

Running Head: The Correlation Between Makeup Usage and Self-Esteem

**The Correlation Between Makeup Usage and Self-Esteem**

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to examine the relationship between makeup usage and self-esteem. Previous research shows that appearance influences overall well-being, and that makeup influences appearance; therefore, makeup may influence overall well-being. Researchers predicted that subjects who had lower self-esteem would use more makeup more frequently. To investigate this hypothesis subjects completed a self-esteem questionnaire followed by a makeup questionnaire. While subjects were completing the questionnaires researchers categorized the level of makeup the subjects were wearing. The data collected showed a positive correlation between the subjects' report of makeup that they were currently wearing and the amount of makeup the researchers rated them as wearing. The results also showed a positive correlation between the makeup that the subjects were currently wearing and the level of physical self-esteem. This indicated that subjects with lower self-esteem were likely to be wearing more makeup. There was no correlation between social self-esteem and makeup usage, nor was there a correlation between other categories of makeup usage and self-esteem. This suggests that the cause-effect relationship between makeup and self-esteem cannot be determined and future research should be manipulated to determine this relationship.

## **The Correlation Between Makeup Usage and Self-Esteem**

According to the Federal Food, Drug & Cosmetic Act (FDA) cosmetics, or makeup, is defined as “articles intended to be rubbed, poured, sprinkled, or sprayed on, introduced into, or otherwise applied to the human body for cleansing, beautifying, promoting attractiveness, or altering appearance” (Edmonds, 2011). Many women use makeup in order to amplify or enhance their features and youthfulness. According to Edmonds (2011), makeup use can be observed as early as the ancient Egyptians. They used cosmetics in the form of lead paint to ward off evil spirits and to deflect the sun. One reason why women would be motivated to promote their attractiveness is to increase their self-esteem. Many women reason that if they look good they will also feel good. In other words, their outward appearance influences their self-esteem. This is supported by a report on the State of Self -Esteem by the Dove self-esteem fund (2008), which states that “78% of girls with low self-esteem admit that it is hard to feel good in school when you do not feel good about how you look (compared to 54% of girls with high self-esteem)”.

A relationship between appearance and self-esteem does not just affect teenagers. Many women feel less confident when they do not wear makeup (Sclamberg, 2012). According to Alexis Sclamberg (2012), a writer for the Huffington Post, research shows that 44 percent of women felt more unattractive and uncomfortable when they did not wear make up than when they did. Sclamberg examined a survey conducted by the Renfrew Center which reported that of the 44 percent, 16 percent of women reported feeling unattractive, 14 percent reported feeling self-conscious, and 14 percent reported feeling naked without makeup (Renfrew Center Foundation, 2012). This study also

reported that only three percent of women said that going without makeup made them feel more attractive. According to Theberge and Kernaleguen (1979), as the use (and importance) of cosmetics increased, so did women's satisfactions with their bodies. These studies demonstrate the relationship that makeup usage has with women's appearance-related self-esteem.

Makeup plays an important role in self-perceptions and perceptions of others as well, which influences social reactions. According to Robertson and colleagues (2014), there is a positive correlation between frequent cosmetic usage and anxiety, self-consciousness, introversion, and conformity. Cosmetic usage is also negatively correlated with extraversion, social confidence, emotional stability, and intellect. So not only does makeup use relate to confidence and other internal characteristics, but it is also related to one's social interactions as well. Miller and Cox (1982) uncovered that women who were concerned about their appearance wore more makeup and were more apt to believe that makeup enhanced their social interactions. This same study found that self-reported makeup use and public self-consciousness were significantly related ( $r=.32$ ,  $p<.05$ ) (Miller & Cox, 1982). Public self-consciousness is defined as an awareness of the self as it is viewed by others (Dictionary.com, n.d.). Public self-consciousness was also found to be significantly related to beliefs about makeup improving one's appearance and making one's social relations go more smoothly ( $r=.40$ ,  $p<.05$ ) (Miller & Cox, 1982). Miller and Cox argue for a self-fulfilling prophecy. The women who are more self-conscious and therefore wear more makeup, also judge themselves to be more attractive when wearing the makeup ( $r=.28$ ,  $p<.6$ ). Because of this, Miller and Cox argue that they act more

confidently and therefore the people they are interacting with respond to that confidence in a positive way and the social interactions go more smoothly. Based on this data one can observe that makeup usage is not only related to one's emphasis of the importance of outward appearance, one's inward confidence and self worth, but also one's social interactions and overall social success as well.

These women are not alone in believing that makeup usage enhances their appearance and the way people perceive them. It turns out that people interacting with these women and the public in general also believe that makeup usage makes them more attractive. Nash and colleagues (2006) conducted a study in which both men and women rated either pictures of women without makeup, or the same women with makeup. The women with makeup ranked higher on levels of perceived outward attractiveness and confidence. Nash and colleagues also found that not only does wearing makeup enhance their attractiveness, but it also enhances the way other perceive them. The subjects also awarded the women wearing makeup with a greater earning potential and with greater potential to occupy more prestigious jobs than the same women without cosmetics. Appropriate makeup use is also linked to assumptions of health, heterosexuality, and credibility in the workplace (Dellinger & Williams, 1997). In this study, one woman described a time when she did not wear makeup to work and she received concern about her health from her coworkers. Many people asked her if she was tired or if she was feeling okay, these questions in turn made her attitude decline. This information shows that it is not only the women themselves who believe makeup usage enhances their self-esteem and social interactions, but it is the outside observers' belief as well.

Thus, we hypothesize that women who have lower levels of self-esteem will report wearing more makeup, more frequently. In other words, the amount and frequency of makeup usage will be positively correlated with low levels of self-esteem. To test this hypothesis, three components will be employed. The subjects will be given two questionnaires. First, they will complete a questionnaire to measure their self confidence, self-perception, confidence with social interactions, and self worth. While completing the questionnaire, researchers will evaluate the subjects on how much makeup they are wearing. To judge the level of make up, the researchers will have six pre-determined levels of usage with which to categorize the subjects' makeup usage. This will provide an outside perspective of the make-up usage. Then the subject will complete a questionnaire in which they select the type of makeup they would wear in three different situations. The situations include the amount of makeup the subject was currently wearing, what the subject wears on an average day, and what the subject would wear when dressing up/going out. This will provide an actual rating of how much make up the subject is wearing and whether or not the subject would wear that much make up typically or not. The researchers will then compare the self-report of makeup and the researcher's categorization of makeup usage to the overall self-esteem, as determined by the average scores of self confidence, self-perception, confidence with social interactions, and self worth of each participant.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants observed in this lab experiment were obtained through a

convenience sample of students at Hanover College. The participants were primarily students in psychology courses, whose participation was part of a class incentive; therefore, it was a convenience sample. We had a total number of 32 participants from which to collect data. All of the participants were female and between the ages of 18-22. Of the 32 number of participants, all were Caucasian by self-report.

## **Materials**

The participants were asked to fill out a self-esteem questionnaire. We used the “Self-Esteem and Physical Attractiveness” questionnaire from International Personality Item Pool (Alpha .84 and .87) (Davis et al., 2001). The questionnaire was designed to measure self-esteem in relation to appearances and also in relation to characteristics of one’s self. Subjects rated the level to which they agreed to statements from 1-5 (very inaccurate-accurate). Some of the statements included: “Am considered attractive by others”, “dislike myself”, “I am easily discouraged”, “Enjoy being part of a group”, and “don’t like to get dressed up”.

The experimenters used a 6 category scale ranging from no makeup to theater/celebrity-type makeup to place each participant accordingly. The categories for this scale are as follows:

1. no makeup
2. limited makeup: 1-2 of the following: foundation, concealer, blush, mascara, eyeliner under, eyeliner above, eyeshadow, eyebrow pencil, fake lashes, lipstick/lip color, lip gloss, lip liner
3. below average: 3-4 of the following: foundation, concealer, blush, mascara, eyeliner under, eyeliner above, eyeshadow, eyebrow pencil, fake lashes, lipstick/lip color, lip gloss, lip liner
4. above average: 5-6 of the following: foundation, concealer, blush, mascara, eyeliner under, eyeliner above, eyeshadow, eyebrow pencil, fake lashes, lipstick/lip color, lip gloss, lip liner
5. excessive makeup: 7-8 of the following: foundation, concealer, blush, mascara,

eyeliner under, eyeliner above, eyeshadow, eyebrow pencil, fake lashes, lipstick/lip color, lip gloss, lip liner

6. theater/celebrity-type makeup: 9-12 of the following: foundation, concealer, blush, mascara, eyeliner under, eyeliner above, eyeshadow, eyebrow pencil, fake lashes, lipstick/lip color, lip gloss, lip liner

In some cases, the researchers increased a subject's classification because of the intensity of the coloring for some items. For example, if the participant wore mascara and bright red lipstick that could be categorized as a 3 instead of a 2.

The participants were then asked to fill out a makeup survey based on the amount of makeup the participant was currently wearing, what the participant wears on an average day, and what the participant would wear when dressing up/going out. This survey was in the form of a checklist as seen in Figure 1.

- Foudation
- Concealer
- Blush
- Mascara
- Eyeshadow
- Eyeliner: over
- Eyeliner: under
- Eyebrow pencil
- Artificial lashes
- Lip stick/lip color
- Lip gloss
- Lip liner
- Other:

Figure 1. Checklist for experimenter evaluation of subjects' makeup

## Procedure

Participants entered a the room where the experimenters were present, and were told the study was about factors that contribute to self-esteem. Experimenters then

distributed an informed consent form to each participant for them to sign and return. Participants were asked if they had any questions regarding the study they were about to partake in.

The experimenters then distributed the self-esteem questionnaire to each participant. While the participants were completing the questionnaire, both of the the experimenters visually scored each participant based on the amount of makeup they were wearing.

Once the participants had completed the self-esteem questionnaire, they were given a makeup questionnaire. Upon completion of the makeup questionnaire and collection of the forms, the participants were verbally debriefed by the experimenters and handed a debriefing form. If any of the participants had questions for the experimenters their questions were answered at this time. If there were no questions for the experimenters, the participants were dismissed and free to leave.

## **Results**

Using these results we first calculated reliability using Cronbach's Alpha. This statistic eliminates the degree to which a measure is free from measurement error. The ratings of self-esteem for each self-esteem question were averaged together to form a self-esteem score. We created a score for both physical self-esteem questions (Physical.Self.Esteem) and social self-esteem questions (Social.Self.Esteem). The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the physical self-esteem scores was 0.88209. Physical self-esteem scores ranged from 1 to 5, with a mean of 2.5 and standard deviation of 0.78. High scores on the physical self-esteem indicate that, generally speaking, the subject has

low physical self-esteem. Due to the Cronbach's alpha analysis we found the degree to which a measure is free from measurement error to be high. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the social self-esteem scores was 0.87846. Physical self-esteem scores ranged from 1 to 5, with a mean of 2.06 and standard deviation of .78. High scores on the physical self-esteem indicate that, generally speaking, the subject has low social self-esteem. Due to the Cronbach's alpha analysis we found the degree to which a measure is free from measurement error to be high.

We expected there to be a correlation between physical self-esteem and makeup usage. To test this we used a Pearson's product moment correlation between physical self-esteem and current makeup, average makeup, going out makeup, and researchers' rating of makeup. The only significant correlation that we found was between physical self-esteem and current makeup. The correlation was .405 (N=32),  $p < 0.05$ . Figure 1 shows this correlation. We also expected there to be a correlation between social self-esteem and makeup usage. To test this we used a Pearson's product moment correlation between social self-esteem and current makeup, average makeup, going out makeup, and researchers' rating of makeup. There were no significant correlations. Finally, we wanted to see how accurate the researchers' ratings were in relation to the subjects self-report of makeup usage, and to check how honest our subjects were. To test this we did a Pearson's product moment correlation between researcher makeup rating and currently wearing, average makeup, and going out makeup. The only significant correlation that we found was between researcher makeup rating and currently wearing. The correlation was 0.779 (N=32)  $p < 0.001$ . This was expected and showing a positive correlation between the



**Figure 2.** *Correlation between Current Makeup Usage and Researcher's Makeup Rating.*

### **Discussion**

Based on previous research and our own experiences and expectations, we hypothesized that subjects with lower self-esteem would use more makeup more frequently. This hypothesis applied to both physical self-esteem and social self-esteem. We wanted to determine the relationship of these two categories of self-esteem with different categories of makeup usage. Our results indicated that there was only a significant correlation between physical self-esteem and current makeup usage. We also wanted to examine how the researchers' makeup rating was correlated with what the subjects reported that they were currently wearing. We found this to be a positive correlation as well. Our results only supported our hypothesis conditionally. The only condition that supported our hypothesis is the relationship between physical self-esteem and what the subjects were currently wearing. This is supported by previous research that indicated a relationship between makeup and physical self-esteem. However, our results did not support previous research that related makeup and social interactions or social self-esteem. According to our results these significant findings suggest that people with lower physical self-esteem are more likely to wear more makeup.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The major limitation to our study is that we could not determine a cause and effect relationship. If self-esteem was a cause of makeup usage subjects with lower self-esteem would have a higher likelihood to wear makeup because they are motivated to gain approval and avoid rejection. If self-esteem was the effect of makeup, subjects would wear

makeup and people would respond to makeup positively, leading makeup to cause them to have a higher self-esteem. Based on previous research we expected self-esteem to be an effect of makeup usage and to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. This means that women believe they are more attractive when wearing makeup, they act more confidently while wearing makeup, others respond to their confidence in social interactions, and therefore their self-esteem is raised. The design of our study did not allow us to determine cause or effect. Future studies should create a design which allows a cause-effect relationship to be determined. One suggestion would be to manipulate the makeup. Subjects could take the self-esteem questionnaire without wearing makeup, receive a makeover, and then re-take the self-esteem questionnaire. Using this design, self-esteem could be determined as the cause of makeup.

Another limitation was that all of our subjects were caucasian by self-report. This narrow demographic limits external validity. The age range of only having subjects ages 18-22 also limits external validity. For future studies, a more diverse population should be used to increase external validity and generalizability.

Future studies may also consider two other design alterations. One of these would be using outside opinions to rate self-esteem of women wearing makeup or not. This would provide a different angle and would show how others perceive self-esteem and makeup usage. A second alteration would be perhaps using different categories of makeup usage rather than current makeup, average makeup, and going out makeup. These categories could be made more specific providing more conclusive results.

## **Conclusion**

In general, we found the only significant relationship between makeup usage and self-esteem was between physical self-esteem and current makeup usage. We also found that our design was effective in that researchers' rating and the subjects' self-report of makeup usage was positively correlated. Future studies may consider a different design that can result in a cause-effect relationship, and higher external validity. Overall, we believe our study was successful to some degree because we did find a significant relationship between low levels of physical self-esteem and current makeup usage.

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