Makeup: A Genderless Form of Artistic Expression Explored by Content Creators and Their Followers

Sijhana Virakul[1]

[1]Chulalongkorn University

ABSTRACT

Since the fifteenth century, makeup has been gendered and has been ongoingly advertised as such through the ubiquity of modern media. However, with the emergence of newer notions of makeup as expressed by Instagram makeup content creators, the notion of makeup as an art has permeated the media, influencing individuals who follow and/or are exposed to such notions. Furthermore, it is also unreasonable to claim that makeup is gendered, since the notion of gender itself has never been clearly defined. Therefore, makeup instead should be regarded as a genderless form of artistic self-expression. By exploring the history of makeup, conducting phenomenological research on Instagram makeup content creators, and utilizing Butler's (1988) notion of gender performativity, Negrin's (2008) writing on gender border crossings, and Kim's (2013) discussion of everyday reflexivity through the media, I shall discuss why makeup should be regarded as a genderless form of artistic expression. Not only that, but I will also explore ethical consumerist makeup brands, as displayed on the Instagram makeup content creators' posts, and the notion of "cruelty-free," and how these notions are related to the post-modernly perceived genderless aspect of makeup.

Introduction

The feminization of makeup has been apparent throughout Western history, most significantly broadcasted during the first half of the twentieth century when the media put forth notions that allowed the general public to believe and perceive that makeup has been inscribed a gender. However, in recent years, makeup does not need to be gendered at all; through social media platforms such as Instagram, makeup content creators and the brands that they support, follow, and utilize have shown that they can express themselves through makeup regardless of their sex, gender, or race. This, then, allows for individuals' understandings of who they are through the experiences of others displayed online, which could possibly lead to a profound shift in the beliefs of individuals within a certain group or following; in this case, it is based on a globalized and liberal Western society. Because of this, I have found through phenomenological research that makeup content creators, their followers, and even makeup brands have changed their beliefs regarding makeup as being specifically gendered, expressing how they think that makeup is now a genderless form of artistic expression.

In addition, through the exploration of what the notion of gender really is, I have found that there have been no clear or strict definitions inscribed upon the notion of gender, since this notion has always been in contestation. Therefore, makeup should not be defined in relation to gender at all, but rather be regarded as a genderless form of artistic expression that can be utilized to express oneself in any way one desires. In order to explore my argument, I will be going through the history of makeup, why makeup had originally been gendered, explicating the differences between everyday and artistic makeup, and giving a brief overview of Instagram and its influential power, and by borrowing Judith Butler's (1988) notion of gender performativity, Llewellyn Negrin's (2008) writing on gender border crossings, as well as utilizing Youna Kim's (2013) discussion of everyday reflexivity, I shall discuss why the notion of makeup as gendered has been renegotiated and possibly transcended.

Literature Review

Historical Use of Makeup

In Western contemporary times, makeup has been perceived to have feminine attributes and has been targeted to be used primarily by women, notably through media portrayals of cosmetic product advertisements, such as those of Chanel and Maybelline New York. Although prominent, feminine makeup brands have created makeup lines that cater towards men, such as Shiseido Men and Dior Homme, there have not been many globally known brands that create its products specifically for men. However, the view of makeup as a specifically gendered practice has always been in fluctuation within the West.

In ancient Egypt, one of the most ancient civilizations which later influenced the earliest western civilizations (Duiker and Spielvogel, 2016, pp. 22-23), both men and women were discovered to have been using makeup as part of their daily routines, using kohl to line their eyes and darken their eyebrows as well as using henna to stain their nails, hands, and feet (H. Butler, 2000, p. 18; Corson, 2010, pp. 8-9). This shows that the notion of makeup as specifically gendered was not present at that time. However, by fifteenth century Europe, the notion of makeup as gendered started to emerge: women started to become the primary consumer of makeup (Corson, 2010, pp. 73-79). This practice, however, shifted in the seventeenth century, when makeup was seen to be unacceptable to both men and women, as dictated by powerful clergymen (Corson, 2010, p. 157).

By the eighteenth century, middle-class men became the primary consumer of makeup, using rouge and perfume as well as even shaping and darkening their eyebrows (Carter, 1998, p. 98; H. Butler, 2000, p. 39; Corson, 2010, pp. 236-237); women, on the other hand, rejected the use of makeup, and those who did were deemed as laughable (Corson, 2010, pp. 214-215). By the nineteenth century, however, the primary consumer of makeup switched again, changing back to women (Corson, 2010, p. 315): this continued into the twentieth century, when makeup use by men diminished (H. Butler, 2000, p. 49). Instead, men fashioned the use of "men's cosmetics," with the inclusion of soaps, cologne, and toiletries, and avoided anything that was associated with effeminacy (Corson, 2010, pp. 526-527).

Not only does this show that the notion of makeup as gendered is a recent belief when taking into consideration the entirety of Western human history, but it also shows that this notion has always been in contestation. Therefore, the stereotypical notion of makeup worn on a certain gender in the present time is only a trend that will eventually shift once again, making makeup arbitrarily gendered in historicity.

Makeup in Society: A Feminine Embodiment

Makeup has been gendered in some way or another in the (western) society since the fifteenth century. Especially with the rise of marketing and advertising in the media since the 1920s, the cosmetics industry has continuously advertised makeup in a way that allows consumers to perceive makeup as a tool to "[increase] women's attractiveness to men" (McCabe et al., 2017, p. 3). Through this, it is not surprising to note that the use of makeup is perceived to be more traditionally feminine than masculine, since the notion of makeup as feminine has been sustained through media advertisements (Ringrow, 2016, p. 19).

According to McCabe et al. (2017), the role of makeup (for women) is to "energize the self, reinforce confidence, and prepare for engaging the world and interacting with other people" (p. 10). In their study of 28 women who they interviewed before and after a week of using Revlon makeup, they have found that women feel more confident and authentic when putting on makeup as well as feeling as if they have connected their "inner [and] outer beauty" (pp. 16-17). Not only that, but women would also assert their femininity through makeup on social media, most apparently by beauty vloggers. According to Banet-Weiser (2017), women (and girls) on social media, with a certain number of followers, portray a "hyper-feminine aesthetic [through] the application of make-up" in order to feel

empowered and confident and, at the same time, demonstrate to their viewers, of whom are also mostly female, ways in which they could become empowered and confident as well (p. 272). This means that not only is the notion of makeup as feminine sustained, but it is also projected and broadcasted.

As can be seen, the society solely focuses its attention to researching how women utilize makeup in their daily lives. As a result, it disregards and potentially alienates other individuals, whether they may be cis- or trans-gender, who also use makeup in their daily lives. Although research in recent years have been made with the inclusion of how and why cis men wear makeup (see e.g., Gough et al., 2014; Hall, 2015; Hjort & Komulainen, 2017), there is still a lack of research, to my knowledge, in which focuses makeup as being a genderless form of artistic expression.

Everyday, Theatrical, and Artistic Makeup

Makeup is worn on many different occasions, of which I can separate into two main ones: in one's everyday life and in theater. However, I would like to argue and propose that there is one more occasion: the occasion of artistic expression, which can also be in one's everyday life. Although there is some sort of distinction between everyday and theatrical makeup, there is no clear distinction between everyday and artistic makeup.

Everyday and theatrical makeup are different because one is worn in our mundane, everyday lives whereas another is worn on stage as part of a performance. A clear distinction can be made here, and the two occasions are regarded as separate, hence the reverence of subverted, non-normative theatrical makeup and the punishment of subverted everyday makeup, an argument congruent to Butler's (1988) critique of gender performativity, where non-normative theatrical performances on stage are revered and celebrated, whereas everyday, non-normative gendered actions are scrutinized and punished. However, there is no clear distinction between everyday and artistic makeup; everyday makeup is worn mostly in a feminized way, as aforementioned, whereas artistic makeup is worn in a way that does not necessarily stem from notions of gender (hence it being artistic), even if the look of said artistic makeup utilized by individuals may look similar to everyday makeup that sticks to conventional definitions of femininity and/or masculinity. In other words, artistic makeup can be worn in any way possible because it is a form of artistic expression, stemming from how one feels, one's bodily agency, and self-autonomy, of which does not necessarily stem from dichotomous notions of gender.

Artistic makeup can be found in various places, most notably and commonly shown on Instagram – the social media platform that I will be utilizing in my research to argue that makeup should be regarded as a genderless artistic form of self-expression. On Instagram, content creators are seen posting their artistic makeup looks that challenge the normative, feminized way in which makeup is worn. Artistic makeup, both on Instagram and increasingly in everyday life, is not worn to beautify the self with any sort of gendered intent, but it is utilized as a form of self-expression in order to bring out what one feels on the inside, even if it may be perceived as part of the either-or. With this, there is now a clear distinction between everyday makeup, theatrical makeup, and artistic makeup.

Brief Overview of Instagram and Its Influential Power

Founded in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and released as an iPhone-only app on 6 October 2010 (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 10), Instagram is an application in which allows its users to share photos with their followers, allowing for their followers to interact with them through the processes of liking and commenting. Through this, a sense of community has been created, as also reinforced by Instagram's official Community Guidelines (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 20), allowing content creators to craft seemingly relatable, intimate, and genuine relationships with their followers through "perceived interconnectedness" (Abidin, 2015). As a result, content creators have become individuals who hold an influential position (which is why they are also referred to as influencers) and are culturally significant, having the platform to raise social awareness through online discourse that can potentially bring about social challenge and/or change (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 151), which can be seen through the ongoing discussions and activism of the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements, to name a few.

The social influencing aspect of Instagram can also be applicable to other issues and beliefs, including makeup, where makeup content creators can explicate on their views of makeup, increasingly as an artistic form of expression, through their posts, comments, and follower engagement. The collective views of popular makeup content creators have also influenced popular makeup brands, allowing for brands, such as NYX Professional Makeup, Morphe, and Fenty Beauty, to advertise on their social media that their makeup is for everyone, regardless of sex, gender, or race.

By tracing the historical use of makeup, it has been made clear that although makeup has been utilized in order to achieve feminine embodiment, that gendered utilization has always been inconsistent throughout history. With makeup shifting from being catered towards men to women, and vice versa, it is significant to establish the fact that the way makeup is perceived now, as being a feminine embodiment, is only a trend that will later shift again, since beauty trends always change through time (Tagai et al., 2016, p. 2). Therefore, makeup should instead be regarded as a genderless form of artistic expression (or something that does not need to be feminized or inscribed a gender) and a mode of self-expression due to the inconclusiveness of the bifurcated notions of gender, the performativity of gender, the fluctuating notion of makeup as gendered, and the narrativizations that have been put forth by the content creators that I have interviewed.

Theoretical Framework

Butler's Performative Acts

In her essay Performative Acts and Gender Constitution, Butler (1988) writes about gender performativity and how heteronormativity can be maintained through normative gender performances. However, there are two main arguments from her essay in which I would like to highlight.

Butler (1988) posits that the body of an actor (or an individual) is gendered through the notion of gender identity being a "stylized repetition of acts," meaning that gender is something that is not stable and is constituted due to mundane bodily actions (J. Butler, 1988, p. 519, italics original). In addition, she writes that the body is actively gendered in specific ways by living in certain environments of which has materialized notions of how gender is to be performed, therefore making gender "an act which has been rehearsed" (1988, pp. 523-626). Similar to how characters in a particular performance can be portrayed over and over again based on a script, gender can also be performed based on existing and established archetypes of previous actors as well – actors of whom have performed their gender in arbitrary ways, which have been mutually understood as a fundamental truth (J. Butler, 1988, p. 526). These performative acts, through time, have turned into normative and dichotomous acts of gender, and have been constantly reiterated to the point where it has influenced the active body, of which keeps on materializing said norms through constant reiteration of said actions. Therefore, if actors, with active bodies, were to keep performing these performative acts, then the conventional and hetero-centric notion of gender would remain materialized, insofar as performative acts are maintained (J. Butler, 1988, p. 527).

Since performative acts are maintained as long as primary actors choose to perform their gender based on a specific archetype, this means that these performative acts can be challenged if actors were to choose to interpret gender in a different manner. Butler writes that since gender is (and has always been) performative and is "real only to the extent that it is performed," what is constituted within a "gender reality," such as the notion of femininity and masculinity, is essentially immeasurable (1988, pp. 527-528). However, if an actor were to "[contest] the script," then it would result in "strict punishments" (J. Butler, 1988, p. 531), which stem from the belief that if a person were to act differently from what had been established, or were to perform gender that is believed to not be in relation to their assigned sex at birth, then it would become "dangerous" (J. Butler, 1988, p. 527).

In sum, because gender is performative, an "essentialism of gender identity" does not exist because gender identity is defined based on actors – actors who have been materializing the normative notions of gender to a point

where it has become perceived as naturally derived since the beginning (J. Butler, 1988, p. 528). Because of this and the existence of actors, gender identity has the ability to be shifted; if actors were to flip the script, then it could lead to the possibility of "subversive performances" of which would prove that gender is not only performative, but an always-changing concept, most notably in the contemporary era during the second half of the twentieth century (J. Butler, 1988, p. 531).

Negrin's Postmodern Gender Carnival

According to Llewellyn Negrin (2008), in her work Appearance and Identity, she writes about what she calls "The Postmodern Gender Carnival", of which discusses the rise in popularity of "gender border crossings" and what gender means within the context of postmodernity (p. 139). In the latter half of the twentieth century, "gender-bending" emerged and was popularized by celebrities, such as Grace Jones and David Bowie (Negrin, 2008, p. 139); this, in turn, created a profound shift in the realm of self-expression because it was no longer contained within the socially constructed binary of feminine and masculine. As a result, the notion of post-genderism permeated the media and entered the public arena: men can now be seen wearing clothes that were tailored for women, whether it may be accessories, perfume, or skincare (Negrin, 2008, p. 140). Negrin then discusses how this created the idea of gender as a performance rather than it being related towards a certain, categorized sex; in other words, gender is treated as "free-floating signifiers" (2008, p. 140). This, however, does not mean that the notion of femininity and masculinity would be eradicated altogether – instead, gender as "free-floating signifiers" would give new meanings to femininity and masculinity. In fact, what was considered feminine, and masculine today differs from what femininity and masculinity was throughout history.

According to Fred Davis, he explains that the notion of femininity and masculinity has always had a shift throughout Western history (Negrin, 2008, p. 141). In addition, what can be defined as feminine or masculine has always been "inherently unstable" because in order to upkeep the norms of what can be defined as feminine or masculine, there must be a constant reiteration and performance of those norms as well (Negrin, 2008, p. 144). Even in the postmodern context, where gender-bending performances would be believed to potentially eradicate the gender binary, it so happens that gender-bending performances actually seems to upkeep the notion of femininity and masculinity. Negrin writes that, contrary to popular belief, gender border crossings do not eradicate femininity and masculinity, but rather renegotiates its meanings (2008, p. 156). In other words, gender border crossings establish new meanings to what is considered feminine or masculine, as the meanings of femininity or masculinity was never strictly defined, as was mentioned by Davis.

Based on Butler's Performative Acts and Gender Constitution and Negrin's Postmodern Gender Carnival, it is evident that gender does not have a fixed meaning and has always been inconclusive: since gender does not have a fixed meaning and cannot be defined, then makeup should not be defined or limited by the notion of gender, particularly that of feminine appearance. Therefore, makeup should be regarded as a genderless form of artistic expression – not only would this be proven with Butler and Negrin's arguments, but also with phenomenological research in which focuses on lived experiences of Instagram makeup content creators.

Kim's Discussion on Reflexivity

In addition to Butler and Negrin's arguments, I will be utilizing Kim's discussion of "everyday reflexivity" through the media (2013, p. 504), since I will also be exploring the comment sections of the content creators' Instagram posts. According to Kim (2013), "everyday reflexivity" is the process of which humans "routinely keep in touch with the grounds of what they do, what they think, and what they feel" (p. 504). Especially within the context of the twenty-first century, where digital, online media is prevalent and essentially ubiquitous, individuals would be inclined to conduct reflexivity through social media, either consciously or subconsciously, which can allow individuals to understand themselves more through what is shown to them, possibly leading to a social change through social challenging

(Kim, 2013, pp. 504-505). Although different people would experience reflexivity in different ways depending on their locations (Kim, 2013, p. 504), I would like to argue that within the digitized realm of specifically liberal Western-based makeup, with English as the main language of communication and expression, individuals would experience similar kinds of reflexivity because they are shown similar types of makeup-based reflexivity on social media platforms, such as Instagram.

I believe that Kim's discussion of everyday reflexivity is integral to my analysis since the process of reflexivity is inevitable within our globalized and mediated world, especially within the context of online and digitized beauty. It can be seen, as will be explored, that through everyday reflexivity, whether it may be the self-internalization of the notion of makeup or through comment section-based interactions with Instagram makeup content creators, would individuals be introduced to the notion of makeup as a form of artistic expression – to express the self in any way possible through makeup, no matter who one may be. In other words, the notion of makeup as a genderless form of artistic expression.

Methodology

Since this paper has been written to explore the notion of makeup as genderless and artistic, I have decided to conduct phenomenological research under the qualitative research approach. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research is "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Within the qualitative method approach is the phenomenological research method, which is a strategy that "identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. 13); in other words, this research method has been utilized in order to gather information about Instagram makeup content creators' lived experiences, a central topic of research in phenomenology. Furthermore, I have decided to gather three participants in order to conduct my research; I believe that by choosing to interview specifically three content creators, I would be able to effectively analyze their lived experiences as well as focus more in-depth towards how their followers interact with them and/or how they express themselves in their comment sections. Not only that, with these three content creators having a lesser number of followers than bigger makeup content creators, there is an established sense of personal interaction and relatability within each creator's respective community-like accounts, allowing for their followers to confidently and unapologetically perform self-reflexivity. I would also like to note that, according to Creswell, it is crucial to "purposefully select participants" of which are not large in number – around three to ten participants for phenomenological research (2009, p. 178).

In order to select the appropriate participants for the interview, I searched for the hashtag #makeupart on Instagram, since this hashtag would be appropriate towards my research goal: exploring how makeup is a genderless form of artistic expression. Upon viewing the #makeupart feed between September 2 and September 8, 2020 and selecting an inclusive group of individuals (regardless of sex, gender, race, or following), I decided to contact all content creators I had listed via Instagram direct message and/or email. With each content creator replying, I asked for their convenient mode of interview, to which they replied via written text (two via email, one via Instagram direct message). Although the qualitative research method prefers face-to-face interviews, the email-based interviews that I had conducted have allowed the participants to intricately spell out their thoughts on makeup and explicate their reasoning. The following are the questions given to each content creator:

(1) How do you identify your gender?
(2) Why did you start wearing makeup?
(3) Why are you wearing makeup now?
(4) How do you feel when you wear makeup?
(5) Do you think makeup has to be related to gender at all?

However, there are certain limitations when it comes to this method of interview. Since the qualitative research approach calls for "face-to-face interviews," which would allow for a less rigid interview (Creswell, 2009, p. 181), this question-and-answer method of an online, email-based interview, regrettably, does not allow the researcher and the interviewees to have a flowing conversation, yet it has granted the participants more time to explicate their opinions and feelings towards (artistic) makeup. With the interviews being conducted during a pandemic, and with the researcher and the interviewees in different time zones, I believe, to my knowledge, that this limitation was impending. I would also like to note that all of the participants have given their consent for me to disclose their interview answers, display their creative property with credit, and display their social media handles publicly.

In addition to email- and message-based interviews, I had also observed the participants' Instagram profiles, viewing all of their posts (up until the time of writing), analyzing their comments and interactions with their followers, as well as engaging in textual analysis with the brands that they follow, support, and promote. With this, I believe that this would give me additional insight towards their lives online, allowing me to incorporate crucial elements of their opinions, their followers' opinions, popular brands' opinions, as well as the interviews that I had conducted with them to bolster my argument that makeup is an artistic form of expression.

Findings

Before discussing my findings, I would like to explicate why Instagram, as an online social media platform, is a legitimate source of conducting my research. Since we are living in the twenty-first century, it is rare for people to not be knowledgeable of popular culture; instead of living off the grid, individuals live within "media-saturated spaces," of which are mostly online (Harris-Moore, 2014, p. 4). Especially with the rise of digital media, popular culture can be found at the tip of one's fingers, therefore allowing individuals to conveniently consume online media in comparison to harder-to-find, traditional print media. Because of this, Instagram, as one of the most popular social media platforms available, is a legitimate source of conducting my research.

The following are the results of the interviews conducted with the three Instagram makeup content creators. First is @julians_lair (Edward, n.d.), who first replied to my initial message: Edward is a content creator from Nigeria with 500 followers (as of writing this paper) who exclusively posts artistic makeup looks. Upon interviewing him, he expresses how beauty and art "has always been a part of [him]," and how wearing makeup has brought "joy," "peace," "confidence," and "excitement," of which he wishes to share to the world, especially to his own local community (personal communication, October 14, 2020). Second is @afierhm (Rohim, n.d.), a makeup artist and makeup content creator based in Malaysia, who has around 2,000 followers as of writing this paper. When asking her about her experiences with makeup, she expresses how even though she had started to wear makeup in order to "feel pretty," she now wears makeup to be expressive, "to make a statement," and to inspire other people with her art (personal communication, October 21, 2020). Third is @jessicajehaa (Harviali n.d.), a beauty content creator based in Indonesia with around 3,000 followers as of writing this paper. Although she both posts makeup and beauty content, in the form of skincare, her content seems to lean more towards makeup content, judging by her Instagram posts. Upon interviewing her, she expresses how even though she started to wear makeup in order to "look better and stay fresh," she has now entered the realm of face painting and "character makeup," of which makes her feel "more creative," "more confident," and "more powerful" (personal communication, October 23, 2020). Interestingly, upon asking the participants whether or not they think that makeup has to be related to gender at all, all of the interviewees answered no.

Most people think makeup is related to females only. But I believe makeup is universal because it is a form of art itself… Anyone can do it. Even nowadays there are lots of male beauty gurus with incredible skills. Therefore, makeup is not related to gender at all. (Harviali, personal communication, October 23, 2020)

It is important to note that all of the content creators believe in utilizing makeup as a form of artistic expression, especially with Edward, who constantly challenges the norm and freely expresses himself, even if his specific location believes otherwise. In other words, because there is a clear refusal of the norm, he is exercising agency and self-autonomy; stemming from his own subjectivity, he believes that he can act autonomously. This is also in

congruence to Rohim and Harviali, who both wear makeup as a form of artistic expression. It is also important to note that this clear exercise of agency is enhanced by posting on Instagram, enabling each content creator to create their own narrativization through the process of everyday reflexivity (Sender, 2012, p. 215; Kim, 2013). With this, it renders it possible for these content creators to go beyond the normative genders.

Discussion

#makeupart: Renegotiating and Transcending Gender Norms

Butler (1988) writes that there is a possibility of normative gendered actions to be challenged and changed if actors were to decide to contest the script and perform their gender in a different way. This, then, provides the possibility of subversive actions, which could potentially result in punishments, such as those that come in the form of derogatory comments online. In Edward's (i.e., Figure 1) case, he challenges, changes, and renegotiates the definitions of what it means to be a boy in makeup in the context of Nigeria by applying artistic makeup; this shows that social media play an important role, providing a space that allows others to conduct their own reflexivity (as discussed by Kim (2013)) through the examples that he displays, which he then provides a platform for discussion of said reflexivity. As he puts it, he wears makeup not only to feel "joy" and "peace," but also to motivate other people: "I want to be able to reach out to [a lot] of kids who have been told [that] this isn't okay, so they can draw motivation and be who they are" (personal communication, October 14, 2020). In other words, he wants other people who are like him to know that "they can [wear makeup] too" (Edward, personal communication, October 14, 2020); this not only shows that there is a possibility for subversive actions against the effeminate gendered notions attached to makeup, but through these subversive actions can also result in the changing and renegotiating of gender norms, as discussed by Negrin (2008).
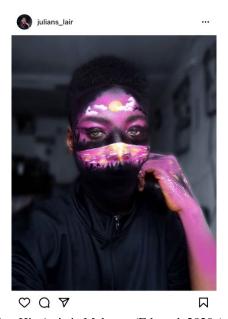

Figure 1. @julians_lair's Post Showing His Artistic Makeup. (Edward, 2020c)

Furthermore, he displays that there are also potential punishments for contesting the gender script within a context of a certain society (Nigeria). However, on an online platform in the digital age, it can be seen that the possibility of potential punishments has been thrown out the window, with individuals being celebrated online when they express themselves in a genuine manner: as he expresses, makeup is a "confidence booster" and is his way of "showing [his] talent and [self-expression] to the world" (personal communication, October 14, 2020). Not only that, but this is

also shown through comments on his posts, such as "SICKENINGGG😵🔥" (Edward, 2020a) and "Oooh you on fireee!!🔥🔥🔥" (Edward, 2020b), which demonstrate celebratory and complimentary remarks in relation to his makeup looks (i.e., Figure 2).

Figure 2. Comments on @julians_lair's Post. (Edward, 2020d)

Upon looking at Rohim's posts, it is also clear that her followers' comments demonstrate celebratory and complimentary remarks in relation to her makeup looks (i.e., Figure 3). With comments such as "YU DID THT …..NOW THE COLOURS .. HOW YU EAT THIS UP SO HARD 😶😶" (Rohim, 2020b) and "gagged!" (Rohim, 2020b), it is clear that these comments celebrate how Rohim presents herself online through her artistic expression.
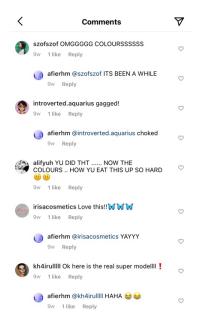

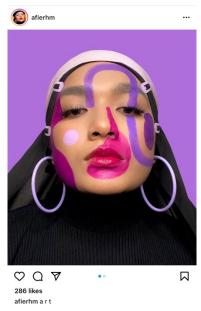**Figure 3.** Comments on @afierhm's Post. (Rohim, 2020a)

Even with Harviali's posts, the celebratory remarks of her followers also show that there is no potential possibility of punishments of subverting the gender norm; comments such as "amazinggg sisss😳🧡," "🔥🔥," and "Gokil keren bgt🔥🔥" (which roughly translates to really cool) (Harviali, 2020b), demonstrate complimentary remarks made by her followers that support her work and artistic expression.

Figure 4. Comments on @jessicajehaa's Post. (Harviali, 2020b)

With comments such as these, it is evident that through social media posts like that of Edward's, Rohim's, and Harviali's can individuals understand who they are, potentially leading to a society in which values and appreciates such genderless and expressive understandings, of which is shown through the cessation of punishments inscribed upon bodies of individuals due to their subversive actions. Although it can be the case that derogative comments have been filtered out, I believe that upon seeing positive comments on content creators' posts, individuals are still exposed to the notion of makeup as artistic, allowing them to internalize such notions, therefore allowing them to continuously perform self-reflexivity based on the content creators' original intent. As can be seen, what it means to be feminine or masculine through the use of makeup has been challenged, changed, and renegotiated, as it has always been historically.

As mentioned, the definitions of what it means to be feminine or masculine has always been in fluctuation, or better put, renegotiation. However, through interviews that I have conducted, I have found that makeup can also be utilized in a way that does not put femininity or masculinity into the equation at all, nor does it treat gender as being fluid or re-definable. Instead, makeup can seem to transcend all of these normative notions and potentially transform into a form of artistic expression, creativity, and individuality, regardless of gender, as can be seen through Instagram posts of makeup content creators in which also provide their followers with an example of makeup-based reflexivity; this belief has also been carried out into everyday life, with individuals increasingly utilizing makeup to express themselves regardless of sex, gender, or race, albeit how it looks may seem, though not intended to be, normatively gendered. As Rohim has mentioned, she does not wear makeup "to feel pretty anymore," but rather wears (artistic) makeup to "create looks to make a statement" as well as to "be different and feel amazing about it," (i.e., Figure 5) inspiring others in the process (personal communication, October 21, 2020).

Figure 5. @afierhm's Post with the Cation "a r t." (Rohim, 2020b)

Similarly, Harviali expresses that when she wears makeup, especially when she does character (artistic) makeup looks on Instagram (i.e., Figure 6), she would "feel more confident" with herself as well as feel creative and inspired, as if she were "unleashing a different personality" (personal communication, October 23, 2020). As such, it could be argued that makeup, also utilized through the process of self-expression, is no longer understood as part of the binary of feminine and masculine, nor is it relevant to gender. Therefore, makeup should be regarded as a genderless form of artistic expression. Not only that, all of the interviewees have also shown that they believe that makeup is a form of artistic expression – artistic expression that should not be gendered at all (Edward, personal communication, October 14, 2020). In fact, makeup should be "universal because it is a form of art itself" (Harviali, personal communication, October 23, 2020), and as long as the individual is having fun wearing makeup, then "that's all it matters" (Rohim, personal communication, October 21, 2020).

Figure 6. @jessicajehaa in Character Makeup. (Harvialia, 2020a)

With this in mind, it is clear that normative notions of gender have always been in fluctuation, and that through these renegotiations can also come transcendence, because makeup is now utilized as a tool to feel empowered and creative as well as to make a statement, which is in stark contrast to what makeup was utilized for in the past: to express and maintain femininity (Ringrow, 2016, p. 2) in order to attract the opposite sex (McCabe et al., 2017, p. 3). This transcendence of gender is then also facilitated through the ubiquity of social media platforms, such as Instagram, where content creators and their self-narrativization can create a space that manages and engages said gender transcendence, potentially leading to their followers' internalization of such notions, allowing them to understand themselves through the process of everyday reflexivity – reflexivity of which is in a similar fashion to those who are of the same following.

#makeupart: Socially Conscious and Artistic Self-Expression

Self-expression can come in many shapes and forms, like such of one that does not necessarily have to stem from bifurcated notions of femininity and masculinity, as previously discussed. In this section, I shall explore the mode of self-expression through the use of makeup displayed and utilized by "aesthetic entrepreneurs" (Banet-Weiser, 2017, p. 272). According to Banet-Weiser (2017), online beauty vlogs, or in this case beauty posts, are considered as "aesthetic labour," while those who produce online beauty vlogs (or posts) are called "aesthetic entrepreneurs" (pp. 271-272). Through these "aesthetic entrepreneurs," the general public would be able to judge and internalize actions of which are deemed to be a form of self-expression that is acceptable and valid in the twenty-first century: these could be through the use of techniques, designs, and/or products of which are displayed by the "aesthetic entrepreneurs." However, since the makeup content creators I have interviewed are those who do not focus their content on makeup instruction, but rather focus their content on displaying their art, artistic expression, creativity, and individuality, I shall be focusing this section not on techniques and makeup designs displayed on their accounts, but through the products that they utilize and display in the captions of their posts.

Because individuals who engage in the realm of makeup and beauty are deemed as economic subjects, whatever is displayed in the captions of these makeup content creators' posts can affect the consumer culture of makeup. In recent years, there has been a rise of ethical consumerism in the cosmetics industry, and it is evident that makeup brands are aware of this, since they meticulously and continuously invent new products of which would correspond to the ethical consumerist narrative (Ruuskanen, 2019, p. 35). Through this, it has been noted that social media is one key factor that helps consumers become aware of what products are "cruelty-free," or products that have not been tested by animals and do not utilize "animal ingredients or byproducts" (Springirth, 2016, p. 3; Ruuskanen, 2019, p. 20). As a result, online makeup content creators would try to be as socially aware as possible and would only utilize products in which are deemed as cruelty-free, although in what way a product can be deemed as cruelty-free is not expressed vividly under United States law (Springirth, 2016, p. 3).

Upon viewing the Instagram accounts of the three makeup content creators who I have interviewed, I have spotted a pattern of utilizing and/or promoting cosmetic brands that are either cruelty-free, vegan, or both, with examples such as NYX Professional Makeup, listed frequently by Harviali; Morphe, listed frequently as a hashtag by Edward; and Fenty Beauty by Rihanna, listed frequently by Rohim. All of these makeup brands are well-known and commonly used by not only content creators but also individuals in their everyday lives: NYX Professional Makeup is known for their quality as well as their cruelty free and vegan products, Morphe is known for their affordable products and inclusivity, and Fenty Beauty is known for their inclusive products, especially for individuals with deep skin. On the websites and/or Instagram accounts of these three makeup brands, it is evident that they vividly display that they are cruelty-free brands, noticeable right on their homepages or Instagram bio. Upon viewing their About Us pages on their websites, not only is it evident that they promote that their brands are cruelty-free, but they also write about how self-expression is a form of art, artistic expression, creativity, and individuality, as if not in reference to strict gendered notions at all.

On the NYX Professional Makeup website's About Us page, the first two sentences write "[W]e believe in unstoppable self-expression. Together we empower every proud makeup junkie to live…" (n.d., emphasis added); they even use the tagline Proud Artistry for All on their homepage. Because of this, it can be inferred that the company also promotes self-expression that does not particularly pertain to the binarized notions of femininity and masculinity, but involves every individual regardless of gender. Furthermore, on the Morphe website's Partnerships page under their About Us section, they write about how they believe in "inclusivity, community, and creating safe spaces for people to express themselves" (n.d.); this means that they also promote self-expression that does not need to be defined by notions of femininity, masculinity, or gender. Finally, on the Fenty Beauty website's About Us section on their homepage, they put quotes by their creator Rihanna, who talks about how makeup should be fun, and how those who wear makeup should "dare to do something new or different" (n.d.). In addition, she talks about how the products of her company are easy to use, and how "everyone can get it on" (n.d., emphasis added). Because of this, it can be inferred that the company also promotes self-expression that is inclusive of everyone, regardless of gender. However, whether these brands promote inclusivity due to activism or due to profitability is another discussion worth making, since brands are knowledgeable of the fact that individuals would be more inclined to consume brands of which promote inclusivity, whether it may be in regard to gender or race.

In other words, the brands used and highlighted by aesthetic entrepreneurs do not only present themselves as ethical brands, but also promote self-expression as a form of art, artistic expression, creativity, and individuality in which does not necessarily need to be defined by normative notions of femininity, masculinity, or gender. Therefore, makeup should be considered as a genderless form of artistic expression by the general public because this is not only expressed by the makeup content creators themselves, but also by the brands they support – brands of which are based within ethical consumerist narratives that also extend to contemporary, ethical humanist narratives.

Conclusion

Though makeup has been inscribed a gender one way or another since the fifteenth century, it is evident that, in recent years, the notion of makeup as gendered has been challenged and changed by the liberal, Western-influenced society, through processes such as reflexivity, as evident on social media platforms like Instagram. Through the actions of makeup content creators, their followers, and prominent makeup brands, I shall reiterate that makeup should, nay shall, be regarded as a genderless form of artistic expression, since the definitions of gender are in constant motion, and the stigmatization of makeup worn on a certain gender or individual is only a trend that will eventually shift once more. In addition, as explored through phenomenological research and through the utilization of Butler's (1988) notion of gender performativity, Negrin's (2008) writing on gender border crossings, and Kim's (2013) discussion on reflexivity, it has been found that not only is makeup a genderless form of artistic expression, but it has also gone to a point where it has transcended strict gendered notions altogether, therefore being regarded in more contemporary times as a form of art, artistic expression, creativity, individuality, and self-expression, all of which are genderless actions. Furthermore, it has been found that through aesthetic entrepreneurs have individuals been able to perform constant, everyday reflexivity, internalizing the notion of makeup as genderless, whether it may be through the aesthetic entrepreneurs themselves or through the socially conscious brands that they showcase and support. By classifying makeup as a genderless form of artistic expression, it can not only allow individuals of normative and non-normative genders to explore their own selves without limitations, but also further gender studies and feminist research in reference to self-expression, artistic expression, and individuality, potentially leading towards a more accepting and non-gender centric view of art.

Acknowledgements

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