Makeup as a Tool for Empowerment, Cultural Expression, and Social Inclusion: A Contemporary Analysis of the Global Beauty Industry

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Introduction

The beauty industry around the globe is very strong and influential, making billions every year and guiding changes around the world. Besides its economic value, beauty industry helps people transform, support cultural traditions and move ahead socially(Turcu and Brancu). Until not long ago, makeup was seen as just for appearance, but today, it often helps transform ideas about gender, race, beauty and belonging. It highlights makeup as a way people can express their identities and beliefs on social and political issues, mainly used by marginalized people (Fletcher and Swierczynski).

This paper discusses how makeup helps people—especially women of color and those in diasporic communities—show their identity, be seen and earn money. Through makeup, people describe their heritage, defiance and status as survivors using artistic form(Rahman). In addition, the industry focusing more on inclusivity is a sign of power shifting, with grassroots groups and companies run by women of color opening up spaces that were once excluded.

This topic is particularly important for women of color and populations from diverse backgrounds, as they are often excluded or overlooked in mainstream beauty stories. Makeup means both power and a way to express their culture to these communities (Khairani). This support system helps people avoid feeling left out and also lets them gain professional qualifications and begin their own businesses. Being beauty workers helps Black and African diasporic women link their personal choices with their culture.

Significantly, the industry's reach is not limited to making money, as it drives people and communities to adjust their feelings about how they are seen and how they see each other(Craddock et al.). For many women from minority backgrounds and those living in diasporas, makeup helps them claim a sense of who they are and demonstrate their control in environments where their looks were often not valued. This negotiation is shared both personally and by the entire community, because beauty rituals strengthen community ties. Explaining makeup from this perspective, the study shows why greater diversity and inclusivity are needed in the beauty industry worldwide to ensure every identity is value.

The author shares a unique point of view, developed over more than twenty years as a global makeup artist. Her efforts include collaborations in the philanthropic world and a tour of 31 days in East Africa to study how makeup ties into communal growth and storytelling. Laura, the co-founder of Kym's Day Makeup, applies principles of representation and social inclusion to her work every day. Because of their professional experience, the analysis includes expert knowledge, personal perspectives and industry understanding.

Theoretical framework

Makeup is explored in this research as a practice involving personal care, social aspects and resistance by using feminism, cultural theories and the aesthetics of self-care.

Intersectional Feminism: Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989)

To see how gender, race and class affect makeup, Crenshaw's intersectionality concept is essential. Intersectionality argues that a person's different identities can create their own unique kinds of marginalization(Azmitia and Mansfield). Women belonging to communities of color or diasporas, often use makeup as a method to relive the everyday hurdles they face because of their race and gender. What this theory suggests is that makeup empowers these women by letting them clearly express themselves in social settings that often treat them differently.

Stuart Hall, Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies (1997)

According to Hall, beauty becomes a place where groups create and contest key ideas from their culture. Demographic representations actively affect the way identities such as racial and ethnic ones, are seen and understood(Montoya et al.). Through styles and colors, makeup in some cases agrees with and in others disagrees with the usual beauty norms. His theory explains how makeup use by marginalized folks can block stereotyping and the simplifying of differences, giving them ways to describe and identify with their culture on their terms. This way of thinking highlights that beauty functions as a cultural language to express heritage, ways to resist and feelings of belonging.

Intersection of Aesthetics and Resistance: Bell hooks (1992)

Without reducing body adornment solely to pampering, bell hooks brings up the role of dressing up as resistance to external pressures and self-loving. According to hooks, wearing makeup is sometimes a way to regain our sense of who we are and what we look like(Setter). This kind of skill challenges whoever holds power by making beauty processes pleasant, desirable and a chance for identity-building. Black women and women from diasporas often use makeup at work to show themselves and resist marginalization in environments where they have often been left out.

Important Ideas: Symbolic Capital, Beauty Labor and Aesthetic Agency

Without Pierre Bourdieu's idea of symbolic capital, we wouldn't see how makeup can matter socially in addition to being just a cosmetic. Symbolic capital is the prestige and social status you get because of certain cultural activities. American film and TV often portray women who are focused on appearance as lazy or fake, yet gaining recognition in the beauty industry can bring respect and opportunities for marginalized women trying to make a living as models, actors or influencers(Dey).

Beauty labor is about appearance and includes using looks as a means of social and political advantage(Sierminska and Singhal). This field is known for gender and race but can also become a place where those who feel excluded defy the main beauty standards and tell their own stories of identity. Between people and social structures, aesthetic agency refers to the use of style, makeup and other practices to identify, challenge marginalization and include others. It acknowledges makeup as a way that individuals demonstrate knowledge and creativity to manage various social situations.

Globalization and new digital trends are changing ideas about beauty and the habits that go with it. Through social media, the beauty industry is now open to all women who want to share what they do and learn about beauty from others all over the globe(Hassan et al.). As a result of this visibility, standards of beauty are no longer only controlled by Europeans and influencers and beauty practitioners from smaller groups can start their own trends and attract followers. Therefore, we see the relevance of aesthetic agency, since people craft their online identities and discuss global issues about identity, health and activism. The research demonstrates that makeup practices are always being reexamined and reshaped, mirroring efforts around the world to gain respect, belonging and control over their cultures.

Integrative Application

When applied together, they help to analyze makeup as relevant to people's feelings, culture and lives beyond the visual effects. Intersectionality focuses on the setting in which beauty practices appear, cultural studies bring to light the conflicting interpretations people make, while aesthetics of resistance brings attention to the political and empowering effects of makeup. You see how practices like these can help people gain influence and superiority in society and at work. This framework helps the study understand how makeup empowers, shares cultural traditions and leads to social acceptance, mainly among women of color and diasporic communities whose makeup challenges being left out and redefines what is seen as attractive by beauty companies.

Methodology

The author used qualitative autoethnography and drew on their decades of professional involvement in the international beauty industry. For over 20 years as a makeup artist, the author has closely worked with various communities and cultures, allowing them to share personal observations about how makeup contributes to empowerment, the exchange of cultural messages and attracting more people into the community. This approach makes it possible to examine the real experience of beauty work, along with its theoretical aspects.

One major element of the method is the author's detailed journey through East Africa, covering Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania which lasts for 31 days. It was chosen specifically because of its special culture and history and the author's current contacts and understanding of the area.While watching and recording makeup use in various places, including workshops focused on empowerment, cultural events and beauty programs, the author explored the ways makeup is linked with people's identities, traditions and jobs. These case studies were selected to highlight how beauty practices differ among various East African communities and to make sure women's stories about makeup are well represented.

In addition, the study draws on ideas from the development of Kym's Day Makeup, an inclusive beauty brand launched by the author. The example of this brand demonstrates the ways representation, inclusion and cultural affirmation can be added to beauty business, tying theory and practice together.

Because she is both a global makeup artist and brand founder, the author's point of view is unique and helps explain events from within the industry. From this standpoint, I can grasp what beauty labor involves and recognizing any possible biases in my autoethnographic work. How the author is

identified and how they work tends to color the way they examine the data, promoting empowerment and inclusion by warning against generalization or idealizing others' lives.

With this method, its not sure the subjects' experiences fully capture how beauty is practiced across the world. People using this method are expected to be open, as it can be hard to mix personal experiences with academic writing. Yet, thanks to the use of theories and extra data, the study looks carefully at how beauty products have influenced the social and political world.

All in all, the blend of qualitative research, observing pronounced diasporic groups and developing a memorable brand, gives a clear and well-supported look at makeup as a major activity in both culture and the economy for women of color and diasporas.

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