

**Cosmetic Usage:**

How has the use of cosmetics affected individuals?

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**Abstract**

Regardless of gender, the use of cosmetics has been a staple in society. Make-up has impacted civilization and evolved significantly throughout the years. With that said we need to understand the history of make-up, why was it used? How was it used? And how it has influenced the public to use it. We can see a long history of make-up used to enhance beauty, cover up any imperfections, use as a problem solver, and achieve whatever the beauty standard is at the time, and the list goes on. The purpose of this paper is to inform viewers how makeup affects users/individuals, whether it's positive or negative. Some disciplines that contribute to the source is psychology, it allows us to view make-up by the study of the mind, meaning comprehending one's feelings, thoughts, and perception when applying/using make-up. Another discipline is sociology and it is the study of humans, understanding the social interactions/behaviors towards the use of cosmetics. Finally, health allows us to view make-up from a medical perspective, since it contains many toxins to one skin it can harm individuals physically when they aren't aware of the ingredients used. With the results, we can see different points of view on the subject matter and can conclude how cosmetics have transformed society and the way it's used.

### **How has the use of cosmetics affected individuals?**

Before we dive into the impact of cosmetics, we need to go back to its origin. We need to understand when, why, and how cosmetics started. One of the earliest histories of cosmetics originated back in Egyptian times, where it is believed that wearing make-up appealed to the gods (Matthias, 2021). Men and women at the time used products such as “khol” which brightened up the eyes and used what's today called eyeliner. Different types of powders to lighten skin tones and complexion and the use of eyeshadow, specifically in the shade of green represented power and the gods. Another era of time is the Byzantine Empire where cosmetics were extremely popular and embarrassed all forms of beauty. Using products for various reasons, such as the enhancement of beauty, complexion, and upholding standards. But we can also see how make-up in other eras was despised. The Roman Empire glorified hygienic care in both women and men, believing the beauty standard was a natural beauty. In Rome, products such as soaps, moisturizers, hair removal, etc. were used by everyone as a sign of status. But associated the use of make-up with shamelessness and was extremely frowned upon, connecting the use of make-up to “sex workers”. The only time when cosmetics were considered approachable was in the line of theater work. Having said that, we can see an increasing use of cosmetics and its impact on society. Although it's not shamed upon or used as a status as as much as before, “Cosmetics, now “productized” and advertised, again became a mark of wealth and status, and emphasizing physical features, even for sex appeal, was no longer considered quite so selfish or wicked.”(Matthias, 2021).

Understanding the impact of cosmetics is a complex issue and can't be solved like a simple math problem. There are many gray areas to take into consideration and it's not so black and white. Involving many disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and health will allow us to

understand the problem and aid in the advancement of tackling the issue at hand. Many of the approaches demonstrated in each discipline took ideas in research, conducting case studies, and understanding the statistics of cosmetic usage. It's important to conduct a literature search while analyzing the problem by looking into each insight. As well as identifying conflicts between each discipline and also understanding the common ground that they display. By doing so, we can gain a comprehensive understanding and be able to communicate results.

Nowadays women have spent a great deal of time and money indulging in cosmetic products. "Surveys with American women showed that 78% spent one hour per day on their appearance (e.g., hair treatments, dressing up, and makeup)." (Mafra, Silva, Varella, Valentova, 2022). Which begs the question, what motivates users to do so? From a sociological perspective, we can see it has become a social norm to apply makeup at any time of the day regardless of gender. It's a way to fix up any imperfections one might have thus creating a dependency to uphold any beauty standards. We can see an incline of effort put into make-up so individuals won't feel judged and sustain professionalism. "The perceived judgment that would come from non-conformity and explained by the postfeminist gaze appeared, indeed, to play a contingent role in the importance of cosmetic usage" (Robertson and Kingsley, 2021) In our socio-culture it appears that it's important to have some make-up on to seem more approachable but that doesn't correlate with how some individuals might feel. People have a sense of belonging, while the "outside world" places pressure on perfection, which causes users to maintain an appropriate manner to seem acceptable. For example, putting effort into appearance so others can take you seriously, because if you aren't up to the standard you will be disregarded. "To gain weight [or to fail to conform to the cultural ideal] is to 'let oneself down' to risk social disapprobation, to lose status and self-respect" (Robertson and Kingsley, 2021). Understanding the social impact of

cosmetic usage can harm one's social self-esteem although this may be a negative approach, other individuals don't feel the same. Some users indulge in cosmetics to feel "different" from the rest. Standout from societal norms, and aid into confidence in social settings. Although there is pressure from society to uphold, many use make-up to combat that. "cosmetics also appear to be used as a "psychological mask" both to decrease negative self-perception and, as suggested, as a way of managing social anxiety or public self-consciousness."(Robertson and Kingsley, 2021).

With the increased use of social media, trends evolving and the constant change in beauty standards affect individuals, specifically in the use of make-up. From that, many individuals tend to compare themselves to the lifestyle and the obscure level of beauty. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, etc. have become a beacon of any beauty-related questions and trends. Consequences of exposure can arise as it idealizes unhealthy beauty standards. "Thus, the increase in digital media usage increased the pressure to look as good as possible because people were increasingly exposed to images and videos of very good-looking individuals"(Mafra, Silva, Varella, Valentova, 2022) There's always a change happening in the beauty industry that stresses individuals trying to achieve the level of perfection. Which can cause harm to one's psychological health, for example: low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and trying to fit into the aesthetic of it all. There is a correlation between one's body image and make-up, if one is unhappy with how they look with themselves, they tend to apply and spend more on the needed applications. "A survey conducted in 2011 among 1,292 women of 18 years of age and older showed that almost half of the women sampled had negative feelings when they don't wear make-up, as being unattractive and self-conscious." (Al-Samydai, Abu Hajleh, Yousif, Alsamydai, 2021, p. 1367) We can see how make-up is becoming more subjective rather

than objective, meaning make-up has become more of a personal feeling rather than wearing make-up for a specific count. As mentioned in Egyptian times make-up was used as an objective to preserve status with the perception of god-like. Rather than now, make-up is used based on one's feelings and how it's applied, some enjoy a natural look while others like a more exaggerated look. Though currently there has been an increase in embracing a more natural look compared to previous years.

Make-up not only affects one's social and psychological aspects but it's connected to one's physical health. With the endless types of products containing many different types of chemicals can be toxic to the skin. Chemicals such as fluorinated compounds that are mainly used for firefighters' foams, fabric coaters, cookware, and other household items are found in several make-up products, specifically in mascaras, foundations, and lip products containing the highest amount. "Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), a highly persistent and potentially toxic class of chemicals, are added to cosmetics to increase their durability and water resistance."(Whitehead, Venier, Wu, ... McGuinness, and Peaslee, 2021). Another harmful chemical is phthalates which is one of the key compounds produced in plastic and is found in many personal care items such as nail polish, hairspray, perfumes, and lotions. "The concerns that are focused around this particular chemical [class] have arisen from a series of tests and studies that have been released recently that point to significant potential health concerns" (Barrett, 2005). Astonishingly, numerous individuals are exposed to such chemicals without realizing it. The beauty industry needs to be more honest with its consumers and understand the long-term harm that these cosmetics may cause. Although some of these products can seem amazing and see improvement from first use, we can never know what are the lingering effects of using these products. However, there are several ways to properly apply and remove

cosmetics. First is to understand your skin type, if you have sensitive, oily, dry, or a combination, and then find the perfect product that complements your skin. Next, is to understand the types of ingredients in your products, this will aid in catering to the safety of your physical health.

Finally, always use gentle cleaners and make-up removers such as micellar water to properly remove any cosmetics that you apply.

With that said, we can take some of the teachings, methods, and beliefs presented in each discipline. Regarding sociology, we can take a look at case studies to help us understand how society shapes and regulates the beauty industry. They control specific products that are popular and set the standard of how make-up is applied and used. Psychology will help us understand people's motives and usage when it comes to make-up. It allows us to dive deeper into what specifically makes users want to indulge their time, money, and effort in makeup. As well as what are people's opinions on these causes. Finally, healthcare allows us to be wary of what chemicals are used to make these cosmetics products. Are they good for us? Or are they safe for consumers who would want to invest?

“Behind the Façade: Motivations for Cosmetic Usage by Women” conducted a case study revolving around what is the socio-cultural norm when it comes to cosmetic usage. They posted questions on several popular websites such as Reddit, Facebook, Twitter, etc. circling what motivates you to wear make-up and received responses from 47 different women, and found four main themes “Multiple selves—Conformity, impression management, and judgment”, “Enhancement and confidence”, “Fun, creativity, and well-being”, and “Signification and identity”. From that, they understood the chokehold that society has when it comes to make-up usage.

“Make-Up Effects: Psychological and Sociological Perspective” and “The Contrasting Effects of Body Image and Self-esteem in makeup usage” both conducted similar studies revolving around the psychological effects of makeup. Both authors did a study on groups of women (Jordanian and Brazilian women) and came out with similar results regarding one's opinion and feelings towards make-up usage. They found that most women had different views on the matter, some enjoyed the wear of make-up and didn't care for what others thought. However other women had the opposite beliefs and felt pressure from others, thus creating self-consciousness within women.

“Fluorinated Compounds in North American Cosmetics” conducted a case study regarding per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances found in many cosmetics. “A total of 231 cosmetics across eight categories including lip products, eye products, foundations, face products, mascaras, concealers, eyebrow products, and miscellaneous products were analyzed using PIGE”(Whitehead, Venier, Wu, ... McGuinness, and Peaslee, 2021) and found that foundation had the highest amount of fluorinated concentration while mascara had the highest amount of fluorinated measurements. “Chemical Exposures: The Ugly Side of Beauty Products” did more of a research study and found a common ingredients in plastic are found in a lot of cosmetics.

In my understanding, integrating all these methods can help better cosmetics by creating more safe alternatives. Beauty industries need to strive for a better understanding of their audience by displaying products in a more empathetic way, without the need to set up high beauty standards. As well as being more cautious of what the attitude it displays since it can pose a threat to one's mental health. Companies need to be honest with their products and try to find

solutions to integrate chemicals without being too harmful to one's skin type. Applying these perspectives will allow us to develop better products, campaigns, and opinions on the matter.

After conducting my research, I've concluded that make-up has impacted society in several ways and it's never going to stop. The everlasting evolution of cosmetics is here to stay, though it might take different forms it will forever influence the population. In my findings, I've realized that different factors come into play regarding what drives individuals when wanting to apply makeup and invest in beauty products. As well as understanding what is make-up and how others like to use it is crucial when comprehending its significance in society. Realizing that cosmetics have their positives and negatives depending on the user also came into play, for example, the chemicals found in some make-ups, many consumers seem not to care for the harmful tendencies that beauty products may display. Many simply apply these products to aid in their self-esteem, mood, and standing within society or use make-up as a form of self-expression and to build confidence. Overall make-up presents itself as a tool, and it falls into the hands of individuals of how they want to use this tool.

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