

Brief Report: The Effects of Women's Cosmetics on Men's Approach: An Evaluation in a Bar

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It has been found that cosmetics do improve female facial attractiveness when judgments were made based on photographs. Furthermore, these were laboratory studies and no field study exists in the literature. An experiment carried out in a field context was conducted in order to verify if makeup is associated with higher attractiveness in a courtship context. Female confederates with and without makeup were seated in two bars on Wednesday and Saturday nights in an attractive spot on the West Atlantic coast of France. Each experimental session lasted one hour. The number of men's solicitations and the latency of the first solicitation were used as dependent variables. Results showed that the makeup condition was associated with a higher number of male solicitations and a shorter latency between the arrival of the confederates in the bar and the first courtship solicitation of a male.

There is evidence that makeup has been used by women throughout history in order to improve their facial attractiveness (Key, 2005; Malkan, 2006; Marwick, 1988). Over the past decade, men have increased their use of cosmetics to increase their attractiveness (Malkan, 2006). The cosmetic industry is one of the most flourishing industries in the world. The question rises as to whether makeup really influences the perception of an increase in facial attractiveness, and if this improvement is sufficient to influence the courtship behavior of men towards women? Social psychologists have extensively examined how people form impressions about others, but the impact of cosmetics on impressions has not received much attention. A few publications suggest that cosmetics enhance the facial attractiveness of women who wear makeup. Furthermore, the stimuli used in this research lack ecological validity. Those stimuli are photographs that depict women in artificial ways, such as unusual poses with physical details obscured. So there is a need for research to examine the role of cosmetics in more natural, dynamic and three-dimensional settings. Secondly, dependent variables have been limited to the use of photographs. Furthermore, the effect of rated attractiveness on behavior still remains in question.

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Literature examining the role of cosmetics on social perception, has found that, overall, make-up is associated with positive evaluation of a woman. Graham and Jouhar (1981) reported positive effects of cosmetics on judgment. Male and female participants rated color photographs of four female targets of average physical attractiveness on several traits related to appearance and personality. With facial makeup, the targets were rated as being cleaner, more tidy, more feminine, more physically attractive, as well as being more secure, sociable, interesting, poised, confident, organized and popular. Cox and Glick (1986) examined how average-looking women were perceived after a professional make-over versus cosmetics-free and found that cosmetics were positively associated with femininity and sexiness. Workman and Johnson (1991) instructed female participants to view one of three colored photographs of a professional model wearing either heavy, moderate, or no cosmetics. They found that cosmetics significantly enhanced the impression of attractiveness and femininity. Cash, Dawson, Davis, Bowen and Galumbeck (1989) conducted an experiment in which American college students were photographed while wearing their typical facial cosmetics and again following the removal of their makeup. Participants rated the physical attractiveness of the women. It was found that males' judgments were more favorable when the women were photographed with cosmetics than when they were cosmetics free, whereas females' judgments were not affected by the presence or absence of makeup. In a recent study, Nash, Fieldman, Hussey, Lévesque and Pineau (2006) presented four women's facial photographs either with or without cosmetics. It was found that women with cosmetics were perceived as healthier and more confident. Participants also perceived women wearing makeup as having a greater earning potential and more prestigious jobs than the same women without cosmetics. However, wearing make-up is not always associated with positive evaluation. McKeachie (1952) found that young male students evaluated young women with make-up as more frivolous and more interested in the opposite sex.

It seems that different levels of cosmetics use are associated with different perceptions. Mulhern, Fieldman, Hussey, Lévesque and Pineau (2003) asked male and female participants to view a set of five photographs of women volunteers and to rank each set from most to least attractive. Volunteers were made up by a beautician under five cosmetics conditions: no makeup, foundation only, eyes makeup only, lips makeup only and full facial makeup (foundation, eyes and lips). It was found that faces with full makeup were judged more attractive than the same faces that were makeup free. They also found that eye makeup alone yielded higher levels of mean attractiveness ratings than foundation makeup

only, and the latter yielded higher levels of mean attractiveness ratings than lip makeup only.

Taken together, these studies seem to show that cosmetics enhance the perception of physical attractiveness and some other feminine traits of women. The intent of the present study was to explore the effect of makeup on the courtship behavior of men toward women in a real context, as contrasted with previous research where impression formation of facial attractiveness was evaluated in a laboratory with the help of photographs. Given the importance of physical attractiveness of women for men in dating (Shackelford, Schmitt & Buss, 2005) it is important to test this effect of makeup on courtship behavior in a natural setting. It was hypothesized that women with facial cosmetics would be solicited more often by men for a date than the same women without cosmetics, and that the latency between entering the bar and the first solicitation would be shorter for the cosmetic condition.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 213 young men judged to be approximately 20 to 28 years old. Given the fact that this experiment was an observational study, no demographics information were available. They were present in two bars where the experiment was carried out. The two bars were situated right in the center of a town of 70,000 inhabitants - a seaside resort on the West Atlantic coast in France.

Procedure

The procedure used in this experiment was approved by the ethical committee of the laboratory. The experiment was conducted during 10 Wednesday and 10 Saturday nights between 8:30 p.m. and midnight with the consent of the owners of the two bars. Three sessions of 1 hour each were conducted each night: 8:30-9:30 p. m., 9:45-10:45 p. m., 11:00-12. The first session began in one bar whereas the second began in the second bar and the third session was again conducted in the first bar. The choice of the first bar was done according to a random selection that was performed each night. Thus 60 observational periods were obtained (2 days a week \times 10 weeks \times 3 sessions each day = 60). Two male observers (20 years old) were seated in the bar near where the experiment took place. Two women confederates (one 20 years old, the other 21) volunteered to participate in this experiment. They did not live in the town where the experiment was carried out and it was the first time that they had entered either of the two bars. Another volunteer was a young female beautician who "made up" the two confederates during the length of the experiment. In the makeup-free condition, the beautician cleaned

and moisturized the faces of the two women confederates. In the makeup condition, the beautician applied makeup to the eyes, cheeks and lips in a way that enhanced the attractiveness of each confederate. Precaution was taken in order to select confederates who usually wore make-up.

According to a random selection during the 20 nights on which the experiment was conducted, both of the women-confederates either wore makeup or not when they entered the bar, and stayed with or without makeup throughout the evening. The women were instructed to try to sit at a free table near the place where single men often stand up to drink. Two minutes before the women-confederates entered the bar, the two young male observers were present. They were instructed to sit in a place where it was possible for them to observe the bar and the tables, without choosing a table near the bar. The female-confederates were instructed to sit down and begin talking to each other without exhibiting interest in the other persons present in the bar. When the women-confederates were seated one of the observers started a chronometer and stopped it when either of the two women folded their arms. It was a code meaning that a man had made a contact. A man's behavior was considered a contact if the man spoke to one of the two female confederates (sentences like "Hello, it's the first time that I have seen you here," or "What are two beautiful women like you doing here?"). Nonverbal behaviors of men, such as a fixed gaze or a smile, were disregarded because they are difficult to interpret. When a verbal contact was made by a man, one of the women-confederates was instructed to say "Hello, we are waiting for someone who will probably arrive in one or two minutes. We will have much to talk about. Another time perhaps?" This brief statement was sufficient to stop the interaction and cause the male to leave the two confederates. The second male observer was instructed to count the number of males who approached (the same code was used each time) the two women, whereas the first observer was instructed to give the "stop" signal by standing up after each 60-minute session.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The two dependent variables measured in this experiment were the time elapsed before a first verbal contact was made by a man from the moment when the women confederates sat down, and the total number of verbal contacts made by men during each one-hour session. These two sets of means are presented in Table 1.

Statistical comparisons of the time elapsed before a first male contact revealed a range from 2.1 minutes to 36.1 minutes in the makeup condition and from 6.2 minutes to 48.2 minutes in the makeup free condition. Within the 60 sessions of observation no session occurred without some male contact. The difference between the two means was

statistically significant ($t(58, \text{two-tailed}) = 2.57, p < .02, d = 0.67$). The amount of time passing before one contact occurred was significantly lower in the makeup condition than in the no makeup condition.

TABLE 1 Time Elapsed for the First Male Contact and Number of Men Making Contact Across Conditions

	Makeup N = 30	No makeup N = 30
Time elapsed before the first male contact		
Mean (in minutes)	17.09	23.08
SD	9.03	9.05
Number of men making contact by period		
Mean (number per hour)	2.07	1.57
SD	0.74	0.68

Note: N= 30 refers to 30 periods of observation

The range for the number of contacts per session was the same for both conditions (from 1 to 3). The difference between the two means was tested with the help of an independent samples *t*-test. We found a significant difference between these two means ($t(58, \text{two-tailed}) = 2.73, p < .01, d = 0.72$), thus makeup resulted in a higher number of contacts per hour. So with each dependent variable, statistical differences between the two conditions were found. Cohen's measure of effect size of the difference indicated a medium effect (Cohen, 1988).

In order to study the relation between the two dependent variables, Pearson correlation tests were performed. A significant negative correlation was found between the amount of time elapsed for the first male contact and the total number of contacts for each session for the makeup condition ($r(28) = -.54, p < .005$) and the makeup free condition ($r(28) = -.61, p < .001$). In other words a short elapsed time before the first contact of a session was associated with a large number of contacts for that session.

The predictions were supported by the results of this experiment. Makeup of the female-confederates was associated with higher male contact and a shorter latency for the first contact. These results obtained in a real social setting were congruent with the data obtained from studies on impression formation conducted in the laboratory (Cash, Dawson, Davis, Bowen & Galumbeck, 1989; Cox & Glick, 1986; Graham & Jouhar, 1981; Nash, Fieldman, Hussey, Lévêque and Pineau, 2006; Mulhern, Fieldman, Hussey, Lévêque & Pineau, 2003; Workman & Johnson, 1991). These results seem to show that the positive effects of make-up on ratings of physical or social attractiveness found in the studies cited here translate to more overt behaviors of males.

One might ask why cosmetic use is associated with courtship behavior. Perhaps the effect of makeup is not to enhance physical attractiveness *per se*, but to serve as a cue to males that "this female might be available." McKeachie (1952) reported data indicating that young women were evaluated by young male students as more frivolous and more interested in the opposite sex when wearing makeup than when not. Cosmetics also have been found to enhance some factors associated with greater attractiveness for men in dating relationships. Specifically, foundation created an effective mask that increased facial symmetry and improved skin texture, variables associated with greater female attractiveness for males in dating relationships (Fink, Grammer & Thornhill, 2001; Tovée, Tasker & Benson, 2000). Perhaps in the present experiment makeup affected men's behavior because the beautician had enhanced the facial symmetry and the skin texture of the two women-confederates. Of course, this explanation remains speculative given the fact that our study only focused on behavioral observation and not on confederates' evaluation. Furthermore, the results found in the experiment have some practical implication. They suggest that women can successfully employ cosmetics to increase their attractiveness and to encourage men to establish contact with them.

There are limitations to the present study. Though care was taken to ensure that the treatment of the two experimental groups only differed in terms of presence versus absence of makeup, it may also be possible that the experimental conditions differed in other ways. The same two women-confederates acted in the two experimental conditions. Even though they had been instructed to talk only with each other, some factors difficult to control, such as changes in facial expression or body language, could have influenced their attraction. Cash and Cash (1982) and Cash, Dawson, Davis, Bowen and Galumbeck (1989) found that American female college students wearing makeup had more positive body-image cognitions and affect than when cosmetics were not worn. Perhaps this effect led our two women confederates to exhibit nonverbal behaviors related to such cognitions: behaviors that led, in turn, to enhanced attractiveness to men. Finally, the present results can not be generalized to cultures other than French given the fact that this experiment was conducted only in France.

It would be interesting to conduct a similar experiment employing women confederates for whom cosmetics have positive body-image cognitions versus those who do not. Another possibility is to employ the methodology of Mulhern, et al. (2003) to test the effect of different cosmetic products separately.

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