

CCGL9064-2A Body Politics: Local Worlds, Body Processes

Final Blog Portfolio

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1. Introduction

Makeup is a common part of most women's daily routines, and is often seen as a tool to enhance, or even minimise the appearance of, one's facial features. However, it can also be a powerful means for self-expression and defying societal beauty standards, as I have come to understand in recent years. Hence, I have chosen wearing bolder makeup in public, with a particular focus on eye makeup, as my body practice for this assignment. My aims for this assignment were to experiment with makeup styles that deviate from the norm or what is typically expected, and as a result reflect on any sensations and reactions I felt, how it would affect my embodiment, as well as the roles makeup plays in a broader context.

2. Norms and Hegemonic Masculinity

Admittedly, what affects my perspectives on both myself and makeup stems from social norms. In Blog Post 1, I mentioned how adventurous colours and styles are not typically accepted by the general public in places such as Hong Kong due to the relatively conservative atmosphere. While the public's tolerance is increasing, modest makeup consisting of neutral shades is viewed as the standard, with other styles that defy it viewed as improper, bizarre, and unprofessional. I believe it is this intense scrutiny and judgement that demotivates people, including myself, from stepping outside our comfort zone when it comes to makeup. Indeed, as I was conducting this experiment, I found myself persistently struggling with doubt and self-consciousness especially during the initial stages. The occasional negative reactions or comments impacted my self-esteem significantly, and I felt a sense of internalised pressure to revert to a more natural style of makeup to gain acceptance from my peers and even strangers.

However, I've come to understand that norms regarding makeup are not only targeted at how much one should apply, but also who should be wearing it. In Blog Post 4, I had written about a discussion between my friend and I, where he expressed despite having a strong interest in makeup, he often hides this passion from his family or peers as boys are often frowned upon for enjoying feminine activities, in this case makeup. I believe such views are connected to the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is commonly denoted by hyper-masculinity and rejection towards the feminine (Iskra 2021: Lecture 4). Toxic masculinity has significantly contributed to the belief that boys should not engage in the feminine, including the manners in which they dress, in order to be seen as a "real" man. Broomfield (as cited in Bobel & Kwan, 2019: 168) describes his experience of having to habitually be mindful of his choice of clothing or accessories to avoid homophobic harassment from his community. In addition, Oh (2015) notes that male K-pop artists are often criticised for not being "real" men for dancing, a feminine-associated activity. Hegemonic masculinity has widely demonised the feminine by regarding it as shameful or invalid, hence perpetuating the shaming of those who engage in feminine activities such as enjoying makeup, such as "girly" girls and boys, as a result bringing harmful consequences like public scrutiny and even harassment.

3. Objectification

Sontag (2003: 64) brings up the important concept of objectification through photography, she elaborates that events and people recorded through photographs make them susceptible to objectification, as they may be treated as possessions or the property of the viewers. I believe the same can be said about makeup wearers, who are often at the receiving end of public scrutiny especially due to the increasing prevalence of social media. Women especially are constantly objectified based on their makeup use, and from personal observation, people often ridicule women who wear a lot of makeup for "false advertising" on social media. In my opinion, such jokes are problematic as they reduce women to simply their physical appearance, thus demonstrating the endless objectification women experience by implying that they are "products" to be "advertised" to the public. Indeed, at times during my experiment, I felt as though I was merely an object for others to pass judgement on, especially when I was interacting with strangers such as salespeople or cashiers, who I felt treated me differently simply based on the makeup I was wearing, which perhaps gave them the impression that I was rebellious or unusual. In one instance, not only was I told to wear

less makeup, I was also sardonically asked if I thought boys would like it, which reminded me of the unwarranted “men don’t like it when you wear so much makeup” comments that women would frequently receive. Such remarks assume that women are merely objects for the viewing pleasure of others and that their sole aim of wearing makeup is to gain attraction from men, which cannot be further from the truth, as to be discussed in the following section.

4. Power and Agency

As mentioned in the introduction, makeup can be a powerful tool for self-expression and demonstrating agency, which can be defined as the potential to defy norms, values, institutions and such (Meek 2021: Lecture 2). This experiment helped me build self-confidence, and towards the end of the process I found myself focusing more on how makeup has shaped my embodiment than others’ opinions or reactions. Trying bolder styles brought me a sense of liberation, as I felt like I was doing it solely for my enjoyment and interest, and not to gain admiration and approval from others. Admittedly, I felt pride for myself for being able to attain more agency through this project.

Moreover, Gentile (as cited in Bobel & Kwan, 2019: 107) writes about using makeup to resist the disassociation which was a result of the sexual violence she suffered from her partner. By applying makeup in an extravagant, messy manner, she defies from the expectation that women should wear makeup to appear attractive to men, and instead uses it to express her resistance towards the symptoms of her post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as to establish her identity. In another instance, makeup can also be a tool for defying power in the form of state policies. The North Korean regime heavily restricts multiple facets of the citizens’ lives, which is not limited to physical appearance. The smuggling and illegal purchasing of foreign cosmetics in North Korea is not simply a violation of state policies, but an embodiment of resistance against the regime’s oppressive rule (Ko 2020).

5. Conclusion

To conclude, my experience with this project has brought me a greater sense of knowledge into the power of makeup. The act of reducing makeup to merely a symbol of materialism and superficiality is ignorant of the immense agency it gives people regardless of their gender, race, sexual orientation, and more.

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LINKS TO BLOG POSTS

Blog Post #1:

https://www.instagram.com/p/CKIV9Y3jXSTOWAIIQlsh_21aK5G98CE2Hxj6tU0/?igshid=7yu9x3armkv3

Blog Post #2: [https://www.instagram.com/p/CLZGGkMDaYxhi7m-](https://www.instagram.com/p/CLZGGkMDaYxhi7m-CnE4h4KioCM6famADrSUQM0/?igshid=1d5eojdu602y3)

[CnE4h4KioCM6famADrSUQM0/?igshid=1d5eojdu602y3](https://www.instagram.com/p/CLZGGkMDaYxhi7m-CnE4h4KioCM6famADrSUQM0/?igshid=1d5eojdu602y3)

Blog Post #3:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CLzNG3MBJdtKxgqP2wUvGd7k6l1qHh4vrZb5cs0/?igshid=znpppzikfa1t>

Blog Post #4:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CMFVFH0BbSxMv8DktbULESuwC7CpDWtdLY9U-80/?igshid=1mpqc2zzuw9nb>

Blog Post #5: [https://www.instagram.com/p/CMZMZLRBoY0i-](https://www.instagram.com/p/CMZMZLRBoY0i-blfBNf1odYry3UVMrJrNkAk700/?igshid=38gvbc2ifopb)

[blfBNf1odYry3UVMrJrNkAk700/?igshid=38gvbc2ifopb](https://www.instagram.com/p/CMZMZLRBoY0i-blfBNf1odYry3UVMrJrNkAk700/?igshid=38gvbc2ifopb)