

Honors Thesis:

# How Feminism and Social Media Have Influenced Millennials' Perceptions of Makeup

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Abstract: This thesis was conducted to research makeup's role in American society. Societal standards are a driving force in the decision to wear makeup, and this research observes how social media and feminism have affected makeup trends. This project is driven by the grounded theory. A literature review and survey concluded that there is a connection among feminism, social media and makeup usage. The most common theme found was that makeup is dictated by societal expectations and social norms.

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## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

At first glance, makeup does not seem like a controversial subject. As early as 10,000 B.C., Egyptian women and men have outlined their eyes with kohl or stained their lips with henna (Chaudhri & Jain, 2009). Throughout history, a woman or man's decision on whether or not to wear makeup has essentially been a cultural statement. In the United States, the majority of women wear makeup on some occasions, while the majority of men rarely wear makeup. However, the societal rules and acceptance of wearing makeup in the United States is changing as opportunity for individual expression has increased and social institutions providing guidelines for normative behavior have weakened. Some women are uncomfortable leaving their house without makeup on, while other women refuse to ever wear makeup. For men, the decision to wear makeup can take on complex social rationalizations.

This literature review was conducted to better understand makeup's role in American society. Two aspects essential to the function of makeup are feminism and social media. Feminism was the driving factor in normalizing the use of makeup in American culture; eventually, feminism would become the reason some women opt out of wearing makeup and the reason some men opt into wearing it. Social media plays a critical role in feminism and makeup because it introduces the ability to create an online persona; providing new venues of individual expression unbound by traditional social norms. To fully understand how feminism and social media have altered how makeup is used within our culture, the history must be explained in the context of social media, feminism and makeup.

### **History of Feminism**

First-wave feminism began with the women's suffrage movement of the 1800s. Many scholars divide the movement into two sections: the antebellum women's rights movement and the women's suffrage movement after the Civil War. Suzanne Marilley, associate professor of political science at Capital University and women's rights scholar, divided the movement into three distinct sections, which more accurately characterize the traits of the movement. The three phases are feminism of equal rights (1820 to 1870), feminism of fear (1870 to 1900) and feminism of personal development (1900 to 1920) (Marilley & Judson, 1999).

Feminism of equal rights surfaced in the Jacksonian era as a response to those against women's involvement in the abolitionist movement. By the end of the Civil War, feminism of fear emerged as a result of drunken men committing violent acts against women. This movement focused on women's rights to live free from fear and cruel abuse or death. Feminism of personal development was the last phase of first-wave feminism and championed for women to be full persons, including the right to vote (Marilley & Judson, 1999).

There was a distinct difference between the leaders of the suffrage movement and the anti-suffragists. Suffrage leaders tended to be from rural areas, embodying the traits of the “New Woman.” Anti-suffragists were New York elites that promoted the ladylike position of the “power behind the throne.” They voiced their opinions on social issues such as family welfare, the female character, and domestic roles, which are topics that are still being debated in modern feminism (Marilley & Judson, 1999).

The second wave of feminism did not reach its height until after World War II. Labor unions for women became stronger with the absence of men in the workplace. Simone de Beauvoir noted in her 1949 book “The Second Sex” that women broke out of their forced gender roles during World War II, and she questioned why women should revert to those roles when men returned home (Vasliopoulou, 2014).

By the 1970s, second-wave feminism had split into two ideological movements. The first movement, called equal-rights feminism, desired political and social equality between men and women, both in the workforce and in family settings. These feminists were typically white, older and upper-class. Radical feminism was on the other end of the spectrum and yearned for a fundamental change to society. Radical feminists were young white women and minorities involved in the civil rights movement (LeGates, 2001).

During the second wave of feminism, radical feminists believed that patriarchal society pressured women to be beautiful, and many stopped wearing makeup as an act of rebellion. Susan Brownmiller, a leader in the second-wave feminist movement, noted:

“An unadorned face became the honorable new look of feminism in the early 1970s, and no one was more happier with the freedom not to wear makeup than I, yet it could hardly escape my attention that more women supported the Equal Rights Amendment and legal abortion than could walk out of the house without eye shadow.” (1984)

Much like today, choosing to wear makeup or choosing not to wear makeup was a statement. According to Davis (1991), women entering the workforce for the first time felt pressure to wear makeup and look stylish to impress potential employers. A widespread practice of the time was to portray feminists as physically unattractive. Television reporters who interviewed feminists would frequently point out what she was wearing and her level of femininity. Women held the fear that if they did not wear makeup, their peers and coworkers would perceive them as radical feminists (Davis, 1991).

Despite the negative portrayal of feminism in media, the movement gained support, enough so to affect the makeup industry in the 1970s. Cosmetics, perfumes and hair-care products all suffered from flat or declining sales early in the movement (Faludi, 1991). The

beauty industry re-established its relevance and power in the women's movement by creating the standard of the independent "new woman." Naomi Wolf, author of the 1991 best-seller "The Beauty Myth," described how the beauty industry and advertisers replaced the myth that women were fulfilled as housewives and mothers with new standards of weight, beauty and fashion to increase sales of beauty products (1991).

The advertising industry used a variety of tactics to appeal to anti-feminists and feminists alike. Advertisements strayed from the stay-at-home mother portrayal and turned their focus to the new working woman. Campaigns began to feature thin, stylish and beautiful women alongside empowering and liberating messages. Vogue ran an editorial on the new American woman in 1972, saying:

"She looks great. She feels great. The American woman has a whole new view of herself pioneered out of self-reliance and a divine discontent with just making do as a wife/woman, mother, chauffeur, cook, lawnmower, keeper of family dogs, cats, hamsters... and, always, a knockout." (p. 75)

With this portrayal, independent women and family women could be empowered.

Makeup shifted from being a tool used for looking presentable for others to a way for women to express and empower themselves. The advertising industry found a way to convince feminists to buy their products without fear of being labeled a radical feminist. This was when the idea of natural makeup, sometimes referred to as the "no-makeup makeup look" was introduced. Feminists could look like they had given up wearing makeup without actually doing so. The popular makeup brand Revlon created a product labeled as a demi-makeup with the tagline, "the makeup that is and isn't" (p. 16).

The feminist movement lost some of its momentum in the late 1980s, but the beauty dilemma persisted as an underlying reservation for many feminists. Various feminist authors of the time, including Lois Banner, Rita Freedman and Valerie Steele, argued that women's reliance on makeup is not the fault of pressures from a patriarchal society, as radical feminists claim. Instead, Banner, Freedman and Steele state women aren't reliant on makeup, and that women wear cosmetics as a form of female empowerment. The use of cosmetics and fashion as a form of self-expression was a "rejection of the Victorian prohibition on sensual expression," argued Banner (1983).

Furthermore, Linda Scott, another feminist author, pointed out that almost all the founders of major American cosmetic companies have been women. Scott argues that makeup is not a tool that aids in the objectification of women, but a product of entrepreneurial working

women. She believes that by producing or consuming, beauty products are one of the limited channels to power that are available to women (Scott, 1993).

Second-wave feminism had shifted its energy by the late 1980s. Building off the foundation of first and second-wave feminism, Generation X entered into a third wave of feminism in the 1990s. According to Burkett and Brunell “The women and others like them grew up with the expectation of achievement and examples of female success as well as an awareness of the barriers presented by sexism, racism and classism,” (2019). Third-wave feminists began to reclaim and redefine gender roles, femininity, masculinity, sexuality and beauty. The idea that some expectations are strictly for women or men is becoming obsolete.

Although makeup is not a frontline topic in feminism, as it was in the 1970s and 1980s, the pressure society places on women to be beautiful and the effects of second-wave feminism are still present. A current dominant makeup brand, Maybelline, proves this with its slogan, “Maybe she’s born with it. Maybe it’s Maybelline.” Despite these pressures, the makeup industry is adjusting to the current social climate. It is up to the individual woman or man to decide if makeup is empowering, objectifying, neither, or even both.

### **Social Media and The Online Persona**

There are three identifiable traits of social media: users must be able to create a profile, add friends and see other users’ friends lists. The first social networking site to do this was SixDegrees, which incorporated all three aspects in 1998. Although the internet was becoming increasingly popular, the site shut down two years later. Critics of the site said there was little to do after accepting friend requests (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

The next iconic social media to emerge was Friendster in 2002. This site was designed to compete with emerging dating sites. The theory was that friends-of-friends would be better romantic partners than strangers. The site quickly gained massive popularity, which caused technical and social difficulties. This drove many American users off the website in what has been called “the greatest disappointment in internet history” (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Friendster sparked the revolution of social media. Many of the networks that followed capitalized on the idea of media sharing and creating custom profiles. Smith and Anderson reported that in 2018, 73 percent of adults in the United States use Youtube and 68 percent use Facebook. In 2018, 78 percent of 18 to 24-year-olds use Snapchat, 71 percent use Instagram and 45 percent use Twitter (2018).

Giving users the opportunity to make custom profiles and share unique content created the idea of the online persona. The online persona, or the presentation of the self on the internet, is the opportunity for one to present his or herself in a controlled way online. Erving Goffman

originally introduced the idea for controlled presentation of the self for human interaction in his work “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.” The concept can be applied to social media as well.

In his work, Goffman analyzed interpersonal interaction and detailed how humans can “perform” to present a desirable image of themselves. Those participating in interpersonal interactions are called actors. Front-stage acting occurs when an actor is conscious of being observed by others and is performing by using specific rules and social conventions to portray him or herself in the desired way. Back-stage acting is the behavior in a private setting, where no performance is necessary (Goffman, 1990). This performance is referred to as self-presentation because it provides people with the option to form new identities and for humans to believe that they have become an enhanced person (Brown, 1998).

When a performer uses a “mask,” he or she is not changing his or her identity. A mask is a metaphor that is a placeholder of sorts for different fragments of one’s personality. Depending on the metaphorical mask that a performer is wearing, the individual is simultaneously bringing forth a particular aspect of his or her character while hiding other traits. Despite which mask the performer is wearing, the performer is both the mask being worn and the hidden person behind the mask (Goffman, 1990).

An essential aspect of Goffman’s argument is that people have intended expressions that they give, and inadvertent expressions that they give off. The intended expressions that performers give are communicated effectively, but the inadvertent expressions performers give off are impressions that were not intended to be received by the audience (Goffman, 1990). When online, users can be more thoughtful and thoroughly think through their performance and which mask they wish to wear, which leads to more front-stage acting and more intentional expressions.

Although some scholars believe that Goffman’s model is outdated or that it cannot be applied to online interactions due to the lack of visible cues present, other scholars give compelling arguments stating the opposite (Gargiela-Chiappini & Haugh, 2010). Miller argues that because social media are so personable, it introduces a new “richness” to communication and that online interactions are extensions of Goffman’s notion. He also argues that offline interactions could also be considered back-stage preparation for online interactions (Miller, 1995).

The online persona can be a metaphorical mask. In this case, someone’s online identity is not a new identity but a facet of the self that can also be found in face-to-face interactions (Baptista, 2003). Goffman also says that performers are expected to maintain face, which means audiences are expecting the same initial impression that the performer originally made

(Goffman, 1990). This can further prove that Goffman's theory can be applied to online personas because audiences (followers) are expecting the performer (the poster) to maintain face and continue the content to which they originally subscribed.

In a study conducted by Liam Bullingham and Ana Vasconcelos about online personas, they found that it was not uncommon for people who presented themselves in online spaces to "embellish the self." Participants in the study admitted to exaggerating stories that they tell and to minorly embellishing facts about their life. Bullingham and Vasconcelos describe these tendencies as minor forms of persona adaption and liken it to wearing a metaphorical mask (2013).

Bullingham and Vasconcelos also found the study participants' online personas reflected their offline selves, but not always entirely. Instead, online users replicate their offline identity but only highlight certain aspects of their personality online. The researchers state that this behavior is only partially-masking because the online presentation is a limited version, whereas the offline self would give a fuller picture (2013). This could explain how users create their online personas.

The study also found that adopting an online persona that is different from the offline self is sometimes due to societal pressure and outside influences. Influences could include family members, peers, friends or even society as a whole. Societal pressure induces a need for conformity regardless of the person's true self. Conformity could be in participating or abstaining in behavior, beliefs or appearance. In some cases, the true self is the online persona and not in face-to-face interactions (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013).

The online persona is a vital topic in discussing makeup in today's culture. Makeup provides a way for one to embellish his or her appearance, whether it be to conform to society's beauty standards, enhance one's features or portray a different person entirely with her or his online persona.

YouTube was launched in 2005 and is now one of the largest sources of user-generated content, as well as one of the most frequently visited sites globally (Burgess & Green, 2009). The website allows users to broadcast themselves through vlogging (video-blogging) and partake in identity-forming practices. A popular community on the site is the beauty community.

The beauty community on Youtube consists of users who teach new makeup techniques, exhibit and review products and circulate any relevant information or updates regarding trends or brands. The unique characteristic of this community is that there is typically an immediate transformation of the physical self in the video. Vloggers in the beauty community usually



engage in self-disclosure and openly talk about their physical flaws that go against society's standards of beauty.

In this transformation, the vlogger typically starts with a bare face, then talks the viewer through the process of applying makeup. By the end, the vlogger may have numerous different products on his or her face. By Goffman's standards, the vlogger is literally constructing his or her mask, whether it be a facet of his or her true self, or a representation of who he or she would like to be (Kennedy, 2016).

One of the most well-known vloggers in the YouTube beauty community is Nikkie de Jager, who runs a YouTube channel under the screen name NikkieTutorials. On May 10, 2015, de Jager uploaded a video titled "The Power of MAKEUP!" The video went viral both inside and outside the beauty community, and it brought to light the complexities of makeup in feminism. Within the first minute of the video, de Jager explains that she has noticed women feeling ashamed to say they love makeup. Others might assume that a woman is wearing makeup because she wants to look good for boys, she's insecure or she doesn't love herself (de Jager, 2015).

Inspired by "RuPaul's Drag Race," a popular television show, de Jager demonstrates the power of makeup by only putting full-glam makeup on one side of her face and keeping the other side completely natural and unedited. She explains that makeup should not be used to cope with insecurities, but that "makeup is fun and there are no rules," (de Jager, 2015).

Since it was posted, her video has over 40 million views. The seven-minute video brings forth a contradiction that many women and men face in society today. This is the issue of authenticity versus makeup as a tool of transformation (Kennedy, 2016). Transformations, like weight loss or home renovations, are becoming more popular in contemporary society, along with confession, intimacy and authenticity (Lewis, 2008). This places makeup in a unique spot.

Nikkie de Jager's video started a "Power of Makeup" movement online. Critics of the movement argue that full-glam makeup is not natural and transforms the identity so much so that the person wearing it is fake. Supporters of the movement counter this by saying makeup is a tool for self-expression and allows wearers to explore and create in the same way that technology enables individuals to reinvent themselves online (Papacharissi, 2002).

Social media sites have not necessarily changed how makeup is perceived. However, social media have highlighted controversies within feminism in the context of makeup and brought about a new platform for identity creation. For many people, it is an issue that makeup can be used to embellish one's authentic identity, whether online or in real life. The difference is that social media provides users the chance to create online personas utterly different than their

physical self. The online persona that one chooses to create is a unique form of individual expression in an online culture where the self is a brand. Social media can be used by feminists to empower themselves and fight for freedom to wear or not wear makeup without judgment.

### **Makeup and Identity**

There is a popular saying that “those that look good, feel good.” For many people, this statement is true. In a study conducted by Dove, 78 percent of girls with low self-esteem admitted it was hard to feel good in school when they did not feel good about how they looked. For girls who reported having high self-esteem, this number was 54 percent (The Dove Self-Esteem Fund, 2008). Outward appearance has a strong influence on self-esteem.

Research shows that makeup is equivalent to a security blanket for some women. Renfrew Center Foundation conducted a survey that concluded that 44 percent of women felt more unattractive and uncomfortable when they were not wearing makeup than when they were wearing makeup. Of the 44 percent, 14 percent of women also reported feeling naked without makeup. Only 3 percent said that wearing no makeup made them feel more attractive (Renfrew Center Foundation, 2012). A different study found that women’s satisfaction with their bodies increased with the use of cosmetics (Theberge & Kernaleguen, 1979).

Not only does makeup play a role in self-esteem, but it also affects perceptions of social interactions. Robertson and colleagues found that there is a positive correlation between cosmetic usage and introversion, anxiety and conformity (Robertson, Fieldman, & Hussey, 2014). Furthermore, women who wore makeup and were concerned about their appearance were more likely to believe that makeup resulted in enhanced social interactions (Miller & Cox, 1982).

A self-fulfilling prophecy could explain this behavior. Self-conscious women who wear makeup judge themselves to be more attractive when they are wearing makeup. Because of this, these women act more confidently when wearing makeup, which causes the people they are interacting with to respond more positively. This results in a more successful social interaction than when someone is uncomfortable and less confident because they are not wearing makeup (Miller & Cox, 1982).

Not only do some women perceive themselves differently when they are wearing makeup, but other people might also view them differently as well. In a study conducted in 2006, pictures of the same women with and without makeup were rated by male and female participants. The study found that women wearing makeup in the photos were ranked higher on perceived outward attractiveness and confidence. Women wearing makeup were also perceived to have a more prestigious job than the pictures of women not wearing makeup (Nash, Fieldman, Hussey, Leveque, & Pineau, 2006).

Men who wear makeup experience a different type of judgment than women who wear makeup. In a study conducted by Hall and colleagues, men who showed themselves wearing makeup online are either preconceived as gay, “defective,” or hyper-masculine. A man who wears makeup can be perceived as more masculine when he uses makeup to contour his nose, cheeks and chin (Hall, Gough, & Seymour-Smith, 2012). However, the ability to express individuality in consumer culture has broadened the ability of men to take part in forms of self-representation that involve projecting internalized notions of beauty to confer identity and power.

It is becoming more common for men to wear makeup online and offline. The market for men’s grooming products in the United Kingdom tripled between 2002 and 2006 (Intel, 2007). Popular makeup brands like Clinique and Jean Paul Gaultier offer a variety of men’s makeup products like bronzer, concealer and eyeliner. However, despite specialized lines of men’s makeup, almost all of the popular male vloggers in the YouTube beauty community use the same products that women do.

Some of the most well-known vloggers in the beauty community on YouTube, and on the site in general, are men. One of the youngest, James Charles, is only 19 years old and has over 15 million subscribers. Another vlogger, Jeffree Star, has nearly 14 million subscribers and has produced a cruelty-free makeup line.

Throughout the centuries, makeup has been a principal part of culture and identity. In Ancient Egypt, it was common practice for men and women to wear makeup as a symbol of wealth and class. Today, choosing to wear or not wear makeup can be a statement for men and women. The history of feminism and the rise of social media have cultivated and perpetuated many controversies surrounding makeup. Regardless of the social debate on makeup, it cannot be denied that makeup is a critical factor in self-esteem and perception of others.

## **Primary Research**

### **Executive Summary**

This thesis was conducted in an effort to better understand the relationship between feminism, social media and makeup. After completing the literature review, three questions were formed to guide this research: 1. Is there an expectation among millennials to portray themselves differently on social media than in real life? 2. Do expectations of gender impact makeup habits? 3. Do people who identify as feminist have different makeup habits than those who do not identify as feminist? This project is driven by the grounded theory. There are many societal standards when it comes to makeup, and this research aims to observe how social media and feminism interact with those makeup standards, if at all.

A 10-question survey was created and distributed to students on the Oklahoma State University Stillwater, Oklahoma campus. Participants were generally born between 1981 and 1996, classifying them as millennials (Dimock, 2019). Because the survey did not ask for the participants age, it is also likely that some respondents were born after 1996 as well, classifying them as Generation Z (Dimock, 2019). Respondents were not required to answer every question.

A common theme in the survey was an acceptance that makeup is a personal decision. This was an attitude common in those who do have feminist views and those who do not, as well as in both women and men. Even though makeup is a personal choice, nearly half of the participants said they noticed when someone posted a photo or video of themselves online without wearing makeup. Even more of the respondents noticed, depending on if that person typically wears a lot of makeup.

Another theme that was generally accepted by all respondents was that social media sets unrealistic lifestyle standards for men and women. Despite respondents agreeing that social media sets unrealistic lifestyle standards, 50 percent of the participants did not feel the need to wear makeup in photos or videos of themselves that they post online. It was more likely for someone to feel the need to wear makeup in pictures of videos posted online and notice if someone else is wearing makeup in a photo or video posted online if they identified as feminist.

Some respondents did believe that it was possible to wear too much makeup. It was more likely for someone to believe this if they do not have feminist views. People who do have feminist views and those who do not both stated that it was not exactly that someone could wear too much makeup, but more that they could apply it wrong. Applying the makeup wrong includes using the wrong shades, not blending well and enhancing the face so much so that it alters one's features.

## **Methodology**

To further understand the relationship among feminism, social media and makeup in millennials, a short survey was created. Because all of the participants are adults and there were no risks involved, participants saw a consent statement before continuing on with the survey. The survey consisted of two multiple choice questions. The first asked if the participant was male, female or preferred not to answer, and the second asked if the respondent had pro-feminist views. The other eight questions were free response and can be found in the Appendix.

The survey was conducted on SurveyMonkey, which created a custom link that was sent to GroupMe groups, posted on Twitter and sent to personal contacts. The survey was live from April 2, 2019, to April 10, 2019. Within that time, 43 responses were collected. Of the total, only eight participants were male, which is a major limitation of the study. Another limitation is that 76 percent of the respondents said they had pro-feminist views. The sample size of the survey was not quite large enough to be considered a strong representative of all millennials.

## **Findings**

A majority of the respondents said they did not feel the need to wear makeup when they posted photos or videos of themselves online. The only participants that did feel the need to wear makeup online were women. Many of these women said it was when they had blemishes or acne on their skin that they felt the need to wear makeup before posting photos or videos of themselves online. One respondent said:

“I like how I look with makeup on more than my natural look and on social media I like to put my best self forward and that includes wearing makeup.”

Other respondents pointed out that it depended which platform they were posting the image on. Certain platforms seem to have more of an expectation of beauty than other platforms. This could partly be due to the followers that are exposed to the image of the person with or without makeup. Platforms like Instagram and Twitter allow for hundreds, or even thousands of impressions, while Snapchat users have more control over who can see a poster’s image or video. The survey asked “Do you feel the need to wear makeup when you post photos or videos of yourself online?” and one participant stated:

“I think on Instagram or twitter yes, but not always on Snapchat because it is more casual.”

Almost all male respondents said they did not feel pressure to wear makeup online. One male respondent’s answer stood out, though. He pointed out that he felt pressure to not wear makeup in photos or videos posted online.

“I feel like I can’t wear makeup in photos as a guy.”

Another noticeable trend was that 50 percent of feminist respondents always noticed when others posted photos or videos of themselves without makeup on, when only 33 percent of non-feminists said the same. This means that millennial feminists are more likely to notice others' use of makeup than those who do not claim to be feminist.

Almost half of the participants said they noticed when someone posted a selfie or video online without wearing makeup. However, this behavior is very dependent on if that person usually wears makeup. If someone typically portrayed his or herself online wearing makeup, it was more likely for others to notice that he or she was not wearing makeup in a post.

Many participants noted that it catches their attention because it is uncommon to see a woman post a photo or video without any makeup on at all. When someone does post a photo or video without makeup on when he or she typically wears makeup, most participants explained they did not treat that person any differently, but one participated stated:

“Mostly I really appreciate people being more honest and genuine on social media, even in vlogs or selfies. When I see someone posting a selfie of themselves without makeup on, I tend to make an extra effort to compliment them and tell them how pretty they look.”

Almost all respondents agreed that social media sets unrealistic lifestyle standards. There was only 10 percent of respondents who said they did not feel pressure from social media. Participants who do not have feminist views were less likely to believe that social media sets unrealistic lifestyle standards. Respondents did not differentiate which social media platforms created the most pressure. A common belief was that celebrities and influencers played a role in why people felt so much pressure on social media:

“Social media has given too much social clout to superficial people throwing their wealth, success, and beauty in people's face which makes young, easily influenced people feel pressured to catch up, when it isn't feasible or healthy. It creates detrimental stress to be popular.”

The respondents who believe that social media does set unrealistic lifestyle standards said women are expected to portray their best selves. For women, that means achieving beauty through weight, appearance and personality. Being adventurous and taking “artsy” photos was also another common theme when respondents answered this question. A respondent said:

“I think women have more pressure to be thin and well-dressed and have elaborate and perfect makeup, as well as to look like they're always doing something fun with friends.”

Participants agreed that social media presents men with unrealistic lifestyle standards as well, but for different reasons. When respondents talked about the social media pressures that men felt on it was to not to be thin, but to have large muscles. Men on social media are also expected to be social and successful. One participant said:

“I think men have less standards as far as their looks, but there is still pressure to be almost obscenely ripped and the same pressure to be doing fun things with friends.”

There were six respondents who said they did not have feminist views. Of those six people, five were women and one was a man. One-hundred percent of those respondents said they did not feel pressure to incorporate makeup into their everyday routine. These participants did not expand on why they did not feel pressure to incorporate makeup into their everyday routine.

For the respondents who did claim to have feminist views, they generally also did not feel the need to incorporate makeup into their everyday routine. A common occurrence was that participants enjoyed makeup, but did not have the time or energy to incorporate it into their everyday routine, unless their skin had blemishes or was breaking out.

“I am in college and go to classes from 8 or 9:30am and don’t get home until the evening. I have been told by guys that maybe if I tried I’d be in a relationship and ‘oh, you don’t wear makeup so you must not care.’ But I don’t wear it for them, I wear it for myself and I’m here for an education and not looks.”

Participants typically did not feel the need to incorporate makeup into their everyday routine, but did feel the need to wear it to certain functions or to gain more respect. Respondents felt that when they were wearing makeup, their peers and coworkers were more likely to treat them more seriously. One respondent noted:

“I feel like more of an adult when I wear makeup. I feel like not wearing it prevents people from taking me seriously.”

Another respondent stated:

“Most of the time I do feel pressure to incorporate makeup into my daily routine. I feel like I look less tired and more professional and grownup with makeup on. I want to be taken seriously, so I wear makeup.”

Half of the respondents believed that there were certain places where people should or should not wear makeup. These participants believed that it was not necessary to wear makeup

when doing physical or casual activities. These participants also thought that it was necessary to wear makeup to formal events like a job interview or a wedding. One participant gave a reason for this belief:

“I believe there are social settings when you should look your best and make up helps. Job interviews, presentations. It shows that you care and are putting forth effort.”

Another respondent likened makeup to jewelry. It is not necessary to wear it, but sometimes it does help. A large portion of the participants believed that it was up to the individual to decide where to wear makeup.

“I don’t think it particularly matters. It should only matter how comfortable someone is with them self.”

The decision to wear or not wear makeup being up to the individual is also a common theme among participants when they were asked if someone can wear too much makeup. These respondents said that makeup is a form of expression, so an individual can wear as little or as much as they feel comfortable in. A participant noted that it did not affect them at all on how much makeup another person is wearing:

“I think this is based off people’s personal preference for how much they would be comfortable wearing and that people that say that might not be comfortable wearing that level of makeup themselves, but that they shouldn’t judge someone for that.”

For many other participants, it was not an issue of how much makeup someone is wearing, but the products and technique used to apply the makeup. Issues with the product being used can include mismatched foundation colors, clashing blushes and bronzers or patchy eyeshadow. Technique application issues consist of poor blending, creases on the forehead, under eyes or around the mouth, and mascara or lipstick smudges.

A majority of participants who did not claim to have feminist views believed that others could wear too much. They said that someone is wearing too much makeup when it begins to alter natural features. These respondents claimed that too much makeup looks heavy and overpowering. A common theme that this group brought up was that makeup should be used to enhance natural features, not completely change them. One participant said:

“Although makeup can be beautiful on someone, it is meant to accentuate the natural features of a person’s face. When you see someone that is wearing too much makeup, they are unrecognizable and they are covering up their natural features.”



More than half (58 percent) of the participants in the survey agreed that makeup has no rules. A popular theme for the participants who thought this is that makeup is a creative form of expression. One respondent claimed:

“Makeup is a way of expressing yourself. If you wanna be bold then be bold. If you want to be simple, be simple. If you want to be natural then be natural.”

Another common theme on why people agreed with the phrase “makeup has no rules” is because it does not affect that individual if another person does or does not wear makeup. These people tended to believe that personal preference on makeup was more important than society’s expectations. A participant noted:

“Guidelines maybe, but not rules. They’ve all been broken anyway. Personal preference should trump societal pressure.”

On the other hand, there was also a group who believed the opposite. Some participants noted that wearing makeup to formal events and career events is respectful. Some of these respondents still recognized that makeup is a form of expression, but that pressures from society somewhat outweigh a person’s choice to wear or not wear makeup. This participant stated:

“Make up can be an artistic expression but in some situations, too much expression can hinder you. But that’s not due to the makeup or the applicant, but societal pressures, especially in male-dominated situations or professional situations.”

Despite some respondents believing that makeup does have rules, more than half showed support for men who wear makeup. The respondents who supported this showed excitement, which was indicated by exclamation marks or colloquial idioms, such as “yasss,” “queen” or “go off sis”. One respondent who showed strong support said:

“I think it’s a great way for everyone, including men to express themselves. I think it gives them confidence and I’m all for it. I don’t think that makeup should only be worn by women.”

No respondents said they did not support men who wore makeup, but some found it odd or unusual. Those that thought it was odd thought so because it was against society’s norms. These participants did not understand why some men would want to put the effort in to wearing makeup when society doesn’t expect men to do so. One respondent said:

“To each their own, but that’s a lot of work especially when no one expects a male to wear makeup.”

## **Conclusion**

Makeup has unspoken rules. The findings confirm that women who choose not to wear makeup online make a statement, whether they mean to or not. The most common theme found throughout the survey's results is that makeup is a creative form of self-expression. This form of expression seems to be on a spectrum though, and social norms have a strong impact on this creative outlet.

By choosing to not wear makeup online, women are perceived as going against the social norm. Partly because of celebrities and social media influencers, women and men are expected to showcase all of their achievements, whether it be being physically fit, spending a night on the town or simply taking an attractive photo of oneself. Women who opt out of wearing makeup online were not perceived as ugly or unsuccessful; instead, they are praised for defying an unfair social expectation.

Men who wear makeup online and offline are also praised for overcoming social expectations. The survey found an overwhelming amount of support for men wearing makeup from participants. Even when respondents found it strange or unusual, they acknowledged that a person should feel comfortable in their own skin, whether that means wearing makeup or not wearing makeup.

A theme found throughout the survey is that others are free to do what they want with their makeup, as long as it does not affect anyone else. This is where the spectrum is introduced. The more formal an event is, the more women are expected to wear makeup. The more casual an event is, the more they are expected to not wear makeup. During both events, someone wearing makeup can directly or indirectly affect how that person is perceived.

During a formal event, such as a job interview, perceptions matter. From the literature, it was found that women who wear makeup are perceived as more successful than those who do not. This survey supports this finding, and concludes that there is a societal pressure to wear makeup for more reasons than just as creative expression.

During a casual event, such as class or workouts, makeup is somewhat distracting. Since there was no specific reason for wearing makeup to the class or gym, people did not understand why others would want to wear makeup there.

Although participants agreed that makeup is a creative form of self-expression, the survey results also concluded that people judge how much makeup a person is wearing, as well as how the makeup is applied. Makeup application is just as important, if not more important, than how much makeup someone chooses to wear. When the makeup is applied correctly, it may

look like a socially acceptable amount of makeup is being worn. Participants began feeling that too much makeup is when features are being changed, rather than enhanced.

This research sought to understand millennials' perceptions of makeup and how feminism and social media interact with makeup. The study had many limitations, including lack of male respondents and respondents with non-feminist views, but many themes were found. This survey exposed the idea that millennials believed makeup to be a creative form of self-expression that should be without pressures from society, but there are still ingrained expectations to not break away from those social norms. As one respondent put it:

“My hope is that, eventually, makeup becomes gender neutral and truly optional-- anybody who wants to wear it can wear it, but there's no pressure to do so.”

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# Appendix A

## Survey

Page 1.

### How Feminism and Social Media Affect Makeup Trends

This 10-question survey is examining if feminism and social media affect makeup trends. Data collected is not identifiable. If you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you are not required to respond to it. This survey will take approximately 7 minutes. Please take your time on this survey and fully think about your response to the questions.

Page 2.

1. What do you identify as?

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to answer
- Other (please specify)

2. Do you have pro-feminist views?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

3. Do you feel the need to wear makeup when you post photos or videos of yourself online? Why or why not?

4. Do you notice when someone posts a "selfie" or "vlog" without makeup on? Please explain.

5. Do you think social media sets unrealistic lifestyle standards? Are those standards different for men and women? Please explain.

6. Do you feel pressure to incorporate makeup into your everyday routine? Please explain.

7. What is your opinion of men who wear makeup in public?

8. Do you believe someone can wear 'too much' makeup? Please explain.

9. Are there social settings where you should always wear makeup? Are there social settings where you should never wear makeup? Where?

10. Do you agree with the phrase "makeup has no rules"? Why or why not?