

Semantic Reconstruction of Beauty and Makeup for Young Females: The Phenomenological Study

Milad Pourrajabi¹
Alireza Ghobadi*²

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Abstract

The concept of beauty is closely linked to gender in contemporary society; in this study, the concept of beauty was explored by the use of phenomenological techniques. For this purpose, an in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted among 35 young female students in Tehran. The sample of study was chosen by theoretical sampling model and the interviews were continued up to the point of gaining theoretical saturation. After extracting the basic, secondary and intermediate concepts, the three main categories were defined as: general areas of beauty and signs, makeup and consumption, and media and the need for beauty and make-up. The results of this study indicate that makeup is defined as an important activity for young girls. Beauty and makeup are intertwined with people's life plans and are regulated by them; that is, the amount and manner of makeup of female students changes with their understanding of the culture of different environments, types and gender of the audience, the level of communication and type of activity. It can be stated that makeup allows girls to have multiple social relationships. In analyzing and interpreting the interviews, a wide range of reasons, such as increasing social capital, coercion or group ambiguity, building a new and self-identifying identity, and increasing self-confidence were identified for the explanation of why makeup is used.

Keywords: beauty, body, young women, girls, makeup, media

¹. Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Sociology, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran
milad.porrajabi@gmail.com

^{2*}. Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Kharazmi University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran
ghobadidr@gmail.com (Corresponding author)

Introduction

The mental image of the body is strongly related to the ideals of beauty. In fact, our body image is influenced by the information we receive daily about what is beautiful and attractive and what is not (de Carvalho, Oliveira, Neves, Meireles, & Ferreira, 2019), This information is deeply rooted in the culture of each country (Fardouly & Rapee, 2019).

In gender-based societies, people's attention to the body differs in the two sexes, and there are different social expectations of men and women, and there more serious social expectations related to women (Salehi et al., 2020; Tiggemann, Anderberg, & Brown, 2020). In such a situation, the body seems to be more important to female than male, so women are under more pressure than men to pay attention to the body and physical appearance, as well as to adapt to the ideals of beauty (Batres et al., 2018).

On the one hand, women's social opportunities (such as marriage, employment, social status, and social power) are influenced by their beauty, and the feeling of beauty or lack of it becomes an important reality to them (Hicks & Thomas, 2020). These results show that many of women acting out to their body are related to their appearance, such as salesperson, marketer, secretaries, typists, stewards, waitresses, mannequins, and other office services, all in different ways. They pay attention to physical appearance (Voelker, Petrie, Huang, & Chandran, 2019). Also, from Huberman's¹ and Foucault's² point of view beauty is considered a tool to women's power exercising (Batres et al., 2018; Maymone, Laughter, Dover, & Vashi, 2019), so using this power is seen as providing opportunities for a better life (Hicks & Thomas, 2020). Of course, Miller argues that women who rely on their feminine strategy (beauty) as a major tool for survival cannot do anything about the flow of physical change that leads them to lose their (beauty) privileges (Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2007). Thus, being on the verge of aging and losing beauty and youth for this group of women is like losing the ability to survive and degrading social power and dignity, and increasing their vulnerability in old age (Mafra et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the social acceptance of women in society is largely related to their appearance, and if a woman does not follow or fails to follow the norms of beauty (for reasons such as physical disability, disability, etc.), they are considered abnormal and rebellious women (Hicks & Thomas, 2020). They are rejected by society (Bhambhani, Flynn, Kellum, & Wilson, 2019). Accordingly, women spend a lot of money, time and energy to make their appearance ideal in different ways (More, Phillips, & Eisenberg Colman, 2019).

Make-up is one of the methods that has been used since time immemorial to achieve this goal; therefore, make-up is not special to modern societies and has existed from the beginning of life (Bhambhani et al., 2019). But unlike the past, when makeup

¹ Jürgen Habermas

² Paul Michel Foucault

was for older or thinner women, it has become a necessity for most young women and girls today, as a social need that sometimes stems from the need for beauty (Wang, Fardouly, Vartanian, & Lei, 2019). Statistics show that on the one hand, the use of cosmetics among young girls is increasing both globally and in Iran, and on the other hand, the number of women who feel dissatisfied with their bodies is increasing every day (McComb & Mills, 2020). In the meantime, the role of the media in this process cannot be ignored. Researchers believe that the ideal characteristics presented in the media affect a person's body image and self-esteem (Uhlmann, Donovan, Zimmer-Gembeck, Bell, & Ramme, 2018).

Based on this, it seems that people's interest in their bodies has also increased (Tiggemann & Zinoviev, 2019). The body is part of the concept of self and visible, functional and structural, and makes it possible to interact with the environment and other people, so the body plays an important role in its life and daily interactions (Uhlmann et al., 2018). The importance of this issue becomes more when we include the role of consumer society and consumerism in the equation (Bhambhani et al., 2019). It is there that the body becomes an arena that, in addition to personal identity, can also represent lifestyles.

Literature Review

Sociocultural models of body image suggest that appearance comparisons are partly responsible for the negative effect of idealized images on women's body image (Cash, 2012), and there is a growing body of literature supporting that assertion (Myers & Crowther, 2009). Social comparison theory posits that people have an innate drive to compare themselves to others in order to determine their progress and standing on aspects of their lives, and that comparisons to people judged to be better than oneself can lead to negative psychological outcomes. Consistent with this theory, research shows that women often compare their appearance to others in their everyday lives (Myers & Crowther, 2009), especially to those judged to be more attractive than themselves, and that comparisons to attractive others can negatively impact women's body image and mood (Myers & Crowther, 2009). Although less common, women also compare their appearance to others judged to be just as attractive or less attractive than them, and those comparisons can have a positive impact on women's body image (Fardouly & Rapee, 2019; Leahey, Crowther, & Ciesla, 2011; Myers & Crowther, 2009).

Facial attractiveness is one particular aspect of appearance that women can compare. Facial features play a significant role in ratings of women's attraction (Confer, Perilloux, & Buss, 2010) and previous research suggests that facial comparisons may be common among young women. Viewing images of attractive female faces, as well as full-body images of thin women with attractive faces, has been found to make women less satisfied with their own overall physical and facial attractiveness than viewing images containing no people (Newton & Minhas, 2005; Vendemia & DeAndrea, 2018). In addition, research suggests that browsing social media, such as Facebook, may be more harmful for women's face, skin, and hair related discrepancies than their weight and shape related discrepancies (Fardouly,

Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015), perhaps because women post more portrait images than full-body images on social media (Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, & Kruck, 2012).

Extrapolating from that research, viewing idealized images of women wearing makeup on social media may make women more dissatisfied with their overall appearance and their facial appearance in particular, and make them to change the aspects of their face, skin, and hair (Fardouly & Rapee, 2019).

Undeniably, cosmetic use enhances positive perceptions by others. Female faces with make-up are perceived as more attractive (Bradshaw, Leyva, Nicolas, & Hill, 2019; Mileva, Jones, Russell, & Little, 2016; Mulhern, Fieldman, Hussey, L  v  que, & Pineau, 2003) although makeup level does not increase attractiveness linearly (Tagai, Ohtaka, & Nittono, 2016). Made-up women are also perceived as healthier, more confident, and as having greater earning potential (Mileva et al., 2016; Nash, Fieldman, Hussey, L  v  que, & Pineau, 2006).

Women judged other made-up women as more dominant while men evaluated them as having higher prestige (Mileva et al., 2016). Furthermore, made-up women receive more positive evaluations in diverse personality traits (Carrillo, Coleman, & Hack, 2014) and appear to be younger when 40 years or older (Russell et al., 2019). Interestingly, women who wear makeup are also rated as more promiscuous and more likely to incite jealousy in other women (Batres et al., 2018; Mileva et al., 2016). Indeed, women wearing more make-up reported higher socio-sexual than women who use less make-up (Bradshaw et al., 2019; Mafra et al., 2020; Wagstaff, 2018).

Women are more prone than men to use self-promotion as an intersexual competition tactic and to use cosmetics as a self-promoting tactic (Wagstaff, 2018). Hence, enhancement of physical attractiveness is one of the ways that women compete among themselves for high-value mates (Varella, Valentova, & Fern  ndez, 2017). Previous studies have investigated the relation between intersexual competition and use of luxury items (Hudders, De Backer, Fisher, & Vyncke, 2014), indirect aggression (Vaillancourt, 2013), high heels (Prokop & Švanc  rov  , 2020), and makeup usage (Wagstaff, 2018). In an experimental study, women were shown to attribute a strategic beautification penalty to other women for wearing cosmetics; they perceived made-up women as dishonest and did not want to affiliate with them. Besides intersexual competition, cosmetic usage in women was also associated with social comparison and dispositional envy (Mafra et al., 2020).

Method

It's about having the quality of targeting a particular understanding of society and a complex psyche that you can focus on with questions about why and how (Ghafoury, Roosta, & Hajipour, 2020; Pregoner, Accion, Buraquit, & Amoguis, 2020). Appropriate sample size in qualitative research is the number of people who give sufficient answers to the research questions (Chan, Ahrumugam, Scheithauer, Schultze-Krumbholz, & Ooi, 2020; Prasasti & Boy, 2020).

The study sample in this study is young women and girl students living in Tehran. To perform the interview, we first selected women for the interview whose appearance

indicated that they had done their makeup. After interviewing these women, we came up with some tips and themes. In the second step, our sample was selected more purposefully, i.e., we interviewed boxers who could provide more and more accurate information based on the research questions. The number of interviews continued until the information reached saturation. At that time, the number of interviewees reached 35.

The interviews took place in shopping malls and passages. In addition to the interviews we had with people, we talked to them in detail one by one. At first, we tried to evoke a sense of intimacy and trust in the interviewee by doing specific conversations. Then, to understand the reasons for their tendency to make-up and beauty, we allowed people to talk about make-up issues. As an example, we asked them to talk about the types of cosmetics and how to buy and use them, and when they talked about these issues with particular interest, the interviewer tried to ask Babian general questions to include the purpose of the study.

Questions like what you think about makeup and beauty were asked in addition to the questions that were raised in general, at least during the conversation; people talked about the reasons for their tendency to make-up and artificial beauties. During the interview, in order to better understand people's attitudes toward makeup and beauty, we repeatedly changed the way we asked questions, sometimes asking them to explain more about the issues they raised, and in this way, sometimes for a number of reasons. We found that this led to a better split of the issue.

After conducting the interviews, we gradually classified, categorized, and coded the content of the interview. In this way, we first read the interviews many times and removed all the points and information that the interviewees had made from their conversations, and then the topics that we shared in a class. In the process of codifying the content and extracting the categories and themes, we tried to move from simpler concepts to more general and abstract concepts, and finally we dealt with the categorization of the contents so that we could achieve concepts that include more themes.

The data collection method was interview and observation. In-depth and free interviews, as well as "non-structured" interviews, were used. In the interview process, due to the nature of the issue and the possibility of self-censorship, "as far as possible", without explanation of the research, "interviews were conducted" and "observation was done in a participatory manner" and "presence" was done "in place". The use of "continuous" feminine in this works both in interviews and, of course, in "testimonies" in addition to the obvious necessity of doing so, was done to create the least possible distortion of the answers. The interview process and the "observation of the present study" (except for "times" that were not done for the purpose of the research) took about 6 months.

Data analysis was performed using cryptographic methods (Chan et al., 2020; Hudders et al., 2014), meaning that the data were analyzed in units that could be analyzed by comparing data from compressed data and using theoretical concepts. "Continuous observation", "long contact" with the "research environment", "study" of

"differences" has been the most important "strategies" to increase the validity of the present study.

Results

In this study, 35 women aged 18 to 30 years were interviewed with an average age of 23.5 years. The minimum education of these people was undergraduate students and the maximum education was PhD students, but on average most of the respondents were undergraduate students.

The place of makeup in women's daily activities:

The findings of this study show that the activities that women do during their daily lives are closely related to the amount and manner of their makeup. Women are always making decisions about how much to wear during their daily activities. Many factors are involved in this decision-making and selection. The most important of these factors include the following:

Type of Activity: The type of activity of people is one of the determining factors in the amount and manner of their makeup. Some respondents stated that depending on whether they wanted to go to university, stay at home, go to a party, go out shopping, or arrange a pilgrimage, they would adjust the amount and manner of their makeup.

Location: Location or activity is another factor that affects the level of makeup of respondents. As one respondent puts it: *It depends on the work environment, if it's private, I'll put on more makeup, or if the area I'm going to shop in uptown, I have more makeup than downtown.*

Familiarity or strangeness of place and group: Familiarity or strangeness with the place and the group into which people enter is another influential factor in people's decision-making to adjust makeup. Most respondents said that if the space they entered was a familiar space, such as their classroom or a family home, they would prefer to have make-up, and if the space and group are strangers, they may or may not make up for them if they do not need to communicate with others, or the amount of makeup doesn't matter.

The stability or instability of the group and the collective: The stability or instability of the group in which the person is placed is another factor influencing the amount of makeup. Respondents stated that they preferred to wear make-up if their relationship with the stranger group was to continue. What seems to be the case in these statements is that establishing a relationship, the type of impact, and its continuity in variables such as space, group, and their sustainability are more important than the variables themselves.

Audience gender: The gender of the audience with which the person interacts is effective in the way and amount of women's makeup. Some respondents said that if only women were present where they went, it would be less important for them to wear makeup or not, and others said that if they were going to be in mixed groups,

they should have makeup, so the gender of the audience could influence the amount and type of makeup a person has.

Definitions and meaning of Makeup from a women's perspective:

Makeup has different meanings from the point of view of those who are involved in the issue of makeup. The main definitions that respondents mentioned are as follows:

Makeup means beauty: Many respondents interpret makeup as beauty, beautification, or a means of beautification.

Makeup means health, cleanliness and beauty: Some respondents considered make-up to be a form of cleanliness and grooming. They believed that makeup was part of the discipline of appearance, and that by spending time on makeup, a person would feel that she had become cleaner and tidier, or that she had destroyed negative things.

Makeup means a means of creating variety and pleasure: A group of respondents consider makeup to be a tool that can cause diversity; for example, one respondent says "*Make-up means removing the face from simplicity*". According to this group, make-up brings variety for them. They get tired of always being the same shape and see their face without simple and repetitive makeup.

Makeup means a means of changing the mood: Some respondents defined makeup as a means of changing mood. As such, they argued that make-up was a means to an end when they were depressed, and that some considered it a means of gaining self-confidence.

The findings of this part of the study on the expression of what makeup meant from the perspective of women make it clear that the purpose of women's use of makeup is to greatly influence their definition of makeup. They define makeup more by stating the purpose. For example, those who seek beauty see make-up as a means of beautification, and those who seek variety and pleasure introduce make-up as a means of diversification, so the goal defines the means.

During the interview, respondents cited a number of reasons for wearing makeup. By examining the interviewee's statements, we extracted concepts, and in the next step, we put these concepts together and came up with more general concepts that can be classified as more general categories. Given the breadth of the spectrum, we categorize these reasons into two social dimensions, one by one, and explain these reasons;

Social reasons: These reasons include things that goes back to society in some way. The most important social reasons include increasing social capital, coercion or group conformity, gaining social opportunities, and turning makeup into a part of lifestyle.

A) Increasing social capital

According to Bourdieu, social capital is the sum of actual and potential benefits that actors gain through membership in social networks and organizations. Therefore, the social capital of individuals is obtained from the presence and continuity of their presence in this network of relationships, and if people are somehow excluded or

marginalized from the network of relationships, they are deprived of the material and spiritual benefits of these relationships. In this regard, the statements of the interviewees show that some people seek to increase their range of communication by applying makeup, and a group of respondents want to communicate better and more effectively with others. This group believes that with better makeup, they can initiate communication and even attract communication. One respondent says: *"When I have make-up, others look at me better; they like to communicate with me and start talking"*

Other respondents in their communication considered it important to be noticed in the spotlight of the opposite sex and believed that they would achieve this goal by applying makeup. For example, one respondent says: *"When I put on make-up, I feel that I care more about boys, that I get more out of them, and that I'm more successful in connecting with them. Most boys count on well-groomed girls and like to talk to them all the time"*.

Some people believe that people like to talk to beautiful people and enjoy talking to them, and on the other hand, when a person is well-groomed and beautiful, other good qualities come to mind that affect the quality of their relationship.

B) Compulsion or social conformity

Respondents use proverbs such as: *"When in Rome, do as the Romans do"*, or *"If you go to the city of the blind, put your hand on your eye"* To explain the reasons for their makeup, it clearly indicates the tendency of people for social harmony. This alignment can be both mandatory and optional. A group of respondents use makeup to escape the humiliation and ridicule of others and some to gain group approval. Paying attention to the short memory of one of the respondents makes this clearer: *" I remember the first days of university very well, I remember one day when a couple of people were sitting in the classroom waiting for the class to start, one of the girls entered our classroom who was very simple and without makeup. The two people sitting in front of me pointed to the girl and said in a mocking tone: "It is clear from her appearance that she is from the city!" Look, she didn't wear makeup at all! ... What does the city square mean? It means rural, it means spelling, it means not knowing how to make up. From that day on, I realized that if I didn't want to be stigmatized and ridiculed, I had to be like them."*

C) Make-up as a way of life

A group of respondents look at makeup as a particular way of life or even a part of life. This group of respondents considers makeup to be a part of health activities and a part of body management and they believe that makeup makes the eyes look cleaner and more orderly. One respondent says: *" When I make up, I feel like I'm not slutty anymore, I think women who don't have makeup are slutty; makeup is kind of clean and healthy."*

They also believe that make-up has become so common and normal that it is unusual for someone not to wear make-up and they say there are no more bad looks on makeup today and it has become the norm. One respondent says: *"Today, make-up has become commonplace among many people so that if someone doesn't put on make-up,*

they talk behind their backs! In the eyes of the people, a person who does not wear make-up is a person who does not care about himself."

D) Acquiring social opportunities

Trying to increase one's chances of gaining social opportunities is another reason to dress up among the respondents. Marriage, employment, and success are among the most important opportunities that girls in society seek to pursue, and their own interpretation of makeup enhances their chances of achieving these opportunities. This group of respondents believes that because boys choose their spouses today, the appearance of girls and, in other words, their beauty has become an important criterion for choosing a spouse. They also have to put on make-up to obtain the proper mate and win the contest. One respondent said: *"It is very important to be beautiful because in our society, women are always chosen and never choose themselves."*

Table1. Categories

Women's perception of beauty and beauty signs	Activities in the public sphere	Intentional activities	Beauty and makeup place	Type of Activity		
				Location of activity		
				Familiarity or strangeness of place and group		
				The stability or instability of the group and the collective		
		Unintentional activities	The meaning of beauty and makeup	Beauty		
				Hygiene, cleanliness and beauty		
				Create variety and fun		
				Mood change		
			Reasons for beauty and makeup	Social reasons	Increase social capital	
					Social coercion or homogeneity	
					Make-up as a lifestyle	
				Individual reasons	Gaining social opportunities	
					Build a new and ideal identity	
					Self-denial or self-concealment	
			The consequence of beauty and makeup	The body as the realm of the exercise of individual power and creativity		
				General areas and signs		
				Makeup and the use of signs		
				The media and the need for women's beauty and makeup		

Individual reasons**A) Creating a new and ideal identity:**

Some people make up because they want to create a new, self-identifying personality. This group of people, by applying make-up, want to present a desirable personality and induce positive and valuable ideas in the society to others. These people feel that by applying makeup, they can achieve a part of themselves. As an example, one of the respondents says: "*After a few years of makeup, I think I've been able to create new faces for myself. People know me and love me with this face. Myself, I know myself with this face and I like it. With this face, I find a new character that I don't want to lose.*"

B) Self-denial or self-concealment

Self-denial or self-concealment is another reason for respondents to be prone to makeup. It is not important for this group to build a new identity, but rather to hide themselves and their identity, even their physical and mental characteristics. They see makeup as a mask that they put on their face and identity to keep it hidden from others. One respondent says: "*Honestly, my face is very easy for others to understand that I am a scumbag, I am suffering from this and I do not want others to consider me backward and judge me accordingly. That's why I try to hide this somewhat by applying makeup.*"

C) The body as an arena for the exercise of individual power and creativity

Some respondents consider it their right to make up or not to make up, and by making up, they seek change, role-playing, and creativity. One of the respondents states that: "*Everyone has the right to decide how and when to wear makeup, and he or she is responsible for what he or she does.*"

This group of respondents emphasizes the individualization of the body and considers the body as a private arena and a field for the exercise of individual power. These people believe that not accepting the abilities of women in society and not paying attention to the flourishing of their talents in the public sphere can be rooted in the socio-cultural fields in Iranian society and make them feel incapable of exercising power in the social sphere. Accordingly, they try to exercise power as a social compensator in the private sphere, that is, their body, and this provides them with the means to do so. In this regard, one of the respondents says: "*Because I can't meet my needs, I see in myself the power to at least be able to look and play.*"

Discussion

Make-up and the tendency of people to become attractive as one of the personal trait were investigated in this social study and its position in the social life of girls and the reasons for their tendency to make-up were analyzed by the actors who were involved in this phenomenon.

The results of this study indicate that beauty and makeup are intertwined with people's life plans and are regulated and coordinated by it. During the interview, they point to a range of social and individual reasons for their tendency toward beauty. Despite the existing structural pressures, girls have retained some of their agency in

choosing their appearance; beauty and makeup are rational ways to acquire symbolic capital and even turn it into other types of capital, the statement said. We have found that women, along with the prevalence of beauty ideas in the media, use beauty signs and ideas to achieve abstract happiness, trying to introduce it as a cultural food based on excessive consumption of facial beauty and makeup and body beauty ideas.

The findings of this study showed, that women adapt their cosmetic behaviors to the audience and the specific places and situations they encounter during the day, and makeup is intertwined with the daily routine of women. That is, they determine the amount and manner of their makeup by considering their culture in different environments, the type of place, the familiarity or strangeness of the place, the type and gender of the audience, the amount of communication, the type of gathering, the stability of the group, the type of clothing and the type of activity and ... change. Private work environments, commuting and shopping in the upper areas of the city, familiarity of space and place and group, sustainability of the group, masculinity of the audience increase the amount of makeup or its importance.

During the interview, individuals cited a range of social and individual reasons. Social communication and positive impact on others was one of the most important reasons cited by respondents. Today, the issue of social communication is very important for young people, especially girls.

A look at makeup and beauty in relation to media consumption, body and beauty ideas shows signs are used to achieve abstract happiness that women find accessible by using appearance and cosmetics, and the media plays an important role in creating this kind of happiness and, of course, psychological failure for women. The media promotes a kind of beauty that can only be achieved with make-up, which, despite their use, is never achieved by women and suffers from what Jean Baudrillard calls psychological failure in the consumer society. Here the person is constantly consuming in order to achieve that beauty and beauty shown in the media, and it is always instilled in her that she has not yet achieved it.

Much of women's inclination, in addition to being a product of commercial advertising and more for sale, is sometimes due to economic competition and job search. Make-up is often not wanted by women and they do it under social pressure. Cultural policymakers must pay attention to both the demands of women and the demands of society on beauty. Many women enjoy general consumption. With cultural planning, this consumerism, which is the result of the interaction of the capitalist system to promote consumerism and women's own desires, can be directed in the right direction. Border controls can also prevent huge profits from flowing into the pockets of global capitalism and large corporations. But even if land borders are closed, if cultural boundaries and culturally vulnerable elements are not improved, there will still be a demand for imported products and cosmetics.

But from another point of view, cultural efforts should be made to define beauty in society so that material beauty and physical beauty are not considered only as a basis for social judgments and criteria for acceptance. Today's definitions of beauty are often influenced by Western and American media standards

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