



## Evidence that makeup is a false signal of sociosexuality



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Makeup  
Sociosexuality  
Attractiveness  
Faces  
Perception

### ABSTRACT

While the positive effect of makeup on attractiveness is well established, there has been less exploration into other possible functions of makeup use. Here we investigated whether one function of makeup is to signal sociosexuality. Using a large, well-controlled set of photographs, we found that faces with makeup were perceived to have more unrestricted sociosexuality than the same faces without makeup. Similarly, women wearing more makeup were perceived to have more unrestricted sociosexuality. The target women who were photographed also completed questionnaires about their makeup habits and the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory. Targets' self-reported sociosexuality was not associated with their makeup habits, with observer ratings of the amount of makeup they wore, or with observer ratings of their sociosexuality when attractiveness was controlled. Thus our study shows that people use makeup as a cue for perceiving sociosexuality but that it is an invalid cue.

### 1. Introduction

Makeup is one of the most ubiquitous forms of personal decoration, widely used by women throughout the world. Makeup use dates back several thousand years with origins in multiple locations (Russell, 2010). Given that it requires time and resources, the ubiquity and longevity of makeup use is particularly striking. This suggests that it is not an accidental behavior, but rather one that most likely serves some function. It is unclear, however, what this function is, or whether makeup use serves multiple functions.

The strongest evidence for a particular function for makeup is making the face more beautiful. Many studies using carefully controlled before-and-after photographs have found that makeup increases physical attractiveness (Cash, Dawson, Davis, Bowen, & Galumbeck, 1989; Cox & Glick, 1986; Etcoff, Stock, Haley, Vickery, & House, 2011; Graham & Jouhar, 1981; Hamid, 1972; Huguet, Croizet, & Richetin, 2004; Jones, Russell, & Ward, 2015; Mulhern, Fieldman, Hussey, Leveque, & Pineau, 2003; Osborn, 1996). For example, Graham and Jouhar (1981) found that women's faces presented with cosmetics were given significantly higher attractiveness ratings than when presented without cosmetics. Similarly, Etcoff et al. (2011) found that several styles of makeup (e.g., natural, glamorous) increased the attractiveness

of women's faces. Whether professionally-applied (e.g., Mulhern et al., 2003) or self-applied (e.g., Cash et al., 1989), makeup has been consistently found to increase the attractiveness of women in photographs as perceived by both male and female raters. This increase in attractiveness may partly be the result of makeup manipulating biologically-based factors of beauty, such as sexual dimorphism (Russell, 2009) and age appearance (Porcheron, Mauger, & Russell, 2013).

Makeup has also been linked with attractiveness in more ecologically-valid settings. For instance, Jacob, Guéguen, Boulbry, and Ardiccioni (2009) conducted a field study where two waitresses were either made up or not and their tips were recorded. Results showed that the waitresses received significantly higher tips on days when they wore makeup. However, it was only the male patrons whose tipping was affected by makeup use. In a subsequent study, Guéguen and Jacob (2011) found that the effect of makeup on tipping behavior was mediated by the perceived attractiveness of the waitress. In other words, waitresses received higher tips in the cosmetics condition because they looked more attractive.

In another field study investigating courtship behaviors, Guéguen (2008) recorded the number of male solicitations, and the latency of the first solicitation, toward female confederates at a bar who were either wearing cosmetics or not wearing cosmetics. In the cosmetics condition,

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the number of solicitations was higher and the latency between the arrival of the confederate at the bar and the first solicitation was shorter. These studies (Guéguen, 2008; Guéguen & Jacob, 2011; Jacob et al., 2009) suggest that the link between cosmetics and attractiveness found in laboratory studies (Cash et al., 1989; Cox & Glick, 1986; Graham & Jouhar, 1981; Hamid, 1972; Huguet et al., 2004; Jones et al., 2015; Mulhern et al., 2003; Osborn, 1996) translates to overt behaviors. Furthermore, Guéguen (2008) proposed that cosmetics may be associated with courtship behaviors not only because they increase attractiveness, but also because they may serve as a cue to availability. This suggests the possibility that one function of makeup is to signal sexual availability.

Consistent with this view, one study found that women are evaluated as having more “overt interest in the opposite sex” when wearing lipstick (McKeachie, 1952). Similarly, Osborn (1996) found that when wearing makeup, women are regarded as less modest and more likely to have an extramarital affair than when without makeup. A more recent study found that female faces with makeup are rated as more promiscuous than the same faces without makeup (Mileva, Jones, Russell, & Little, 2016). These findings suggest that makeup may be associated with unrestricted sociosexuality (i.e., a willingness to engage in uncommitted sexual relationships; Penke & Asendorpf, 2008; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). However, all of these studies were designed to test other hypotheses, and they used samples of only one to six target women. Thus, there remains a need to more firmly establish whether faces with makeup are perceived as signaling more unrestricted sociosexuality, which we sought to accomplish in this research.

Regardless of whether people *perceive* makeup to be a signal of more unrestricted sociosexuality, it remains unknown whether makeup is, in fact, a *valid* cue of unrestricted sociosexuality. No studies to date have investigated whether makeup use predicts the *actual* sociosexuality reported by women who wear makeup. Indeed, investigations of whether actual sociosexuality can be perceived from the face have revealed mixed results. Boothroyd, Jones, Burt, DeBruine, and Perrett (2008), for example, found that when viewing composites of women with unrestricted sociosexuality and those with restricted sociosexuality, male participants could not successfully distinguish between the two in terms of which woman would be “more open to short-term relationships, one-night stands, and the idea of sex without love”. When using individual faces, however, Boothroyd et al. (2008) found a positive correlation between actual (self-reported) sociosexuality and perceived sociosexuality, even after controlling for each woman's facial attractiveness. Gangestad, DiGeronimo, Simpson, and Biek (1992), however, found that when controlling for attractiveness, the relation between actual sociosexuality and perceived sociosexuality was not significant for female targets. Moreover, there are research discrepancies regarding whether restricted or unrestricted sociosexuality is preferred. For instance, Campbell et al. (2009) found that men rate women who appear to be more unrestricted as less desirable long-term mates, whereas Boothroyd et al. (2008) found that men rate such women as more desirable long-term and short-term mates. These inconsistencies suggest that further research examining perceptions of sociosexuality is still needed.

In the present work, we examined whether makeup use functions in part to signal sociosexuality. To do so, we explored the relation between makeup use and sociosexuality. Specifically, we investigated three hypotheses: 1) that makeup use predicts perceived sociosexuality (rated by observers), 2) that makeup use predicts actual sociosexuality (reported by women), and 3) that perceived sociosexuality predicts actual sociosexuality. In Study 1, we tested whether makeup use predicts perceived sociosexuality. We did this in two ways. First, we had raters assess the perceived sociosexuality of women who had been photographed with and without makeup. Second, we had another set of raters assess the perceived amount of makeup worn by each woman and then examined the association between this measure and ratings of perceived sociosexuality. In Study 2, we tested whether makeup use

predicts actual sociosexuality (reported by women) by examining associations between self-reported sociosexuality and different measures of makeup use. In Study 3, we tested whether perceived sociosexuality is a valid predictor of actual sociosexuality by examining the association between the perceived sociosexuality ratings made on the photographs in Study 1 and the self-reported sociosexuality of the photographed target women used in Study 2.

## 2. Study 1

### 2.1. Methods

#### 2.1.1. Target stimuli

Photographs were taken of 69 women of European descent ( $M$  age = 20.01 years,  $SD$  = 1.39) who were facing forward under constant camera and lighting conditions, with neutral expressions, no adornments, hair pulled back or pinned down, and closed mouths using a Nikon digital camera (Model E950) mounted on a tripod against a background of professional grade photography paper. Target women were recruited from the student body of a large public university in the northeastern United States by an advertisement in the student newspaper and posters on campus. Each target was photographed three times: once while holding a card with an identification number, once with no makeup on, and a second time after they had applied their ‘everyday’ makeup. The photographs with the ID numbers allowed us to associate each target woman's photograph with her other data without having to use her name or another identifier, thus ensuring the target women's anonymity. The target women were instructed to arrive wearing no makeup. We also provided cotton balls and makeup removing wipes for women who did arrive wearing makeup. Each target woman provided her own cosmetics. To make it easier for the women to apply their makeup, we provided two three-paneled vanity mirrors. Only women who stated that they routinely used makeup were eligible to participate. All women provided consent for their photos to be taken and used in subsequent research following a protocol approved by the local Institutional Review Board. This process resulted in 138 images, where each of the 69 target faces had a no makeup image and a makeup image. The no makeup photographs, together with others of women of non-European descent, were also used to test a different set of hypotheses in a study by Campbell et al. (2009).

#### 2.1.2. Procedures and raters

Ethical approval was received from the local Institutional Review Board. Study 1 raters were recruited at a small eastern college in the United States. Raters first completed a short questionnaire that asked about their sex and age. Raters were then told that they would view several faces on which they would make assessments. Raters were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. In one condition, raters were asked to assess each face according to how much makeup each woman appeared to be wearing (“How much makeup does this face have?”; 1 = no makeup; 7 = a lot of makeup). In a second condition, raters assessed each face in terms of its attractiveness (“How attractive is this face?”; 1 = less attractive; 7 = more attractive). In the third condition, raters assessed each face in terms of its perceived sociosexuality (“I can imagine this person being comfortable and enjoying ‘casual’ sex with different partners”; 1 = strongly disagree; 9 = strongly agree). This is one of the items from the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991).

The raters evaluated all 138 target images (makeup categories were intermixed) and assessed the images individually in random order. One hundred and eighty two raters (85 male, 96 female, 1 other), aged 17–22 years old ( $M$  age = 18.66 years,  $SD$  = 0.98) completed this task.

### 2.2. Results

Male and female raters demonstrated high inter-rater reliability for

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