a bright colored beard, as she has performed in (male) drag before and thought it would be fun to get a beard in bright colors. She also proposed to add some Amy Winehouse – style thick cat eye liner. “She was an incredible musician and as an avid music lover, I thought it would be neat to combine the masculine drag beard with a feminine eyeshadow look,” Stephanie said. “I embrace my masculinity and femininity and thought it would be fun to express them visibly through makeup.”

The look itself was one of the quickest ones to achieve. The overall process lasted less than half an hour, and consisted of black eyeliner, of course, and turquoise, black, and white mascara on the bottom half of her face in order to create a realistic looking beard. Stephanie seemed pleased with the end result and it seemed to be a fun experience for her in general.

Stephanie’s relationship to makeup is nonexistent at this point. When asked how she feels about it the few times a year she puts it on, she responded: “Sometimes [it feels] fun and exciting depending on the event I put makeup on for. If it’s for a drag show then *empowering*, if it’s for a wedding then *I do it more to please others*.” Moreover, she described the feeling of having makeup on as mostly ‘heavy’. “It’s more of a caught in the middle type of feeling. *I like it but also hate it at the same time*.” She can definitely understand how it can be used by some people in order to feel “*triumphant*”; however she is mostly indifferent towards it most of the time.



It seems like Stephanie had not thought of different aspects of makeup before. She commented “Makeup is something made and used by many different types of people all around the world. In that sense it can be *feminist*, it can be *racist*, *it can be anything and everything*.” What we can conclude from this answer is that Stephanie sees makeup more as a neutral tool that does not necessarily have an underlying

agenda on its own, but can be manipulated by users and other external factors to adopt different properties and meanings for each person.

Antonios



The last participant of my makeup project for this thesis is Antonios. Antonios has only worn makeup a couple of times in his lifetime, usually if the occasion calls for it (party, masquerade, etc.). When it was time for our consultation, he knew exactly what kind of look he was after: “I want to do something like a face painting inspired by my childhood hero, the lead singer of U2, Bono. I didn't want something colorful so I selected something subdued. I picked this look from U2's 90's era when Bono came up with an alter ego stage persona called MacPhisto after the demon Mephisto in the Faust legend.” Mephisto is, according to legend, a demon who's working with the devil. Bono wore black and red leather, and a specific type of makeup (white face, red lipstick, smokey eyeshadow) and adopted a specific accent to portray this eccentric persona during U2's European tour in 1993. Makeup wise, the look of MacPhisto had several alternatives, two examples of which can be seen below, but for this session I was looking at the image on the left when doing Antonios' makeup.



10 Bono as MacPhisto

Antonios described the feeling of putting makeup on (or in most cases, having makeup put on him) as enjoyable, and after it is on, he feels like he is a different person, as if he is playing some character (which in this case is accurate). He never wears ‘regular’ type makeup, so he is generally neutral towards it, and when asked if he viewed it as a form of self-care, his simple yet concrete answer was “as long as it makes you feel good and it makes you happy, then I see it as a form of self-care”.

On the other side of the spectrum, Antonios also sees how makeup can be used maliciously. “As a product of an industry, makeup is creating trends and influencing the masses, sometimes resulting to people assuming that without it they are not pretty/good enough, something that of course is not true.” Nevertheless, he *differentiates between the makeup as an industry and makeup itself*. “*It is just a product that you can use it however you want and I don't think it is necessary to label it as political or sexuality/gender related.*”



Results

As expected, there were various different opinions that were told through this project. Starting with the feeling of putting on makeup or having it on, the responses of the participants vary from “enjoyable”, “empowering”, “exciting”, “ritualistic”, “calming”, “energetic”, “festive”, “comfortable” and “safe”, all the way to the other side of the spectrum with descriptions like “uncomfortable”, “to please others”, “more aware of external gazes”, “tedious”, and “obligatory in order to appear professional”. Some even feel like they are ‘stepping outside of themselves’ and putting on a front or even becoming a completely different character. I found this aspect of using makeup as a “shield” against the outside world as a different viewpoint that I had not yet encountered when researching for appropriate literature for this thesis. It almost feels like the opposite of the #InsideOutChallenge mentioned earlier, where instead of exposing one’s vulnerability through makeup expression, one almost hides it behind a more tough or ‘fierce’ –in this case- exterior.

Another question that was answered by the participants was whether or not they see makeup as a form of self-care. While the answers were mostly positive, there was nevertheless some differentiation of opinion. Some people thought that “makeup as self-care” is another concept that is perpetuated by society and the capitalist system in order to promote consumption and control women’s bodies. This seems to partially be in agreement with Foucault’s biopolitics theory, proving that it still is relevant to this day, as well as Clare Chambers’.

Most of the participants, however, did not fail to see that makeup can be reclaimed by its users and used for good. Some told me of some personal experiences where playing with makeup helped them explore their own beauty, made them feel safe, or served as an outlet to express their creativity. Others told me that even if they don’t use makeup on themselves that often or find it empowering for themselves, they still recognize that for others it can make them feel “indestructible”, “triumphant”, it can provide a moment for themselves to clear their mind, focus on themselves, honoring their features and their own unique beauty, as long as it is something that makes them happy and does not feel forced. Someone even said that it can be healing, which is reminiscent of Skye McLaughlin’s story from earlier. These opinions seem to align with the quote from Melanie Williams mentioned in the literature chapter, who said that using makeup this way enables great steps towards self-empowerment.

Moreover, in the topic of makeup used in order to oppress, there were more opinions that align with Foucault’s theory. Some of the answers I received were that “being read as woman goes with a certain expectation of aesthetics and somehow applies different measures” and that there is definitely pressure from beauty standards on people that cannot attain them or simply would not choose to. Another participant stated that “there is such a fine line as to what is considered “acceptable” makeup; the makeup that is often represented is not creative or fun, but rather a tool to get your face to be “presentable”. People certainly feel the pressure that Foucault was talking

about, to fit into certain boxes and be controlled, or, to use Foucault's terms, *surveilled*.

Last but not least, when asked about the feminist nature of makeup, or lack thereof, some participants debated that it has the potential to be a feminist tool to fight gender norms or beauty standards that, ironically enough, are often perpetuated by society and the makeup industry itself (gender norms can be challenged in the form of drag/conceptual makeup). Most participants however seemed to agree that there is nothing inherent to make-up that makes it feminist or not, and that is merely a lifeless tool that can be used either way, depending on people's intentions or agenda. This aligns with Mayura Iyer's argument from an article mentioned earlier, that "the anti-feminism of the beauty industry does not derive from wearing the makeup itself—it has to do with the limited scope of what is considered beautiful".¹⁸

¹⁸ <http://www.literallydarling.com/blog/2015/07/16/makeup-beauty-and-being-a-bad-feminist/>

Epilogue

It is apparent that there is no absolute consensus or conclusion when it comes to the nature of makeup. To this day, it has been dichotomizing feminists from all over the world. I personally do believe that all of the aforementioned theories and politics are, to an extent, truthful. Especially considering the human factor, which is subjective, and ultimately makes the debate unsolvable.

The point of course, is not to solve the debate, but keep adding to the conversation and being open to different perspectives. And ultimately, learn how to appreciate it as a form of art and not condemn its users for using it for their own benefit and wellbeing. Wearing makeup or liking it does not make anyone a “bad feminist” nor does it necessarily make a feminist statement. One must not forget that it is still an inanimate tool that is to be used however one wants, either for right or for wrong. I personally choose to look at its more positive side, the side of people using it to empower themselves and express their creativity. To quote Liz Frost, “For women to feel powerful and in control, to feel a sense of agency and competence (all, I would argue, essential for mental health), doing looks can no longer be viewed as an optional extra but rather as a central identificatory process which can offer meanings such as pleasure, creative expression and satisfaction provided that women can appropriate a discursive space in which to contradict the silencing discourses of vanity, abnormality, superficiality and unsisterliness.”¹⁹

¹⁹ (Liz Frost, 1999)

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