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Exploring Core Concepts and Uses of Makeup in Expressive Arts Therapy and Mental Health: A Critical Review of the Literature

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**Exploring Core Concepts and Uses of Makeup in Expressive Arts Therapy and Mental
Health: A Critical Review of the Literature**

May 5th, 2023

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Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Expressive Arts Therapy

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Exploring Core Concepts and Uses of Makeup in Expressive Arts Therapy and Mental Health: A
Critical Review of the Literature

Introduction

Makeup has been used for centuries to promote wealth, social class, and honor traditions of numerous cultures. The earliest form of makeup can be traced back to the African Middle Stone Age, and the creation of “body art” from natural materials over 100,000 years ago (Gupta, 2017, para 1). Conventional and non-conventional cosmetics, face paint, and body art have been used in Asian Cultures (Chinese Dynasties, Geishas, Kabuki Theater makeup), Mexican and Latinx cultures (Day of The Dead), and Indian Cultures (Henna and Bindi’s). As well as dating back hundreds of thousands of years to Ancient Egyptians. Makeup is also commonly used in the LGBTQ+ communities and in pre-existing Expressive therapy modalities like Play or Drama therapy. Makeup has been and can continue to be an expression of emotions, passion, culture, tradition, community, and advocacy for people of all ages and backgrounds.

According to Merriam Webster (2022) the definitions for Makeup are as follows; “Cosmetics (such as lipstick, mascara, and eye shadow) used to color and beautify the face”, “A cosmetic applied to other parts of the body”, and “Materials (such as wigs and cosmetics) used in making up or in special costuming (as for a play).” Many of the articles reviewed also discuss the importance of skin care and the rituals that one goes through when applying or removing facial products. For this research, a combination of all definitions above will be most beneficial. However, one may define makeup, within the current body of literature, there seems to be a universality about what is known. Though makeup’s ability to physically transform is obvious, those individuals who use it more often tend to have an affinity for its emotional impact as well.

Whether the application provides a calm space, helps one to better understand themselves, provides a sense of control, a hobby, sense of pride, helps increase self-esteem. or allows them to feel a closer kinship to themselves. Makeup can be an outward reflection and expression of who someone is. It can allow people to feel a sense of control and balance in life. The therapeutic value of makeup is therefore an important argument to consider in expressive therapies.

According to international aesthetician, Dr Geetika Mittal Gupta, “makeup therapy is real, and it could be your thing to turn to when everything else seems too difficult to tackle. When it comes to our beauty routines, we have complete power. We know how to apply eyeliner, how much nude to put on our lips, and how to put three dots of highlighter on our cheeks. No one knows this better than we do, and it is because of this awareness that we feel entirely in command” (Shah, 2022, Makeup Therapy Offers You a Semblance of Control section). The research questions for this review are, what are the core concepts of makeup and its uses that make it therapeutic? Can makeup be used as a therapeutic modality within Expressive Therapies for mental health purposes?

The concept of makeup as therapy is extremely new, and the expressive arts therapies field lacks research on this topic. As a response to the gap in literature, a critical review of existing knowledge around makeup, skincare, face massage, physical touch, and how these may affect one’s mental health or sense of self must be explored. As well as providing a clear and concise definition of what makeup can mean within Expressive Therapies. Julia Jarrold, LCSW, a therapist at Real, defines self-expression as, “how we express or convey our thoughts, feelings, and ideas. For many of us, outlets of self-expression, like makeup, are ways in which we connect with our lives — it's how we process who we are and our experiences” (Sasso, 2022, para 2). To educate future and current Expressive Therapists on how to make it more accessible, adaptive,

and socially acceptable within a therapeutic setting, guidelines and precautions are needed before using this as intervention. This review is a starting point for more in-depth studies and ongoing research to be done on how makeup could be used as a therapeutic tool.

It is necessary to first look at how makeup was used throughout history within cultures and how different populations have used makeup and its evolution. Through this process it is crucial to address the common generalizations of what makeup is and how we might redefine them for a therapeutic setting. For example, makeup can be seen as a concealment of flaws or a way to “cover-up” as if to shield from the outside world. However, “Makeup can be about more than just your outside appearance. It can be about regaining control over your life” (Set Your Beauty Standard, 2020, Using Makeup to Aid with Anxiety Struggles section). Makeup can be therapeutic in more ways than one. It can provide someone with a space to “unwind” and declutter their mind. It can be part of someone’s stable routine, a self-esteem boost, a self-care regimen, one’s best expression of self, or one’s only opportunity during the day to be present. Makeup can provide an outlet for someone which Julia Jarrold, LCSW, mentions as also being “coping mechanisms for how we experience our feelings, and, depending on our relationship with self-expression and the form it takes in our life, it may even be a patterned familiar practice that can help us to do that connecting and processing safely or in a way that feels contained”(Sasso, 2022, para 2).

Through a collection of resources there may be a common thread between the expressive therapies and the use of makeup and skin care for those who are working toward better mental health. Of course, it is not anticipated that “makeup therapy” will be recommended to everyone who begins working with a licensed expressive art therapist but rather that it becomes a possibility for trained therapists to explore with certain clients and gain a deeper knowledge of

its benefits, as firsthand accounts and future research are the goal of this literature review. This compilation of evidence may provide the key to a door that can help us to reflect on makeup and how it may be the rising modality that helps a wide demographic of clients in wider society and contemporary culture.

Through this research, addressing not only the benefits but the negative impact makeup may have on certain individuals' mental and physical health is crucial. A common misconception around makeup and the people who wear it is often that "they lack confidence", while the opposite may be said for those who opt out of wearing makeup. This sort of biased stance in the use of makeup is a valid start to conversations with future clients on where their feelings on makeup may be based. Jarrold says, "We don't need to get wrapped up in the products — what we use and when we use them — but how they make us feel." (Sasso, 2022, para 2). With a topic that is largely subjective, it is important to investigate any potential limitations or biases to makeup as a therapeutic modality.

Historical Context of Makeup

The ancient Egyptians are known to have begun using the world's first set of cosmetics. In 10,000 BCE cosmetics were an "integral part of Egyptian hygiene and health". Both men and women would use essential oils to clean and soften their skin, much like modern skin care regimes. The use of oil was helpful for protection against the Egyptian sun and dry winds, similar to today's cultural emphasis on the use of sunscreen ("History of Cosmetics", n.d., para 2). Women used burnt matches to darken their eyes. Back then, berries weren't just for eating as these fruits were quite important in staining their lips. (Lobo, 2017, Makeup History and Trivia section) Much like today the use and ideals of makeup has been bound by society's standards.

For example, Ancient Egyptians used makeup to promote their social status using “lead-based face makeup” to lighten their skin (Sasso, 2022, para 3).

Within Indian culture, Henna is created by crushing the leaves of the *Lawsonia Inermis* trees, creating a “thick paste that results in semi-permanent, reddish-brown stains” (Awana, 2020, The Art of Marriage section). Henna has an association with luck and rites of passage within the culture and is often used on brides before their weddings. Henna can be applied to hair, fingernails, hands, and feet (which is most often seen at wedding ceremonies and known as ‘mehndi’). Women of Indian heritage wear mehndi on many other special occasions and religious holidays (Awana, 2020, The Art of Marriage section).

A Bindi is a red dot worn often as an accessory to make up, between the eyebrows and is associated with love and honor. It is also a custom often seen at weddings but can be worn for any occasion. It is said that the “Area between the eyebrows is known as the "third eye," a chakra that East Indians believe to be the center of a person's spiritual power” (Awana, 2020, The Chakra of Beauty section). For years, Bindi’s have been worn by both genders to enhance their beauty and spiritual vitality.

The Day of the Dead, or “Día de los Muertos”, is a popular holiday celebrated in Mexico and some of South America. It is a day to celebrate your loved ones who have passed on and honoring their lives. It is most recognized for the unique and colorful face makeup that many of the festival goer’s wear. The design is modeled off of a skull candy or “sugar skull” that is made for the celebration. The infamous holiday has roots dating back to ancient Aztec rituals and many believe that this is the day, “When the limit in between the worlds of the living and the dead is thought to be thinnest” (Neeley, 2020, Don’t confuse Día de los Muertos with Halloween

section). The makeup worn during this holiday is supposed to symbolize this thinning between worlds and the coming together of both the living and deceased.

For makeup in China, Shen Yunlu, a professor from Shanghai International Studies University remarked that “ancient beauty practices were closely related to social, political and economic factors” (Yunlu, 2022, para 1). This can be seen throughout the centuries in each of the Chinese dynasties. The Tang Dynasty was known for the application of red blush on a large area of the face. It was believed that this gave a “rich and luxurious presentation” (Euphoric Sun, 2022, Tang Dynasty section). In the Han Dynasty, women wore white powder and black ‘Dai’ (a greenish-black pigment used to darken eyebrows). Based on your social status, those of lower class used natural elements to achieve this look, whereas women of a higher class wore white powder made from lead, which had a stronger whitening effect.

In Japanese culture women also wanted to achieve a lighter complexion but for two different reasons. Geishas, who were entertainers, trained in dance and song connected to their culture, wore white face makeup to be more visible and recognized (Morishita, 2022). Another well-known makeup tradition is known as ‘Kabuki’, or Kesho and Kumadori makeup, which is rarely seen outside the theater. Kesho is the standard make up for most actors on the set, but Kumadori is used for villains and heroes. Within Kumadori style, there are hundreds of different variations of the makeup look, often using dramatic lines, shapes, and colors to represent different emotions or feelings. For example, “dark red represents passion or anger; dark blue represents depression or sadness; pink represents youth; light green represents calm; black represents fear; and purple represents nobility” (Serras, n.d., Kabuki makeup section). The makeup used in Kabuki theater is crucial to the storytelling and depiction of each character.

As makeup has evolved over centuries it has grown from a cultural touchstone, into an everyday, every occasion medium, that many access to express expressions of gender, identity, and modern ideas.

Makeup and Current Culture

The Impact of Makeup Within the LGBTQ+ Community

In the 21st century makeup has taken on different meanings for many ages, genders, and cultures. Within the LGBTQ+ community, specifically, makeup became a tool in key cultural moments like within the “NOH8 Campaign”, created by celebrity photographer Adam Bouska and partner Jeff Parshley in the early 2000s, who painted their infamous logo on the cheeks of many celebrities. This organization's mission was to “promote marriage, gender, and human equality through education, advocacy, social media, and visual protest” (NOH8 Campaign, 2009, Mission Statement section). The photos featured people with “duct tape over their mouths, symbolizing their voices being silenced by Proposition 8 and similar legislation around the world, with "NOH8" painted on one cheek in protest” (NOH8 Campaign, 2009, para 2).

Before the NOH8 campaign, the use of makeup was already widely used to make an impact within Drag communities. For many years, drag was defined as “cross dressing”, when it’s so much more, “It’s an art form that’s defiant of gender norms. Each bold brushstroke and wig flip is a step towards a non-conformist, out-of-the-ordinary means of self-expression” (Desai, 2020, para 2). The use of makeup has helped those in the drag community feel like they can be transformed into anything they want to be, despite societal, gender constructs. Rimi Heart, a renowned drag queen states, “make-up is central to my character. I grew up as a feminine, gay boy, drawn to bright pink colours in a society where that’s frowned upon. Through drag, I could

finally fill that longing and embrace that side of me; and now I can't live without it" (R. Heart, personal communication, September 28, 2020). Another adds, "Drag is a part of my lifestyle. My body is my canvas, I use all the colours in my make-up palette to create magnificent characters which help me emote and communicate about topics that are important to me and others like me" (Zeesh, personal communication, September 28, 2020). Drag queen Betta Naanstop says makeup helps express a character's feelings and believes drag empowers them saying, "It taught me that if I don't mean anything to myself, I can't expect it out of other people" (B. Naanstop, personal communication, September 28, 2020).

Makeup within the BIPOC Community

For those in the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities, self-expression can be one of the most important factors in making a statement and being unapologetically themselves. Unfortunately, with constantly changing beauty standards or respectability politics, people in these marginalized communities "Don't have the freedom to express themselves without the fear of being harmed or rebuffed" (Sasso, 2022, Exclusionary Self-Expression and Beauty Standards section). In other words, certain groups may lack access to makeup and the subject itself may be a point of tenderness that therapists should be mindful of when working with people of color. Julia Jarrold, LCSW, a therapist at Real states, "When our ability to express ourselves is limited, it can impact our relationship with ourselves, and that looks differently for all of us," Jarrold says. "It may result in our feeling silenced, and that silence weighs on our ability to connect with ourselves, and so we don't attempt to generate that self-relationship. For others, it may mean that in spite of our external circumstances, we work much harder to engage in this self-relationship" (Sasso, 2022, Exclusionary Self-Expression and Beauty Standards section).

"Self-expression can also be the means through which a person challenges the systems of oppression", For example, people of color are "increasingly embracing their natural hair texture or curls, male-identifying folks wearing nail polish, or women intentionally choosing to no longer use makeup" (Sasso, 2022, *Exclusionary Self-Expression and Beauty Standards* section). Makeup can be the "go-to" of self-expression and empowerment for individuals defying societal constructs and injustices.

For people of color, it is not only a challenge to find ways to be their authentic self, but it is also a challenge within the beauty world to have access to makeup that doesn't "whitewash" who they are. Many makeup brands do not carry a wide range of shades in face makeup such as; concealer, bronzer, and foundation. Not only are people of color rarely represented in media and product promotion, but makeup often is not made for their skin tone. Oftentimes brands do not have a broad enough shade range to meet the needs of EVERYONE, due to where their products are being sold and their projected customer base (Arterberry 2015, *What's The Hold Up* section). While in recent years there have been more brands extending their shade ranges, there are still many brands that remain "tone-deaf" simply because they don't believe that POC is their "clientele". Funmi Fetto a beauty editor for Vogue Magazine, speaks through her own difficult experience with makeup being a person of color. She mentions, "The issue is not really about foundations. It is about representation and equality." She goes on to say, "It's not perfect, but a Mindshift in marketing and media could make a significant difference." (Fetto, 2019, para 15) That being said, a discussion around accessibility and lack thereof with clients of color may be necessary. As a therapist providing makeup as therapy, we must be aware of the challenges and experiences of those surrounding the makeup and skin care world. Fetto ends the article by noting. "While it's wonderful that I can now find a base that won't turn me deathly grey or

cantaloupe orange, in order to really move forward, the beauty industry needs to start having conversations that go deeper than the shades of foundation” (Fetto, 2019, para 19).

Makeup and Therapeutic Contexts: A Multisensory Experience

De-roling in Drama Therapy and Self Discovery

The act of taking off makeup or “de-roling” is just as significant as the act of putting it on can be. Applying makeup can be like putting on a role for some. “Roles play a part in self-expression, contingent on interactions with others and the world” (Sarbin, 1986). In drama therapy roles provide us with a “self-discovery outlet for clients to try on new roles, gain insight into stagnantly expressed roles and identify contradictory or counter roles” (Lassken, 2017, para 1). The use of makeup in a therapeutic setting may provide a safe space for us to try on or take off roles we've created or want to create for ourselves. This transition can be a huge shift for us mentally, emotionally, behaviorally, and physiologically (Lassken, 2017, as cited in Landy, 2009), which is why de-roling would be crucial in this work. It, “Is a process where the role play ceremoniously ends and awareness is essential to validate contributions obtained from playing the role and gain neutrality” (Lassken, 2017, as cited in Landy, 2009, para 1).

Make Up and The Mask

This is where skin care and a skin care routine can be introduced as an obtainable option for those who enjoy wearing makeup, who don't wear makeup or for those practicing not being reliant on makeup. For clients who rely on makeup as a “mask” or as a necessity, it may be in the therapists’ best interest to offer makeup removal wipes, skin care rituals, or a routine for removing make up alongside a client (Weaver, 2012). This article provides suggestions that can

be great interventions to use with a client that may be struggling to go out in public without a full face of makeup or who may be struggling with self-esteem and body image. A therapist can suggest reciting affirmations, substitutions for negative self-talk, and work on ways to remove focus of physical appearance. Weaver suggests several tasks that individuals can do for themselves. They are, firstly, to “start each day with a positive statement that compliments attributes other than size, weight, shape or physical appearance; minimize diet and weight talk, allowing more time to focus on positive, meaningful aspects of life, and to remove the focus off of physical appearance, allowing one to more fully reflect on their thoughts, feelings and words of self-acceptance”(Weaver, 2012, para 20).

Skin care and rituals of self-care can help us to connect deeper to ourselves and show ourselves love and compassion. The incorporation of positive reinforcements and affirmations after wearing makeup or during a skin care routine can have positive effects on one's mental health.

Physical Touch and Face Massage

Physical touch and connection are also a huge factor in makeup and skin care. Whether you enjoy the feeling of massaging your foundation into your skin or the act of “tickling” yourself with brushes dusted in color, it can be a very enjoyable and peaceful experience. When it comes to skincare the same may apply using rollers, your hands to massage facial oils or lotions into the skin and even an emerging popular tool called a gua sha. Gua sha tools are a form of ancient Chinese medicine involving the use of an oval like stone tool that is used to rub over the skin in a distinct motion. It is believed that by using this tool to stimulate blood flow, it could help release, “Unhealthy toxins from the blood,” ultimately “promoting the metabolic repair of

the cells, allowing the body to heal much faster” (“Origins of Gua Sha”, n.d., Where Did Gua Sha Originate section). Not only can the use of gua sha’s be an extraordinary addition to your makeup removing ritual, but it can also help relieve tension in the face, often due to stress. It can help with “reducing puffiness and inflammation and reducing sinus pressure” as well (“Why Gua Sha is Good for You”, 2022, Gua Sha for the Face section).

When a person can physically feel good and health conditions are managed correctly, it can do wonders for their mental health as well. The use of gua sha’s can be beneficial for elevation of multiple physical health conditions such as “musculoskeletal problems, especially major ones like tightness in the shoulders, legs and back. It can also help alleviate tension headaches, migraines, neck pain or swelling in your body. Sobo adds that gua sha can help with anxiety, fatigue, insomnia and perimenopausal symptoms when done in addition to acupuncture” (“Why Gua Sha is Good for You”, 2022, Who Should Avoid Gua Sha section). Not only can gua sha’s help with short term health conditions but there has been numerous studies that show gua sha usage can help those with Perimenopausal syndrome and Tourette's syndrome. One study found that 80 women with Perimenopausal syndrome experienced a reduction of symptoms after a 15-minute gua sha treatment that took place once a week along with conventional therapy for eight weeks (Higuera, 2017, Perimenopausal Syndrome Section). Another study involving a 33-year-old man with Tourette's syndrome found that gua sha treatments in conjunction with acupuncture, natural supplements, and modifying his lifestyle improved his symptoms up to 70 percent after 35 once a week session (Higuera, 2017, Tourette Syndrome section).

Makeup Across All Developmental Stages

Face Paint with Children

Face paint has been used as a traditional activity at parties and festivals allowing them to transform into their favorite character or animal. Face paint can bring a smile to many kids' faces and provide a great deal of learning opportunity for them. No matter the child's gender identification, face paint is a type of makeup that children and families seem to enjoy and accept. The use of face paint can also provide a child with new learning opportunities!

First and foremost, Face paint can provide a child with choice, and full control during a time in their life when most things are decided for them. A nursery teacher conducted a project that allowed children to face paint on themselves and one another. The author noted that based on the theme of "alphabet" the children chose what letter they wanted to do, then decided on the appropriate word starting with that letter to paint on one another. Not only did the children partake in dressing up, they were able to choose "their ideal face" by looking through "books for ideas" as well as the internet which helped with providing "templates for the children to use" (Bowkett, n.d., Finding Inspiration section). Face paint also provides an element of play and drama therapy as the child can act out the animal or character they are becoming. According to the author, "Transforming our faces enhanced play activities enormously" (Bowkett, n.d., Learning opportunities section). "Our play corner became a jungle when some monkeys arrived with lions and leopards in close proximity, and even a snake slithered by at one point. When children asked for more stripes than their friend, or two less spots, it was the ideal opportunity to talk about the vocabulary of numbers" (Bowkett, n.d., Learning opportunities section).

Makeup with Teenagers

A "Parenting of Teens", advice blog describes how makeup can benefit the teenage population. A National Report on the State of Self-Esteem, commissioned by the Dove® Self

Esteem Fund, revealed “that there is a self-esteem crisis in this country that pervades every aspect of a girl’s life including her looks, performance in school and relationships with friends and family members”. Regardless of gender, studies have shown that the ability and freedom to express one’s self-using makeup can help a variety of mental health conditions. Makeup can help teens to “overcome the feelings of self-consciousness they get when they look in the mirror. It can also help them begin to establish a more lasting sense of identity” (“Polaris Teen Center”, 2017, para 3).

A Sense of Control

One of the first points made is that when someone can control some aspect of their life when all else feels like it's out of their control, they begin to feel more motivated to take control over their life, reducing symptoms of anxiety. (“Polaris Teen Center”, 2017, Sense of Control section). Makeup can enable teens to control their appearance and inspire a sense of empowerment. (“Polaris Teen Center”, 2017, Sense of Control section). Shakaila Forbes-Bell, Afterpay's consumer psychologist, says. "Studies show that ritualistic processes like applying makeup can help people cope with these negative emotions, mainly because you have complete control over the process and the outcome" (Stewart, 2020, How Makeup Can Help with Anxiety and Depression section). The process of picking out colors, choosing the products, and being able to count on “predictable “results are all factors in ways makeup can help manage emotions. Dr. Jaime Zuckerman, a psychologist states, "When our brains are able to predict what comes next, we naturally have less anxiety and worry"(Stewart, 2020, para 10).

A Sense of Predictability, Structure, and Routine

Makeup can also help establish a routine, just like making your bed. A simple routine can “inject a sense of stability and self-discipline” (“Polaris Teen Center”, 2017, Makeup Helps Individuals Gain Stability section). Through creating a constant routine, this can help reduce anxiety and find solace during an otherwise stressful time. The use of routine can help someone struggling with depression to be motivated to get out of bed and have something to look forward to. The article noted that with a parents' support in expressing themselves, a teenager may have more self-assurance and a sense of empowerment.

A Sense of Confidence

Another positive impact makeup can have on teens is instilling confidence. When a young person is confident, they not only feel better, but they do better in multiple avenues such as school, making friends, and as said above, provides them with motivation to keep pushing through (“Polaris Teen Center”, 2017, Makeup Can Help Individuals Increase Their Confidence and Sense of Self-Worth section). However, the article states, “If they sincerely feel that this confidence comes from wearing makeup—even if it is just from the placebo effect—there is really no just reason to deny it from them” (“Polaris Teen Center”, 2017, Makeup Can Help Individuals Increase Their Confidence and Sense of Self-Worth section).

Please note, that although makeup can provide a sense of confidence and self-assurance for teens, it may be harmful for those who heavily rely on it, especially at a young age. The article does include resources for young people who may be struggling with more serious issues around self-esteem, etc.

Makeup Therapy on Elders with Dementia

A study carried out with elders at a nursing home was done to see if makeup therapy could be a beneficial non-pharmacological option for dementia patients. Although the study found that there were immediate positive effects on cognitive and affective functions, the use of makeup therapy has not been fully proved for dementia patients and those with cognitive decline symptoms. It was found that, makeup therapy immediately alleviated behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia of female dementia patients. They were able to have positive feelings toward physical appearance, storing their self-esteem and alleviating BPSD with a sense of greater satisfaction (Tadokoro, Yamashita, Kawano, et al., 2021). A previous study reported that 3 months of makeup therapy prevented the further cognitive decline of dementia patients.

Discussion

This literature review investigated/ explored the existing literature around the concept of makeup as therapy including the limitations to makeup as a modality with the Expressive Arts therapies, the impact makeup can have on different community groups, those of all ages and backgrounds. While makeup therapy may not be for everyone, based on the evidence provided in this review, a deeper discussion around how makeup may be beneficial to someone's mental health journey is needed.

Makeup with Different Populations

Makeup as therapy can be tailored to so many individuals belonging to different populations. Our positionality within society is heavily impacted by what society deems as, how Jarrold describes as “valuable” or “beautiful, or “normal” (Sasso, 2022, para 7). "When a person is socialized to believe that an identity or presentation is less valuable, undesirable, or wrong, the

expression of that identity can become avoided, risky, and even unsafe. That could mean that self-expression may become all the more necessary and critical as a means of fighting against that oppression" (Sasso, 2022, Exclusionary Self-Expression and Beauty Standards section)

For children, teens, and elder adults, self-expression through the application and routine of makeup can provide benefits both physically and mentally.

“Being able to choose the way in which they express themselves is an important step in becoming a functioning adult. Because of the potential increases in self-confidence, routine building, and self-determination, parents of teenagers who want to experiment with wearing makeup ought to allow them to do so” (Polaris Teen Center, 2017, The Effects of Wearing Makeup Are More Than Skin Deep section).

Makeup benefiting Mental and Physical Health

Studies have found that creative expression can lead to strengthening immune systems, management of chronic pain, and a decrease in anxiety. Jarrold says. "If we view our makeup routine as a form of creative self-expression, these potential outcomes can certainly apply" (Sasso, 2022, Makeup and Its Effect on Mental Health section). As stated in this review, a sense of purpose and routine can often provide people with the solace they need. Makeup as routine can provide someone with a present moment they need in their day, giving them control, resulting in an overall decrease in anxiety symptoms.

Applying makeup can help release oxytocin, which is a hormone produced by the brain, often referred to as the “cuddle hormone”. Valentina Dragomir, a psychotherapist, and founder

of PsihoSensus, says, “As the hormone impacts our mood and emotions, the body feels good and relaxed” (Stewart, 2020, para 2).

Makeup as Connection

The act of applying makeup to oneself or to another can be extremely therapeutic. Applying make to one another can promote connection and positive effects overall. Brit Phatal, a multidisciplinary artist and beauty director who has worked with many celebrities and drag queens states in an interview, “What I love most about doing makeup is the connections I make through doing something I am really passionate about” (B. Phatal, personal communication, n.d.) and later goes on to say “I think being a makeup artist is similar to being a waiter in some ways, as we both work with old and new clients, and we can have the chance to connect with them in very meaningful ways”(B. Phatal, personal communication, n.d.)

Connection while applying makeup is bound to happen. Getting close and personal to someone's face and applying touch and pressure creates that connection. The use of makeup to promote interrelation with self and with others can be extremely powerful for those with unique circumstances. For example, for those on the autism spectrum, those who may have gone through sexual trauma, and others who may be prone to self-isolate. A study was carried out with four schools exploring the impact of the *Massage in Schools Program* on participating children in four key areas: well-being, empathy, social skills, and confidence. (Pringle, McLennan, & Smith, 2018)

The Multisensory Experience of Makeup

Physical Touch

The effects of massage and physical touch found there to be improvements in children in

wellbeing, and some improvements in confidence after engaging in peer massage. (Pringle, McLennan, & Smith, 2018, p 354) In the area of well-being, the massage group reported that they felt “calmer and less worried” than the control group.

The study supports the use of massage as an intervention for psychological or mental health issues including younger people who may have experienced sexual abuse (Powell & Cheshire, 2010) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Field, Seligman, & Scafidi, 1996). “Massage techniques have also been reported as being of value with learning difficulties such as autism” (Pringle, McLennan, & Smith, 2018, as cited in Cullen-Powell, Barlow and Pushway, 2005; Escalona, Field, Singer-Strunk, Cullen, & Hartshorn, 2002, p.344).

Positive touch is imperative for social bonding and establishing feelings of security and emotional wellbeing (Bowlby, 1988). Research has begun to show the benefits of massage for anger management (Pringle, McLennan, & Smith, 2018, as cited in Von Krorring, Soderburg, Austin and Unvas-Moberg, 2008) and bonding and attachment (Pringle, McLennan, & Smith, 2018, as cited in Cullen-Powell et al., 2005, p 344). Especially in a world where many of us remain socially distant and can’t be close to one another, physical touch and connection is needed more than ever. Key findings showed clear improvements in wellbeing, and some improvements in confidence. (Pringle, McLennan, & Smith, 2018, p 354)

A Colorful Self Expression

Jarrold points out some important things to remember when engaging with the use of makeup as self-expression. She states that awareness or mindfulness is an integral part of applying makeup. Asking yourself why that color, or why you may want to add extra mascara or lipstick that day can help us better understand ourselves and build a deep relationship with

ourselves. She goes on to say, “Our conception of beauty is ever evolving, so our relationship with it can follow suit.” Color can be significant when creating any art form and it is no different in makeup. Jane Polinski, PLMHP, PCMSW, a mental health therapist, says, “The brain responds to individual colors differently. For instance, blue can make you feel sad, while orange could spark energy. Applying bold colors on the face can help a person to feel bolder and more confident. Color attracts attention and this attention can boost confidence” (Stewart, 2020, How Putting Color on Your Face Can Boost Your Mood section). “The relationship between our routines and confidence, is rooted in awareness. What makes a makeup routine rooted in self-expression is our relationship to the routine and expression itself ” (Sasso, 2022, para 2).

Makeup as Therapeutic Intervention

Within a pre-existing model of the Expressive Art therapy modalities, makeup can fit in with any modality such as play, drama, and visual arts. Just like painting or drawing, Jane Polinski, PLMHP, PCMSW, a mental health therapist, says, “Makeup can be therapeutic because it's a form of art. Doing something like applying makeup can help the body and mind to slow down and focus intently on something.” Additionally, she notes, “Dopamine can be released when you finish your makeup. "This can help to boost self-esteem, positive mood, and overall morale"(Stewart, 2020, para 1).

Courtney Tracy, LCSW, PsyD, a licensed clinical social worker and therapist, introduces another way makeup can be interwoven in expressive therapies: through dance and movement. She says, "Creativity and the movement of applying the makeup provides relief from traumatic responses, the anxious ‘freeze’ response, and the depressive ‘stagnant’ persona. Movement and

creativity can significantly reduce stress, low self-esteem, and trauma responses" (Stewart, 2020, How the Creativity Behind Applying Makeup Impacts Mental Health section).

Another way a therapist may suggest using makeup as intervention is reciting affirmations in the mirror as a client takes off their makeup. A therapist can give clients ideas for affirmations, substitutions for negative self-talk, and walk through the makeup “unmasking” progress with a client. It can be a start to deeper reflective conversations with clients around what makeup does for them and what it may feel like to take off each layer. Makeup as an intervention does not just have to be about the act of putting on makeup and the fun that may come with that. It can also be about exploring what parts of makeup we don’t like and why that might be. Makeup as intervention can be about removing the mask and recognizing our inner beauty, taking the focus away from social ideals of physical appearance. If there is a client who struggles with this and may hold themselves to a certain beauty standard, this intervention can provide a window to a deeper conversation. The therapist may provide makeup wipes or sanitized tools to begin a skin care routine with a client as they dive into this modality, also providing a client with self-care tools they can practice outside of session. The therapist may ask probing and thought-provoking questions to the client as the process unfolds, such as "How does it offer you a connection with yourself? How does it show who you are?" (Sasso, 2022, para 11)

In Our Hands

As Jarrold notes, it is important to remember that self-expression should not be for anyone but ourselves. “Makeup is as personal as it gets, so when a million little voices that don't sound like your own start racing through your head, remember that, as cliché as it sounds, beauty is in the eye of the beholder — and the only beholder who counts is you” (Sasso, 2022, Makeup

and Its Effect on Mental Health section). Being able to notice that and ask why such voices are in your head can be a great start to a powerful discovery of oneself.

Limitations

When discovering the therapeutic effects of makeup, it's bound to come with its fair share of controversy. If makeup were to become a therapeutic tool within a therapeutic setting, the clinician would first need to be informed of the limitations surrounding the use of makeup in such settings.

Misconceptions around Makeup

One of the first arguments that emerges surrounding the use of makeup and promotion of it, is the idea that makeup is altering one's appearance to conceal parts of self we aren't happy with. It is important when using or suggesting makeup with potential clients that the background and presenting problems of such clients are well known by the clinician. For example, a client who struggles with self-esteem and discomfort with their appearance, may not be the best person to suggest such a modality. However, when working with the idea of makeup or removal of makeup the clinician should discuss the impact makeup can have with the client. In a survey done by The Renfrew Center Foundation, it was found that out of 1,292 women 18 and older, almost half of them have negative feelings when they don't wear makeup (Weaver, 2012). "A healthy body image requires a balance within our whole self. If an individual is using makeup as a 'mask,' rather than an 'accessory,' her feelings of vulnerability may remain buried inside of her, unspoken and unaddressed, but festering and growing," Kleinman said in an email. (S. Kleinman, personal communication, 2012) As a therapist experimenting with makeup as therapy,

the process may be working with the client to “remove the mask” and discuss what a healthy body image might look like to that client.

“Turning to makeup to repair a lack of inner peace or sense of wellbeing can lead to feeling ‘ill at ease’ — a signal that something is bothering the individual,” Kleinman said. “These ‘cues’ when not addressed, can affect one’s overall mental health. This is because when makeup is used to cover up emotions rather than to enhance one’s appearance, the emotions remain locked inside of an individual, growing in intensity but not being solved” (S. Kleinman, personal communication, 2012).

The Renfrew Center Foundation survey showed that 44% of women “suffer from negative emotions when they go natural. For example, 16 percent of women felt unattractive, 14 percent felt self-conscious, and 14 percent felt like without wearing makeup they were “naked/as though something is missing” (Weaver, 2012). Only 3% of the women surveyed felt more attractive when they decided to go natural. Almost half of the women surveyed started wearing makeup at the ages of 14 and 16 and more than a quarter began wearing makeup at ages 11 and 13. This represents the importance and impact makeup can have at such a young age. It also highlights that “wearing makeup is more than a physical experience for many women. Beyond positive or negative emotions, there is more of a psychological response to makeup” (Weaver, 2012).

Gender Roles and Perception

A new study published in the journal *Perception* finds that men perceive women who wear makeup to be more *prestigious*, while women perceive other women who wear makeup to be more *dominant*—and more promiscuous. In the study, two experiments examined the effect of

facial cosmetics use on perceived social status and “underlying mechanisms” of those perceptions. The findings of both experiments help to highlight just how makeup can be perceived in society and the generalizations and assumptions that come with the idea of wearing makeup. The study does not include the perceptions around non female identifying individuals who choose to partake in makeup and the projected assumptions and perceptions that may come with that. This study also highlights the sexualization that comes with wearing makeup even from and amongst other makeup wearers (in this case women). “Highly attractive women are also perceived as having a greater number of sexual partners and as less restricted in their sexual encounters” (Mileva, Jones, Russell, et al., 2016, p. 1174).

Harmful Effects of Makeup on Health

While in this review we have found that makeup can be therapeutic and provide ease when it comes to certain mental and physical health problems, it is important to be mindful of how it may be harmful to our health. It must be addressed that most makeup contains toxic chemicals and metals that can create health problems down the road. If therapists were to begin using makeup in session, there would need to be communication with the client on the type of makeup being provided or brought in and any allergies or adverse effects that may be caused using makeup. It is recommended that therapists are aware of their client’s allergies and boundaries around makeup, and research should be done on the best products to use with the least amount of toxic materials. The more organic the better. Of course, with that conversation comes the conversation around cost. It may not be cost effective for the client or therapist to provide the most organic, purely made product. Cosmetic products can contain more than 10,000 ingredients which can be linked to many diseases like cancer, birth defects, developmental and reproductive impairments (Kaličanin & Velimirović, 2016, p 477).

Conclusion

In a society built so much on appearance and image it can be easy to fall into the traps or cosmetic advertisements. As we progress and educate ourselves in society's modern culture there are a lot of stigmas around makeup and skincare. This review is merely a suggestion that may be beneficial to certain Individual's within therapeutic setting. As society begins to have more discussion around beauty standards and ideals and the deconstruction of such, why can't we do the same with clients in a therapy session? Makeup as therapy may be the key to a door someone needs to explore their purpose, self-expression, self-esteem, and feelings toward their world. It can be their opportunity to connect with self and find solidarity within their vessel or body. Of course, more research must be done on the positive and negative effects of makeup as therapy.

Makeup therapy can be a way for people to explore and redefine the social cultural norms of our society. It can be one's expression of personality and it can be one's way to finally remove the metaphorical mask and "de-role" from the ties society has put onto them. It can be returning to one's natural self in the mirror and finally loving who's looking back. Ultimately, makeup may provide a new possibility for those struggling and a comfortable starting point when entering the world of Expressive Art Therapy interventions.

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

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