HOW DO COSMETICS ENHANCE FEMALE BEAUTY?

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ABSTRACT
There exists biologically based universal factors influencing perceptions of attractiveness. The main evidence for the idea that attractiveness has some basis in biology is the observations of agreement between adults in different cultures and between adults and very young infants on the relative attractiveness of different faces. Youthfulness, skin homogeneity, averageness (similarity of the face to the population average), sexual dimorphism, and bilateral symmetry of the face are now considered to be consistent universal factors of facial attractiveness. If there is agreement on what is attractive in a face, there should also be agreement on how the attractiveness of a face can be enhanced. Yet the makeup practices used by women from different ages and from different origins to enhance their beauty seem incredibly varied. In this context, our research aims to understand how cosmetics enhance female beauty. Are there any biological rules, universal or specific, that guide the way cosmetics are applied to enhance facial beauty? Russell & Jones observed that makeup enhances the difference in luminance and color between the eyes, the lips, the brows and the surrounding skin - also defined as facial contrast. Facial contrast has been shown to be a universal sexually dimorphic - female faces having higher luminance contrast around the eyes and the lips than male faces (Russell 2009; Jones 2015) - and youth-related attribute - young female faces having higher contrast around the eyes, the lips and brows than old female faces (Porcheron 2013) -. In addition, increasing facial contrast with subtle digital manipulations makes female faces look more feminine and younger, regardless of the origin of the face and the origin of the observer. Though people are not consciously aware of the sex and age differences in facial contrast, they nevertheless use facial contrast as a cue in perceiving the sex and the age of a face. Altogether these findings strongly suggest that a universal function of makeup is to accentuate biological factors of femininity and youth to enhance women's beauty. Yet in a recent study we observed that makeup does change the apparent age of the face, making older women appear younger, but making young women (and perhaps girls) appear older, and not causing any change to the apparent age of women around 30 years old. An intriguing possibility is that makeup makes young faces appear older simply because it is worn primarily by adult women. This would support the notion that makeup makes faces more attractive not only by modifying biologically-based factors of beauty, but also by signifying socially desirable traits (e.g. sexual maturity, competence, social status, etc.). All this work lead to opened questions on how the biological and social functions of makeup guide the cosmetic practices of women.
KEYWORDS
makeup | factors of attractiveness | facial contrast | age | femininity | universal

REFERENCES