

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

by Kirsten Dellinger and Christine L. Williams

This study seeks to understand women's use of makeup in the workplace. The authors analyze 20 in-depth interviews with a diverse group of women who work in a variety of settings to examine the appearance rules that women confront at work and how these rules reproduce assumptions about sexuality and gender. The authors found that appropriate makeup use is strongly associated with assumptions about health, heterosexuality, and credibility in the workplace. They describe how these norms shape women's personal choices to wear makeup. Next, they examine how some women transform the meanings of wearing makeup and, in rare instances, attempt to subvert the institutionalized norms. Although many women find pleasure in wearing makeup, the authors conclude that the institutional constraints imposed by the workplace effectively limit the possibilities for resistance.

© COPYRIGHT 1997 Sage Publications, Inc.

Why do women wear makeup to work? Countless books and articles in women's magazines insist that wearing makeup enhances a woman's career. Researchers have also found that conventionally attractive people are perceived as having greater occupational potential than are less attractive people (Jackson 1992, 97; see also Rubinstein 1995). On the other hand, Kanter (1977), Gutek (1985), and several others have argued that the tendency in organizations to define women in terms of their sexuality often has a negative impact on their careers. One study found that while women in high-status occupations view attractiveness as an asset in acquiring new job opportunities, many consider attractiveness a liability in terms of getting along with male colleagues and being taken seriously on the job (Kaslow and Schwartz 1978, cited in Jackson 1992). Since physical attractiveness appears to have both positive and negative consequences for women in the workplace, the question remains, Why do women wear makeup to work?

There is a substantial literature in feminist theory that addresses women's conformity with appearance standards. Recently, feminists have appropriated Foucault's (1979) docile body thesis to understand the obsessive practices of weight control, fashion, and cosmetic surgery (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993). Foucault maintained that the body is a central location for the expression and reproduction of power relationships. Through self-surveillance and everyday disciplinary practices, individuals internalize and reproduce hierarchies of social status and power, transforming their own bodies into "carriers" or representatives of prevailing relations of domination and subordination. Bordo uses this approach to argue that contemporary disciplines of diet and exercise "train the female body in docility and obedience to cultural demands while at the same time [these practices often are] experienced [by women] in terms of power and control" (1993, 27). This thesis can help to explain why some women are drawn into and feel empowered by practices that reproduce male dominance and female subordination.

Interestingly, Foucault's theories have also been appropriated by feminists who emphasize women's resistance to oppressive beauty regimens. These theorists draw on Foucault's observation that domination is always met with resistance. Thus, instead of examining how women are victimized by a patriarchal beauty culture, these theorists focus on the ways that individuals can disrupt and undermine power by subverting the meaning of oppressive cultural forms. Butler (1990), for example, argues that individuals may resist the very categories of sex and gender through a masquerade of practices of femininity; she suggests that drag may be one form of making such "gender trouble" with our bodies. This approach is useful in preserving a sense of women's cultural agency and asserting the possibility for change in oppressive social relations.

What is too often missing in the theoretical debates about femininity and the body is the complicated relationship between powerful hegemonic ideologies and women's agency reflected in their actual lived experiences. Deveaux warns that feminists should not overemphasize either the docile body thesis or the liberatory aspects of Foucault's work because doing so "blocks meaningful discussion of how women feel about their bodies, their appearances, and social norms. It obscures the complex ways that gender is constructed, and the fact that differences among women—age, race, culture, sexual orientation, and class—translate into myriad variations in response to ideals of femininity and their attendant practices" (1994, 227). The challenge for feminist researchers is to treat women as "active and knowledgeable agents" in the construction of social life while simultaneously acknowledging how women's activities are "limited through asymmetrical power structures" (Fisher and Davis 1993, 3).

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

Davis (1995) discusses this problem in her study of Dutch women and their decisions to have cosmetic surgery. Davis points out that a variety of feminist approaches fall short of dealing adequately with the ambivalence that surrounds women's involvement in practices that are also detrimental and/or degrading to them. She is troubled by the conclusion that women involve themselves in beauty practices "because they have had the ideological wool pulled over their eyes" (1995, 57). To overcome the problem of the "cultural dope," she argues that we must "be able to explore [women's] lived experiences to their bodies, to recast them as agents, and to analyze the contradictions in how they justify their decision to have cosmetic surgery" (1995, 58).

This article seeks to understand women's use of makeup in the workplace without treating women as cultural dopes of oppressive patriarchal regimes. Makeup is a topic that has been largely ignored by sociologists, including many feminists. Although many women spend a significant amount of time each day applying makeup, sustaining a multibillion-dollar industry (Chapkis 1986; Wolf 1991), women's concerns about their personal appearance often are trivialized and considered unworthy topics for sociological investigation. There are several possible reasons for this exclusion. First, as Smith (1979) has argued, the established categories of research in sociology have traditionally reflected the interests and experiences of men and have excluded issues that are relevant to women's everyday lived experiences (see also DeVault 1991). Among feminists, a general ambivalence toward emphasizing gender "difference" may provide another explanation for the dearth of research in this area. Bordo (1993) argues that many feminist academics fear that discussion of how women "differ" from men will jeopardize the likelihood that women will be viewed as equal to men. Finally, others may avoid the topic of makeup out of fear of being considered vain and frivolous (Lakoff and Scherr 1984, 13).

The few social researchers who have discussed makeup have viewed it as an imposition of patriarchal culture (Adkins 1995; Barthel 1988) or as an expression of women's pleasure in their identity as women (Beausoleil 1994; Rubinstein 1995). Both approaches suffer from the limitations discussed by Deveaux (1994). The former approach ignores women's agency and fails to explain the processes whereby oppressive patriarchal ideologies are translated into women's actual practices. The latter approach exaggerates the possibilities for women's self-expression and resistance to appearance norms by underplaying the significance of the specific social contexts that frame women's use of makeup.

In this article, we attempt to move beyond the depiction of women as either oppressed victims or freewheeling agents. By examining women's lived experiences with makeup within the context of their work settings, we explore how women express themselves and assert autonomy within the structural constraints imposed by social institutions. We examine the appearance rules that women confront at work and how these rules reproduce assumptions about sexuality and gender. We also explore several ways that women negotiate these rules and what wearing makeup means to them in their specific work contexts. We argue that wearing makeup does contribute to the reproduction of inequality at work, but we emphasize that women who wear makeup are seeking empowerment and pleasure. The institutionalized workplace norms about appearance effectively limit the possibilities for resistance.

METHODS

The goal of this study is to explore how norms of female attractiveness shape women's use of makeup in a variety of work settings and how a diverse group of women alter the meanings of these norms and determine their own makeup practices. A total of 20 women were selected for hour long, in-depth interviews using a purposive snowball sampling method to ensure diversity of race, age, and sexual orientation. The sample includes 12 non-Hispanic Whites, 2 Mexican Americans, 2 African Americans, 1 Asian American, 1 Mexican, 1 Taiwanese, and 1 Venezuelan. Fifteen of the women identify as heterosexual, and 5 identify as lesbian. Their ages range from 20 to 64. Nine of the women identify themselves as married or partnered; 7 are single; 4 are divorced (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: Characteristics of the Sample

Pseudonym	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Marital Status	Sexual Orientation
Adrienne	62	White	S(D)	Heterosexual
Barbara	34	Mexican	S	Heterosexual
Brenda	28	White	M	Heterosexual
Denise	42	White	P	Lesbian
Diane	25	White	S	Heterosexual
Helen	57	White	S(D)	Heterosexual
Jackie	32	White	S	Lesbian
Janet	27	White	M	Heterosexual

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

Jennifer	20	Asian American	S	Heterosexual
Joan	31	White	S	Lesbian
Kathy	29	African American	S	Heterosexual
Kelly	42	White	M	Heterosexual
Kit	33	White	S	Lesbian
Magda	31	Mexian American	M	Heterosexual
Maria	28	White(a)	M	Heterosexual
Melissa	30	Taiwanese	M	Heterosexual
Mona	64	African American	S(D)	Heterosexual
Rebecca	41	White	P	Lesbian
Sarah	42	Mexican American	M	Heterosexual
Suzanne	31	White	S(D)	Heterosexual

Pseudonym	Highest Degree	Occupation	Makeup at Work?
Adrienne	BA	Assistant vice president	Yes
Barbara	BA	Legal assistant	Yes
Brenda	BS	Dental hygienist	Yes
Denise	JD	Attorney	Yes
Diane	HS	Hairdresser	Yes
Helen	BA	Middle school teacher	Yes
Jackie	BA	Parks and recreation supervisor	Sometimes
Janet	BA	News/public service director	Yes
Jennifer	HS	Student/bartender	Sometimes
Joan	MA	Social worker	No
Kathy	JD	Attorney	Yes
Kelly	HS	Administrative associate	Yes
Kit	BA	Printing business	No
Magda	BA	Administrator/financial company	Yes
Maria	BFA	Massage therapist	Yes
Melissa	MA	Homemaker	Sometimes
Mona	AA	Child development teacher	Rarely
Rebecca	HS	Copywriter	Yes
Sarah	HS	Administrative assistant	Yes
Suzanne	HS	Office manager/real estate	Yes

NOTE: S = single; D = divorced; M = married; P = partnered. BA = Bachelor of Arts; BS = Bachelor of Science; JD = Doctor of Law; HS = High School; MA = Master of Arts; BFA = Bachelor of Fine Arts; AA = Associate of Arts.

(a) Venezuelan.

Of the women, 18 were employed full-time in the paid labor force at the time of the study; 1 was employed part-time (Jennifer); and 1 (Melissa) was not currently in the paid labor force but was working as a full-time homemaker. The women's occupations include both predominantly female and predominantly male jobs. Their workplaces range from professional downtown office buildings to church day care facilities to an at-home office for massage therapy. Respondents were selected to enable us to investigate the broadest possible range of work environments, including professional and service-sector settings.

The interviews were conducted by the first author. Respondents were asked about their current everyday experiences with and feelings about makeup, dress codes, or informal appearance requirements at work; coworkers' reactions to their appearance; their own feelings about wearing or not wearing makeup at work; and the consequences of not wearing makeup at work.

FINDINGS

When asked about their makeup practices, 14 women said they wear makeup everyday at work, 2 said they wear it most of the time, and 4 said they never or almost never wear makeup to work (see Table 1). Many of the women who wear makeup daily report that they do not consciously think about their use of cosmetics. They suggest that it becomes "a routine," "a habit," or "unconscious." Sarah, a 42-year-old Mexican American administrative assistant, wears makeup "everyday":

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

Except Saturdays. I mean, of course, I get up early every morning and makeup

is one of my routines. It's just a way of life, I mean. And it's probably

rather silly when you think about it, but I'm so used to it. I mean, it's

such a normal part of my life that I just do it.

None of the women interviewed recalled a specific written requirement for makeup use even when their workplace was regulated by a formal dress code policy. Women said that they themselves--as opposed to formal regulations--determine what constitutes an appropriately attractive appearance and whether they attempt to meet those standards. In other words, the women believed it was their personal choice whether or not to wear makeup. Nonetheless, many women experience or perceive they will experience negative consequences if their makeup is not properly applied. They expressed three major concerns: Respondents felt that women who do not wear makeup do not appear to be (1) healthy, (2) heterosexual, or (3) credible. We will discuss each of these issues, focusing on how women internalize the assessments of their coworkers, transforming institutionalized norms governing makeup use into their "personal choices." Subsequently, we will discuss how some women resisted or subverted the institutional norms of their workplaces.

Institutionalized Norms

Looking Well-Rested and Healthy

Women who routinely wear makeup to work said that coworkers express concern about their health if they show up to work without any makeup. Magda, a 31-year-old Mexican American financial administrator, explains that Friday is "casual day" at her downtown office and that she takes a break from full makeup and only wears blush and lipstick. On these days, she notices that people ask her if she is feeling OK:

During the week, I wear full makeup. I wear the base, I wear powder, I wear

the whole thing. When I don't wear the whole thing [on Fridays], it looks

like I've tired out by noon. And people will come and say, "Are you tired?

You don't look good." . . . I've noticed that when they tell me that, my

attitude starts going down.

Magda internalizes her coworkers' comments about her appearance with less makeup; she actually feels more productive while wearing full makeup.

Adrienne, a 62-year-old white administrator, explains that she wears makeup to work everyday and never forgets to wear it. However, when she was working at a previous job, she did forget to wear her eye makeup one day, and she still remembers the reactions of her coworkers:

I was there for a long time and I worked with the same people so they

weren't shy at all. "Feel all right?" And people would really--and it was

the eyeliner because my eyes look very bland and sunk back in my head and

I have these heavy lids and everything. So if I forget to put on my

eyeliner, people would really notice that. "Your eyes look so peaked."

Adrienne associates her coworkers' comments about her health with her lack of eyeliner.

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

Maria, a 28-year-old massage therapist originally from Venezuela, runs her business out of her home. She says she wears makeup to look "presentable" to clients:

Right now, I feel like I need to wear it everyday so not to look like I just woke up because I have clients that come to the house, so I have to look presentable. So, if I go out somewhere around where my clients go or to the school, I need to look presentable. And so that's one thing they really emphasized in [massage] school--that you need to be aware of the way you look because you might run into clients or run into people who might become your clients and you want them to see you in a presentable way and they don't want to see you all looking bad.

Although Maria does not mention any instances when clients commented directly about her appearance, that is exactly what her training at massage school instructed her to avoid by wearing makeup on a daily basis. Maria wears makeup because she has internalized the idea that when she is not wearing it, she looks like she just woke up or is "looking bad."

When Janet, a 27-year-old white radio DJ, tells a story about forgetting to wear makeup one morning and feeling self-conscious, she also illustrates the degree to which appearance standards are internalized and self-imposed:

I do remember one day when I went to work and I forgot to put on makeup. And I didn't even think about it, you know, I have my little thing that I go through every day and somehow I just skipped a step and it never went on. And I don't think I really noticed it because I work so early in the morning, so I think of myself as looking like crap anyway and I went into the bathroom or something and I remember looking at the mirror, going, "God, you know, you've really got some bags under your eyes."... And it wasn't 'til later, like a second trip into the bathroom or whatever, that I realized, "I don't have any makeup on." And then after that, I felt self-conscious about it because at least, even though you don't think you look good, you think at least if you have a little bit of makeup on that other people won't notice or they're not saying, "God what's the matter with her? Is she sick or something?"

Janet explains that one of the purposes of makeup is to avoid negative attention or comments from other people. According to Janet, makeup is not about thinking you look good; it is about preventing the embarrassing questions: "God, what's the matter with her? Is she sick or something?"

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

Thus, women who regularly wear makeup to work and do not wear it for some reason on a particular day receive comments expressing concern about their health and level of fatigue. On the other hand, women in the sample who did not regularly wear makeup to work received extremely positive comments about their appearance on occasions when they did wear it. When asked how she feels when she is wearing makeup, Jackie, a 32-year-old white parks and recreation leader, answers, "Well, I usually feel pretty good. I feel pretty confident ... I think I look better probably or I feel like I look better and other people have commented, 'Hey, you look good today. What is it? Hey, you have makeup on.'" Mona, a 64-year-old African American day care worker, says that her coworkers are sure to notice when she paints her fingernails and puts on lipstick and a dress.

Janet's coworkers also comment favorably on her appearance: "Only good things. . . you know, nobody's going to come and say, 'You look like a slob' or anything." These positive comments can bolster a woman's self-confidence. When asked if she thought women should wear makeup today, Barbara, a 34-year-old Mexican legal assistant, replied immediately,

Oh definitely--it brings a lot out of you. It gives you a lot of security. It's like when you're wearing a new dress, you feel very secure.... Let's say when you go to a party, you feel good, comfortable when you're wearing a new dress than if you were wearing one that you were wearing before. Nobody knows, but you know it, and it doesn't make you be yourself because you're kind of intimidated that you're not wearing a new dress even though you wanted it. So I think that makeup, in a way, makes you feel that way. At least, it makes me feel that.

In fact, many women in the sample say they wear makeup because it makes them feel confident about themselves. They explain that they feel "more polished" and "prepared to meet the public" (Helen) and "More attractive. More self-confident. Just more put together" (Kelly). Denise and Kathy explain that makeup is part of a "package" that allows them to feel powerful.

However, those who report feeling more confident wearing makeup to work also express a significant amount of ambivalence about the source of this confidence. In many cases, women talked about empowerment and self-consciousness in the same breath. For example, Adrienne says,

I think you should come to work looking like you're here to be a professional person, and I think it says something about how you feel about yourself and how others--of course a lot of people will argue that that's all false. But I want to put my best foot forward. So I don't want to inflict my sloppiness or bumps and ugly complexion on anybody else [laughs].

When Adrienne is asked how she feels with makeup on, she replies,

I feel better. Like at home, if I'm going to stay at home, I don't like to

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

look at myself in the mirror when I don't have it on. But I don't see any

sense in putting it on because I'm there by myself all day.

In Adrienne's case, confidence is about putting her best foot forward and hiding her "bumps and ugly complexion." She reports feeling better while wearing makeup but suggests that she does not like to look in the mirror when she does not wear it. Her confidence in her appearance with makeup is thus linked with a negative self-image without makeup.

Kelly, a 42-year-old white administrative associate, who said she felt more attractive, self-confident, and put together while wearing makeup, continued by saying,

But also there's a little bit of facade in that I don't need it at home. I'm comfortable at home with my family, but I wouldn't be comfortable to come to work everyday without makeup on. So it's also just that ... I don't know, not quite real ... I feel more confident when I have my makeup on. I feel sort of self-conscious if I--there's I'm sure a few occasions where my husband will talk me into going to the store or something real quick without makeup on, but I'm real uncomfortable like that.

Kelly feels comfortable at home without makeup, presumably because she feels secure in her family relationships, yet she is uncomfortable in public places unless she is wearing makeup. By calling makeup "a little bit of facade," she seems to acknowledge that the confidence it brings hides her insecurity about her personal appearance. During the interview, she explained that she was jealous of women who did not care so much about their public appearance. But she concluded, "That's just the way I am."

A 30-year-old Taiwanese homemaker explains that she puts lipstick and eyeliner on when she goes out of the house so that she will look "more energetic." Melissa says she enjoys makeup because it makes her feel good about herself and because her Chinese friends often compliment her on the "wide-eyed" American look she achieves with mascara. Melissa expresses some ambivalence, however, about the way in which Caucasian eye shapes are considered more attractive than Asian features. She explains,

Chinese people like American female eyes. They're just like a doll. I felt very confused about why we always got American-style dolls when we were younger. All of the dolls in Taiwan were like that. So from a very young age, I thought, in the future, I would look like that.

Melissa senses that the confidence she achieves by wearing makeup is linked to a devaluation of her Asian features.

In sum, many women in the sample indicate that wearing makeup to work gives them what is defined as a healthy and rested appearance, and thus enhances their self-confidence. Because their coworkers constantly monitor and evaluate their appearance, responding most favorably when women wear makeup, it is not surprising that some report feeling more confident and productive when they are wearing makeup. Current societal definitions of health, success, and beauty are intertwined: Cultural images of healthy, energetic, and successful working women are, for the most part, young, white or Anglo-featured, thin, and made-up. The ambivalence some women express about the connection between makeup and their self-confidence is fostered by the difficulty of meeting all of the requirements for a "healthy" look. Societal definitions of health and beauty are incorporated into institutional norms about makeup use and, in this way, shape women's

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

personal choices about their appearances.

Heterosexuality

In addition to marking women as healthy and well rested, makeup also marks women as heterosexual. Recent studies suggest that normative constructions of sexuality are built into and reproduced by work organizations (Leidner 1993; Pringle 1988; Woods with Lucas 1993). The experiences of both straight and lesbian women in this sample illustrate how a system of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980) is maintained through workplace appearance norms.

Suzanne, a 31-year-old white administrative assistant, works in a downtown real estate office. When referring to the prevalence of women who wear makeup in her building, she suggests that women who do not wear it are at a disadvantage: "You can't walk into this building and find anyone in any office on 22 floors who is not wearing makeup.... Women who don't wear makeup, I guess, are thought to be either tomboys, homebodies, or ... it's not a professional picture." The threat of being labeled "tomboys, homebodies, or . . ." strongly implies the threat of being labeled a lesbian, or, more generally, someone not concerned with attracting men. Thus, there is an assumption of heterosexuality built into professionalism. An implicit requirement for looking appropriately feminine is that women look "pleasing" to men. When asked what it meant to be beautiful, Magda, who is heterosexual, responded after a long pause--"Successful." She then added,

I guess it's because in the work I do, being pleasant to look at helps a lot. In the financial business it really does, when there are a lot of men involved. They tend to work easier with someone who is easy to look at. And that's, that's terrible, you know, to say, but that's how men think.

Several times during the interview, Magda mentions that her husband "interacts better with women whose appearance is pleasing to look at." She once asked him if he thought that women had to be pretty to be competent employees; she reported that he said, "Magda, it has nothing to do with beauty, it has to do with ... just the effort they make to look good.... That effort means everything." When asked to explain the context of her husband's comments on this topic, Magda said:

The reason I had asked him is because he had just hired a young lady who we took out to dinner the night before. And I told him she was fabulous. I said, "She's witty. She's intelligent and she could do those things you don't want to do." He goes, "Yeah, but she doesn't try to maintain herself." And I said, "What do you mean? Does she fight? Is she aggressive?" . . . He said, "Her appearance. Didn't you see how she was so--just so simple?" And I said, "But that was the good quality in her--she looked fine." . . . And then he went on to say, "I just don't want everybody on my staff to feel that she doesn't fit in or she's not performing because of her carelessness in her appearance."

While Magda focuses on the woman's competence for the job, her husband is more fixated on her "questionable appearance" as a significant liability to office morale. When he explains that the woman "didn't try to maintain herself," Magda's first thoughts are about potential disruptive conduct in the office, not her physical appearance.

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

This example suggests that for some men and women, caring about one's appearance signifies caring for or respecting men. Magda has incorporated the importance of looking pleasing to men into her definition of success, and her husband's reactions to the apparent "lack of effort" his future employee puts into her appearance supports Magda's decision to do this. Yet, her comments regarding the importance of women's appearance for their careers reflect significant ambivalence. While Magda feels more competent and successful when she wears makeup, she also expresses discomfort when her husband implies that women must be pretty (or at least try to be pretty) to be considered competent by men.

Except for Suzanne and Magda, none of the other heterosexual women in the sample discussed makeup in relation to norms regarding heterosexuality. In contrast, all of the lesbian women we interviewed noted a link between heterosexuality and makeup. Recent feminist theory has focused on the importance of analyzing the active construction of heterosexuality, and the pleasure and privilege associated with that identity from the viewpoint of heterosexual women (e.g., Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1993; Segal 1994). Although this agenda is extremely important to pursue, we found that the heterosexual women we interviewed did not talk about their appearance practices at work in connection with their own ideas about sexual attractiveness, pleasure, or desire.

We offer two possible explanations for this. First, many women have been fighting to overcome the definition of themselves as sexual objects, especially in the workplace. To avoid problems with sexual harassment, sexual objectification, and devaluation by men, perhaps many women monitor discussion about their feelings and experiences of sexual pleasure when discussing work. Second, many heterosexuals may consider their sexuality as natural and inevitable. Because they are in a position of heterosexual power, they may be blinded to the experiences of the subordinate group and fail to see their own sexual identity as socially constructed and a source of privilege (Collins 1991). Frankenberg's (1993) recent study of white women's racial identities demonstrates the difficulty of exposing what has so long been assumed and invisible in dominant group members' lives. Because lesbians do not conform to the taken-for-granted norms of heterosexuality, they may have a clearer vantage point than heterosexual women of the constructedness of sexual identities. Thus, it is not surprising that the lesbian women in the sample provided greater insight than the heterosexual women on the link between makeup and heterosexuality.

For instance, Joan, who is a 31-year-old white lesbian social worker and the only woman in the sample who never wears makeup at home or at work, offers several important insights about the link between heterosexuality and conventional workplace appearance standards, and about the costs of nonconformity. Although Joan says that at her current job as a social worker she can be "pretty comfortable" in terms of her appearance, she reports that she received many comments and suggestions about her appearance when she first began working there. When asked what her coworkers said, she explains that

just sitting around and talking it would just come up and people would be like, "You need to wear a little bit of makeup" or "You need to get a perm" or "You need to get some better clothes." Not mean-like, but that's kind of the message that you get when you're sitting on the other end of it because they mean you would look better if you did this to yourself.

Joan claims that she "passes for straight" at work; she has told only one coworker that she is a lesbian, and she does not want to tell anybody else. She says she does not fear any repercussions if she were to "come out" to people at work. However, in the midst of explaining her coworker's ignorance of her sexual orientation, she describes an interaction with coworkers that suggests otherwise:

Part of me feels like, well, I should just come out and tell people, and I would if I was ever asked directly. But I--I don't really fear any repercussions by telling anyone, but also I don't see any purpose, really,

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

in telling anyone. And oh, yesterday, these two nurses were showing me pictures of [disease-infected] genitalia--men's and women's--and one of them said, "Now you're young and single. If you see a penis like this coming at you with this on it, get away." And she goes, "Oh and there's a vagina, but you don't need to worry about that comin' at you." And the other nurse said, "She better not have to worry about it" or "She better not want to look at that" or something like that. And it's just like, OK. Great. I'm not tellin' you anything. Which also, since I'm the only one who doesn't wear makeup or my clothes are--well, really they're not that much different--personally, [I] don't think my hair's any worse than anyone else's. I guess it's just the makeup thing and being single thing is different.

After describing the nurses' "joke" that she better not have to worry about a vagina coming at her, Joan wonders aloud what it is about her appearance that might mark her as a lesbian. She narrows these markers down to the fact that she is single and does not wear makeup. Not surprisingly, Joan equates her coworkers' concern for her success at looking appropriately feminine with the nurses' concern that she meet standards of compulsory heterosexuality. Presumably, there are major repercussions (personal and professional) for failing to meet these standards.

Rebecca, a 41-year-old white copywriter, actively uses makeup at work as a way to smooth workplace interactions with men and women. Because she is tall and a lesbian, she feels she may be intimidating to some people. She explains that she always wears makeup to mute what she calls her "difference":

And I'm not doing it to be attractive, especially to [men].... Mostly it's so that that's not what we're meeting about. So it's not like, "What does that [no makeup] mean?" And I am aware of that, especially with men in corporations.... There is sometimes ... a natural edge with them.... I even try to take a little bit of that threat off, you know, by saying you don't have to worry about me being different as well as bigger than you.

The difference Rebecca is trying to tone down has to do with "appropriate" gender differentiation and sexual orientation. She indicates that makeup makes clients less likely to think about the fact that she is different because she is a lesbian and that it may neutralize the threat she may pose to men who are uncomfortable with a woman who is physically taller than they are.

Similarly, Denise, a 42-year-old white lesbian lawyer, reported that she pays close attention to how she dresses in the courtroom so that her appearance is not "a distraction." The first day of a trial she wears a traditional navy blue suit and a plain, white blouse and then mixes in brighter, more feminine clothes throughout the week. The juries she has worked with in the past have commented that they like these more feminine suits and, consequently, are less likely to think Denise is

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

"too serious looking." Denise sums it up when she says, "I don't think that having [the jury] say they like something [I wear] sways them to your client's side, but it takes--kind of makes you into a non-issue."

Both Rebecca and Denise are clear that their use of makeup and dress has something to do with compliance to heterosexual norms of feminine appearance. While they adamantly insist that they are not dressing to be attractive to men, they have learned that not wearing makeup or dressing in a "masculine" style will cause problems in their workplace interactions with both men and women.

The specific form of heterosexual femininity that women emphasize in their appearance seems to vary by occupation. In a study of women working in male-dominated banks in Britain, McDowell (1995) found that executive women were particularly careful to dress so that they would not be mistaken as secretaries, who were seen as dressing to emphasize their sexuality. In our study, Helen, a 57-year-old white heterosexual junior high school teacher, comments that she thinks her students respond more positively to her "mother image" than to what she calls the principal's "femme fatale" look. She believes that a maternal feminine image may be more acceptable for those working around young children than a sexualized image, especially for older women.

On the other hand, certain occupations emphasize a highly sexualized image among employees. Rebecca expressed fears about attending beauty school because "I thought I would be older than most of the people in there, and also I thought that I would be definitely dykier and haggard and, you know, I was pretty scared about that." Before Joan became a social worker, she waited tables at a restaurant in Oregon. After several months of employment, she explains, "Eventually, my boss said, 'It'd be nice if you'd wear some makeup.' And my response was, 'I'm not going to, so you can fire me right now if you want.' And then he was like, 'OK, never mind,' because I had been there long enough." The occupation of waiting tables in a restaurant has been identified as a highly heterosexualized work environment (Cobble 1991; Giuffre and Williams 1994). The manager's request that Joan wear makeup implies that he thinks that she would look more attractive to customers and would better fit the model of a feminine waitress if she wore makeup.

The discrimination that Joan faced when she applied for a position as dance instructor further clarifies how expectations of heterosexuality are built into appearance norms in certain occupations. She says,

I was at my wit's end here looking for a job--this ballroom dance studio was training instructors and I love to dance. Anyway, I thought, OK, this will be cool and so I went through the training.... And this isn't to brag, but I would honestly say I was the best one of all of them and I was on time and I was there every day and I was just so sure I'd get picked. They were going to pick from our group of trainees who was gonna get the job to stay on and become an instructor and learn to dance more. And I really wanted it. Anyway, it came the day. I was just so sure and [the boss] said, "Not you." And I said, "Why? I was this. I was that." He said, basically he said, "You don't have the right look, your hair doesn't look right, you don't wear makeup, your clothes aren't right." It was all because I wasn't feminine-looking enough.

Although Joan claims she has not had to deal with "that attitude," which demeaningly suggests that women who do not wear makeup are less than ideal, she has provided three diverse work experiences in which makeup was an unspoken

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

job requirement. Joan was not hired for the dance instructor position because she did not look "feminine enough." Although Joan was able to keep her job as a waitress and is still employed as a social worker, her appearance is apparently fair game for comment and criticism, and her sexual orientation is very clearly defined as outside the realm of acceptable possibilities. Although comments about appearance are often thought to be benign, Joan's experiences indicate the degree to which occupational standards for an appropriately feminine look and concern about a worker's heterosexual identity are linked.

Some occupations do not have such pervasive appearance norms regarding makeup use. For example, Mona, who is a 64-year-old African American heterosexual woman, feels she is exempt from having to dress up and wear makeup due to the physical and often dirty nature of her work in a day care center. Jackie, a recreation supervisor, wears blush and eyeliner to work most of the time, but as she says, "I just sometimes forget. It's not a routine for me.... I was gonna--I had intentions of putting some on today, but I sort of forgot." When asked whether she ever felt there were situations at work when she should wear makeup, she explained,

With recreation, it has some stigmas of not necessarily dressing up and wearing makeup. I think if I were in a very businesslike setting, I would probably wear makeup and dress up more, but in this setting, I never feel real pressure as far as making up, really at all.... Because people I work with here, they don't really wear it at all either. Sort of a cliquish kind of thing, I guess.

When Jackie talks about recreation as an occupation in which employees do not necessarily dress up and wear makeup, she may be talking about the physical nature of the job. But Jackie's reference to this norm of casual dress as a "stigma" is also linked to the stereotype that women who are involved in athletics or work in related fields are lesbians (Cahn 1994).

Like Jackie, Kit, who is a 33-year-old white lesbian print shop worker, has not experienced the same kinds of comments and pressures about workplace appearance that Joan and other women have. She explains that there were no formal dress codes when she worked at a downtown shop and that she could choose what she was comfortable wearing:

When I worked downtown, I would dress up a little more to go to work just because I felt more comfortable in that environment, but I never really added makeup to that because I had gotten to the point where, you know, if somebody else did not think that was appropriate that was fine, that was their opinion. But I wasn't really interested in feeling like I couldn't breathe all day.

Did the coworkers ever make any comments to you about not wearing makeup?

No, not really. A lot of that--I was "out" at work when I was working downtown so I think some of the men I worked with just assumed that

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

was part of the lesbian package. It was not--that was just an assumption

I made--but I just always thought, "Oh well, they think that `that' [no makeup] goes along with `this' [being a lesbian]."

Expectations for wearing makeup do vary by occupation and organization, but in all the cases we encountered, makeup connoted heterosexual femininity. In occupations in which makeup use is normative, those who refuse to wear it are typically suspected of being lesbian. Suzanne's comment that women who do not wear makeup in her building "are thought to be tomboys, homebodies, or ... it's not a professional picture" illustrates the conflation of gendered norms of appearance and compulsory heterosexuality. Magda's conclusion that success is partially dependent on "looking pleasing to men" and Rebecca and Denise's use of makeup to "smooth" workplace interactions also reinforce this link. Joan suggests that being single and not wearing makeup may mark her as different from her current (straight and mostly married) coworkers. Kit, who is "out" at work, also felt that her choice not to wear makeup at work was construed by her coworkers as connected to her lesbian identity. When individuals in this sample challenged the makeup norms at work, the consequences ranged from pressure to appear more "feminine" to outright discrimination. Recall, for example, that Joan reported that she was denied jobs for which she was qualified because she did not look "feminine enough."

In sum, the experiences of the women in this sample suggest that wearing makeup is a form of "doing heterosexuality" as well as "doing gender" (Giuffre and Williams 1994; West and Fenstermaker 1995). In the workplace, individuals are often held accountable to heterosexual norms of appearance in interactions with others. Conforming to these norms reproduces heterosexuality and reinforces a dichotomous conception of gender difference.

Credibility

In addition to displaying gender difference and heterosexuality, some women wear makeup because they feel it makes them appear more competent. Diane, a 25-year-old heterosexual white woman, explains that as a hairdresser, looking good by wearing "attractive" makeup and a fashionable hairstyle is required. Her appearance directly reflects the degree to which her clients can trust her as an able "beauty consultant." When asked if she feels like her appearance is important when she goes to work, Diane answers straightforwardly, "Yeah. It is. It is real important in the industry that I'm in just because you can't look like crap and tell somebody how they should look and expect them to believe you if you look like shit."

Kathy, a 29-year-old lawyer in a highly male-dominated field, explains that makeup also enhances a woman's credibility in the courtroom. She says,

It's one of the things you do to excel. To survive.... If you don't--I mean I've seen people--I've seen female attorneys go to court and looked washed out and people just do not react as positively as they could to someone who was more attractive. And I've seen male attorneys and judges react more favorably to someone they consider to be attractive, who's got the makeup and the hair and is dressed just so. It's part of competing.

For many women in the sample, makeup use at work is a significant "part of competing."

Kathy is one of two women in the sample who felt that wearing makeup was particularly important for enhancing their status as women of color in the workplace. Sarah, a heterosexual Mexican American woman, wears makeup because "I feel like a role model, you know, to my own daughter as well as, you know, to my nationality. I want to look nice." Kathy, who is a heterosexual African American woman, views her personal use of makeup as an effort to enhance her credibility in a racist society:

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

I have always experienced racism in my life and I'm more attuned to identify when someone is being racist and I let the sexism pass. It's more offensive to me for you to be racist than to be sexist. So I do find that because I'm an African American, there are certain things that I need to do because I'm African American, and one of those things is to look professional and all the other good things.

Kathy believes that she must "look professional" because she is an African American. For women, looking professional entails a degree of sexual objectification. So when Kathy says she will "let the sexism pass," she seems to suggest that the difficult task of "fitting in" that women of color experience may require her to gain status at the expense of putting up with sexual objectification. Thus, racism is noted and resisted while sexism is not only tolerated but viewed as an unspoken, yet taken-for-granted condition for "looking professional." Kathy suggests that maintaining a professional appearance can transform racial stereotypes:

The appearance is not necessarily to prevent racism or do anything about racism but to educate people because there are so many non-African Americans that are not exposed to African Americans that they have a tendency to stereotype African Americans and African American women, and they sometimes don't expect to see a professional African American woman with excellent credentials who dresses conservatively, who can be articulate, who can perform in the courtroom. So, it's beating the stereotypes and not giving them what they expect sometimes.

Both Sarah and Kathy feel that wearing makeup is a necessary part of being respected as women of color in a racist world. Looking professional for these women may have a different meaning than it does for many white women: Wearing the "right" makeup plays a part in gaining respect (perhaps gaining the status of white women) in the workplace, even though it entails sexual objectification.

Women's use of makeup in the workplace is also linked in a complex way to women's status in regard to age. Dominant cultural ideas about women's "need" to be concerned with youth are constantly perpetuated by the media (Barthel 1988). And while some women in the sample do express their plan to "fight age back any way you can with creams and makeup and the whole works" (Barbara), some express a desire to age with dignity and to "take it as it comes" even if it is uncomfortable sometimes (Rebecca). Helen joked that she bought "Turn-Around" cream from Clinique "some time when [she] was feeling old or something" but that nothing has "turned around" because the jar sits unopened in her bathroom closet. While women recognize that youthful standards of beauty predominate in the United States, they explain that status in the workplace is more complicated than matching an ideal image of beauty in a magazine.

So how are makeup use and age associated in the workplace? Is there a trade-off between a youthful appearance and the knowledge and competence that comes with more years of experience in a job? The value that is placed on a youthful appearance may vary depending on the specific occupation and workplace context. Service jobs that require interaction with customers may be more likely to emphasize the importance of a youthful appearance for women and to require or encourage makeup (Adkins 1995; Leidner 1993; Pringle 1989). On the other hand, some women said that age was not an issue in their workplaces or that a youthful appearance was actually a disadvantage for women who want to be taken

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

seriously. Helen, who is 57, elaborates the former point:

Teaching is not a place where you're going to be discarded because you look sort of middle-aged. I mean if you're a good teacher, they're going to pretty much value your services as long as you have your wits about you.

Denise, who is currently a lawyer and was previously in law enforcement, states that when she first began her career in both areas, she tried to make herself look older in order to be taken seriously:

I've had clients who ... have said things like, "I'm glad that you're a little bit older." And sometimes they don't realize how young I am. It's always kind of funny because--probably particularly in my mid 30s--because I was gray-headed they would assume that I was in my 40s and then they would find out I was really quite young, quite inexperienced.

And the same thing, kind of, in the law enforcement practice. I think that coming across as too young makes people--people aren't quite as trusting of you.

Although "looking too young" can create problems for women in some workplaces, other women suggested that they wear makeup because it makes them look younger. When asked if she wears makeup to look younger, Adrienne says,

I don't know. I mean I've just always worn it. I guess in a sense you cover up the circles and you try to hide the wrinkles as much as you can.

But you can't really hide that. So I don't know that I've worn it--I haven't changed--I've just changed what I wear. But not so much as an aging thing.

Although I feel like I look older if I don't have it on.

Adrienne claims that she does not wear makeup to try to look younger, but she feels like she looks older when she does not have any makeup on. In her view, wearing makeup is a personal habit that just happens to hide the signs of aging.

When asked if she wears makeup to look younger, Kelly brings up another problematic issue regarding age, makeup, and status:

Yeah. I think so. I think that the trick is knowing when--I just remember at one point seeing women, usually single women--older, single women--and they were trying to be younger and it didn't fit where they were at and that was really sad to me. I'm always asking my kids, "Is this OK?" "Am I too old for this?" And they're like, "Oh, Mom. It's all right!" It's like I don't want to be there.

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

When it comes to youthful appearance and status, women must negotiate societal standards of beauty, the demands of their particular workplace and occupation, and the difficult task of trying not to look like they are trying to look too young.

Thus, some women wear makeup to work to look competent. Those employed by the beauty industry may feel that wearing makeup is particularly important for establishing their credibility, since they are in a position of selling advice to other women about their appearance. However, women in a variety of occupations also associate makeup use with the appearance of competence. Some feel compelled to wear makeup to challenge racist stereotypes that women of color are not adequately feminine. Makeup is also a tool that some women use to cope with the conflicting and complicated issues associated with the status of older women in society: Some wear makeup to disguise their aging in order to appear more competent; others, to make themselves look older in order to be taken more seriously.

In sum, according to the interviews, women who wear makeup are seen as healthy, heterosexual, and competent. The women in this study appreciate the value that is associated with these qualities in the workplace and many consequently wear makeup so that they might be successful. A woman's personal choice to wear makeup cannot be understood outside the context of these institutionalized workplace appearance norms.

Thus far, our analysis has emphasized how workplace appearance norms are internalized. We have noted a significant degree of ambivalence in the women's comments about their makeup practices. Both women who wear makeup and those who do not struggle with the fact that their appearance is constantly being evaluated and that others' perception of their competence as employees is linked to wearing makeup.

But is wearing makeup simply a reaction to externally imposed conditions of employment? Davis (1995) has criticized this approach to understanding beauty culture for denying women's agency and viewing them as simply reacting to a given situation. The following section of the article, therefore, will explore women's attempts to transform the meaning of their use of makeup and to resist and subvert the makeup norms.

Women's Transformation of Institutionalized Norms

Although appearance standards do exist in the workplace and outright resistance to them is difficult, women can and do transform the meanings attached to their own use of makeup. In this section, we explore a variety of meanings that women give to their use of makeup in the workplace that reflect their creativity and pursuit of bodily pleasure. We also examine the efforts of some women to resist the institutionalized appearance norms.

A Woman's Culture

Many women said that other women coworkers offer them friendly advice about makeup (or vice versa). Often, these comments reflect enjoyable aspects of a woman's culture shared by certain women in their workplaces (Lorber 1994). For example, Sarah explains that she and her coworker formerly sold cosmetics and that they currently recommend cosmetics, moisturizers, and foot creams to one another. She said that they recently went to the mall to buy makeup together. Jackie says that one of her coworkers works at the Body Shop and has offered to give her a facial and to advise her about how to make her "deep-set" eyes stand out. Kathy says that she talks about makeup with her secretary sometimes because "she would like me to wear makeup more consistently. Because when I wear it, I typically get very positive remarks." Suzanne and Magda both explain that they give advice to other coworkers when they ask for it. Magda describes how the younger people in her office asked her about shades of lipstick, hairstyles, and other issues of appearance when they were at a professional conference. When a coworker asked Suzanne her opinion about her recently colored "cabbage-red" hair, she recommended highlighting. Brenda, who is a 28-year-old white heterosexual woman employed as a dental hygienist, even gives her patients advice about makeup. As she put it, "We do more than just teeth in that chair."

In these ways, makeup can be a topic of conversation that bonds women together. Women may be able to show their affection and concern for one another through compliments and advice. But many women realize that commenting on another woman's appearance can be divisive instead of solidarity enhancing. Thus, after saying that she recommended highlights to one of her coworkers, Suzanne added,

But as far as makeup goes, I keep my opinions to myself You know, I

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

think women are somewhat insecure about wearing makeup anyway. You know, because you are always worried if it's too dark or not dark enough, even not having any on.

Magda also acknowledges the limits of offering advice, admitting that "I never go to anybody other than the Estee Lauder counter and ask them [for advice]. I guess I'm embarrassed to ask other people whether I look good or not because if they say no, then I'll start crying." And in Joan's case (discussed earlier), coworkers' comments about her appearance were neither comforting nor fun; they made her feel inadequate.

Some women were also sensitive to the negative stereotypes about women who are defined as overly interested in cosmetics and appearance. Research has found that when women gather in small groups at work, people label their discussions "mother's meetings" or assume that they are discussing trivial matters (McDowell 1995). When asked if she talks about makeup with her coworkers, Helen answers,

No. Absolutely not.... I mean really my coworkers are intelligent women.

You know, it's not that we have some kind of high-powered career job.

Because most people do not regard teaching as such. Although teaching is a very hard job. It takes lots of smarts. The women I work with, we talk about our kids in college, we talk about ... we might comment, you know, "That's a nice skirt you have on." But the talk about clothes and makeup is practically nonexistent. I mean we only have about 20 minutes to sit and eat our lunch, you know, so our adult conversation is pretty limited and we're not going to waste it on something silly.

Helen suggests that teachers have to do a lot of work to combat stereotypes that their jobs are easy and unprofessional. She does that here by explaining that she and her coworkers are intelligent and uninterested in chatting about makeup and appearance. Obviously, women in the workplace must walk a fine line regarding appropriate and inappropriate discussion about appearance.

Time for Oneself

Makeup can also symbolize a woman's time for herself For Sarah, who is 42 years old and a mother of two children, makeup symbolizes independence. She currently works as an administrative assistant. When asked how makeup makes her feel, she replies:

It's just a routine. Sometimes, it's not on perfect, but it's not a big deal. It's like, it's part of a routine--I go through it every morning.

I'm more careful now with my makeup. I find that I use healthier things for my skin. I'm more concerned about aging because I'm getting there. You know, I'm getting a little bit older and it's--you start worrying about

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

your skin. When you're younger, it doesn't matter. It's like nothing's ever gonna change, but it does. And I'm more concerned now about my skin and I try to take better care of it. And at the end of the day, I spend a little time--not much--but a few minutes for myself and that's--you know, I use something on my face, take a hot bath and, you know, cleanse my skin.

If Sarah had stopped her answer here, we might conclude that she has internalized society's youthful standards of beauty and that her use of makeup and cleansing regimes are simply attempts to ward off the aging process. But when Sarah defines her cleansing routine as "a few minutes for herself," it is important that we listen to what those few minutes mean to her. When asked, "So it's just part of your routine?" Sarah clarifies her feelings:

Yeah, but I feel it's still important to me and I think we go through a phase, and I think I did, when you're so busy and your whole focus is on your children and their well-being and you wake up and the first thing in the morning you think of them and their whole day. And now that they're getting older and I'm back in school and I'm back working, I find that I'm important too. And just a few minutes a day makes that difference.

Sarah talks about her skin care routine as a symbol of time for herself. This time is also linked to going back to school and going back to work. Sarah's use of makeup at work may be just as much a statement about her newfound independence as it is a way to retain a youthful appearance. Radway (1984) reports a similar niche of privacy and independence that women carve out for themselves by taking time to read romance novels.

Thus, while women recognize that there are costs to not wearing makeup, most of those interviewed defined makeup as pleasurable. Some talk about the fun they have with their friends shopping for makeup, sharing advice, and giving one another compliments. Makeup can symbolize independence for a mother of two children torn between family and work responsibilities. Although no one believes that makeup alone can be the basis of female solidarity or that it is a panacea for the problems of the second shift, some women nevertheless use makeup to promote their goals of personal enjoyment and bodily pleasure.

Working to Rule

Some women also resist the institutional requirements to wear makeup by intentionally bending the appearance rules. Many of the respondents talked about just "getting by" in terms of work expectations for appearance. They explained that they did not spend a lot of time thinking about their makeup during the day. For example, Brenda emphasized that she was not "the kind of woman" who carried makeup with her:

You know how some carry makeup bags with them? I don't worry about that. I just put it on once; if it wears off, it wears off. Isn't that terrible? Unless I go out, then I'll put it on again before I go out. Otherwise, it stays the same.

Brenda contends that she meets the standards for makeup that are informally required at the dentist's office but that she

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

does not worry about carrying makeup with her to apply it throughout the day. The apologetic tag "Isn't that terrible?" assures us that she recognizes that the rules for appropriate femininity are important but also indicates that, to a certain extent, she cannot be bothered with them.

Kathy also stresses that she does not really think about makeup very much and, like Brenda, only applies it once a day:

I feel dressed with makeup on when I am also clothed in professional clothes or dress clothes. I don't feel naked without it unless I have a suit on.... It just doesn't fit to have a suit on and not have makeup on.

But that's about it--I really don't think a whole lot about it, which is probably why I only put makeup on once a day. I put it on at 7:45 before I leave my house and I do not touch up my lipstick every hour or after every meal, which I have friends that do that and I find it very interesting to watch them finish their meal, be it lunch, breakfast, or whatever, and they immediately reach for their purse and put their lipstick on and say, "Oh, I just feel naked without it!" Once I put it on in the morning, I never touch it up.

Although Kathy considers makeup a requirement when she is wearing a suit, she emphasizes the fact that she does not think about makeup a lot throughout the day. Diane makes the distinction between wearing makeup to work and wearing it out. She explains,

When I go out, I pay more attention to whether it's right, instead of like for work, I just kind of throw it on. But if I'm going out, . . . if I need attention, it's more of a thing to do to make me feel more confident-to accentuate the best parts and minimize the worst-all those little tricks I learned in beauty school that I usually just blow off now. Somehow, that was just way too much work to do every day.

Diane meets the unspoken requirements for appearance at work but refuses to expend the energy that would be required to apply her makeup according to professional standards. She concludes, "Somehow, that was just way too much work to do every day." Like some of the other respondents, she resists the appearance standards by doing the equivalent of working to rule--wearing the minimum acceptable amount of makeup at work.

An incident with one of Rebecca's clients illustrates an extreme case of nodding to the ritual of makeup use. When Rebecca was running late for a meeting, she did not have time to put on her makeup at home and planned to put it on in the car. She explains,

When I was driving to the meeting, I didn't have time to put on my makeup

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

... but this was my intention when I put it all in my briefcase. So then I got there and I just went, "Pretend I'm wearing that [pointing to the makeup in her briefcase]" And she was like, "OK, You're wearing that." It was an acknowledgment to the ritual.... But I would not have made that joke with a man. I'm sure I wouldn't have.

Again, Rebecca demonstrates women's ability to alter the standards of workplace appearance within certain constraints. She clearly exposed women's use of makeup as a taken-for-granted ritual in professional business interactions but also admitted that this could cost her an account in other situations, especially other business interactions with men.

Thus, while some women acknowledge that appearance rules govern their use of makeup at work, they nevertheless resist complete conformity to these rules by refusing to monitor their cosmetics throughout the day. They make a halfhearted show of compliance, following the letter--and not the spirit--of the organizational appearance norms.

Confusion and Subversion

Outright subversion of the makeup rules was not readily apparent in this study. We found no evidence of women manipulating their appearance to destabilize sex/gender categories (Butler 1990). We suspect that resistance through bodily practices may be easier to find in studies that do not evaluate the actual constraints imposed on women by social institutions. For the women in this study, the institutionalized norms in their workplaces seem to limit the possibility of resistance through personal appearance.

Rebecca recounts an incident at work that could be interpreted as subversive cross-dressing at first glance. When she describes her first day on the job as an animation camera person, she says,

So I went to work and I was wearing tuxedo bottoms. But, you know, old men's, real baggy and flared and all this stuff and I think I was wearing an undershirt and suspenders. And so that when I walked in and everybody was just like [shocked looks]. And I just looked at them and I said, "What's the matter, you never saw a transvestite before?"

But Rebecca had prefaced this comment by sharing what she considers a trade secret. She explains that departments such as copywriting and design expect you to "dress a little different." When asked how her coworkers reacted to her cross-dressing style, she responded,

Well, everybody just kind of got over it.... Maybe this [cross-dressing] is a little more work, but for me it's time better spent than I would spend trying to be something I'm not. And this has been true about my sexuality as well. What I try to do is be a nice person, an engaging person. And I have not really felt limited about that kind of stuff [appearance norms]. Even though I've worked in some really stuffy places.

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

. . I feel that I have been allowed to escape that.... Somehow [my

appearance] is some of what I give to the organization. You know, "Oh,

yeah, she has to be that way because you can see it in her work. She's clearly imaginative."

Although Rebecca's tuxedo pants surely made her coworkers' jaws drop momentarily, she explains that they "just kind of got over it." Rebecca's appearance in the workplace and, perhaps, her sexual orientation are acceptable because she is a member of the creative department. She also recognizes that although challenging dress codes may be more work for her, it is less work than trying to hide her "true self." It seems that people in the organization avoid having to question the constructedness of their own sexuality and of Rebecca's by defining Rebecca as an "artist." Rebecca is "allowed" to be herself as long as the organization benefits from this identity.

Rebecca herself admits the limits of challenging people's ideas about what women should look like. While she likes to keep people guessing about her gender identity and sexual orientation, she explains that there is a bottom line when it comes to getting a job:

But when I'm trying to get a job, you know, I want to get the job. The thing

I want to do is control the conversation around the work and so I don't

want them to be going, "She's not wearing any makeup."

Denise suggests that there is a similar limit to challenging dress codes among lawyers. Denise sees the legal profession as a work environment that encourages "androgynous" dressing, by which she means a de-emphasis on feminine clothes for women. She notes that some of her lesbian friends who are trial lawyers may use this environment as an excuse to cross-dress but may suffer criticism for doing so:

I mean there are women that I know, that I have kidded about the fact, I

mean the ones that are always in the starched white shirt and the gray,

the navy, or the pinstripe suit, that are kidded about the fact of using

it as an excuse to cross-dress. Because they're so stark.... And I've

heard remarks about those folks.... People start to think of them as being

stiff. Where I'm not sure this same reaction would be had if it were a man.

Although we do not know the motivations of the lesbian lawyers who dress in a very masculine style, it is evident that the limits to their subversive dress may be the credibility they are or are not afforded by judges, clients, and other lawyers.

Denise is currently running for public office, and her use of makeup seems to be controversial for some members of the gay and lesbian community as well as for the religious right. Although she wears makeup to look professional and to accent her features for the television camera, others interpret her use of makeup differently:

I've gotten some kidding from people about, you know, "I saw you on TV and

lipstick and everything!" I mean I've gotten that more from the gay and

lesbian community, but not necessarily where people have sounded offended

like they thought I was trying to hide who I was or something. But I think

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

the ones way on the other end--kind of the radical religious right--

think that my appearance throws them for a loop. `Cause I don't know what

they expect. I don't know what their little stereotype was. You know, I

don't know if they expect this really hard-looking tough woman who's going

to show up in--I don't know what they expect--men's work clothes or

something? I don't know what they thought I was supposed to look like!

Denise explains that friends of hers who belong to the Christian Coalition have told her that other members of the group do not know what to think about her and seem extremely confused that "She sounds so, kind of rational." Perhaps her appearance with makeup comforts these voters into thinking that at least Denise subscribes to their idea of proper femininity. Although Denise may be breaking some stereotypes about what all lesbians look like or how all lesbians think, her use of makeup does not seem to be calling the gender differentiation or constructedness of conservative voters' sexual orientation into question. Instead, it seems to comfort the members of the Christian Right that she may be "normal"--that is, properly gender identified, after all.

CONCLUSION

Appropriate makeup use is strongly linked to assumptions of health, heterosexuality, and credibility in the workplace. In turn, these qualities are associated with professional success. Foucault's (1979) docile body thesis is compatible with the experiences of women in this sample, particularly with their descriptions of everyday makeup use and their self-imposed surveillance. Women also reported experiences in which their bodies were central locations for the expression and reproduction of power relationships. For example, the monitoring of appearance norms by coworkers not only reinforced assumptions about heterosexuality but privileged this sexuality. Yet, as Bordo (1993) argues, women's bodies are trained into docility and obedience to cultural demands, while at the same time these practices are often experienced as sources of power and control. Thus, some women spoke of their use of makeup as necessary to gain credibility and as a way to bolster their confidence at work.

Yet, women do not wear makeup at work solely because of the pressures imposed by institutionalized appearance norms. Some pointed to the pleasure they received by talking about makeup with other women and getting compliments on their appearance. Others explained that they actively bent the rules in their compliance with appearance expectations for work.

We found very little evidence of outright resistance to appearance norms in the workplace. Those who refuse to wear makeup may suffer job sanctions in certain work contexts. Although some women may wear makeup to parody femininity or destabilize sex/gender categories (Butler 1990), our data suggest that such attempts at subversion can be easily co-opted to bolster gender differentiation and compulsory heterosexuality.

Deveaux (1994) suggests that feminists must work toward conceptualizing women's relationship to their bodies both as a reflection of social construction and as their own response to (and mediation of) the cultural ideals of femininity. Similarly, Davis (1995) argues that we must recognize women as knowledgeable agents faced by asymmetrical power relationships if we are to move beyond the cultural dope model of understanding women's participation in oppressive beauty practices. Our analysis of women's use of makeup at work illustrates how women act as knowledgeable agents within institutional constraints. By taking this approach, we avoid the dual pitfalls of characterizing women as completely passive victims of beauty norms or as unsituated agents of resistance. Instead, we attend to the various ways that race, age, gender, and sexual orientation affect women's negotiation of ideals of femininity within the institutional constraints imposed by different workplace contexts.

While we do not argue that women wear makeup to work because they are sexist, homophobic, or racist, we do suggest that this cultural practice has consequences that reproduce inequality between men and women, and also between different groups of women. But resistance to workplace inequality through the body is problematic granted existing institutional constraints. We call for more research that contextualizes women's and men's appearance practices in

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

specific institutional settings. By taking this approach, we do not abandon the search for agency and resistance, but we insist that researchers attend to the necessary task of analyzing how social institutions shape and limit individual choices.

REFERENCES

- Adkins, Lisa. 1995. *Gendered work: Sexuality, family, and the labour market*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Barthel, Diane. 1988. *Putting on appearances: Gender and advertising*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Bartky, Sandra Lee. 1990. *Femininity and domination: Studies in the phenomenology of oppression*. New York: Routledge.
- Beausoleil, Natalie. 1994. *Make-up in everyday life: An inquiry into the practices of urban American women of diverse backgrounds*. In *Many mirrors: Body image and social relations*, edited by Nicole Sault. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Bordo, Susan. 1993. *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Cahn, Susan K. 1994. *Coming on strong: Gender and sexuality in twentieth century women's sport*. New York: Free Press.
- Chapkis, Wendy. 1986. *Beauty secrets: Women and the politics of appearances*. Boston: South End.
- Cobble, Dorothy Sue. 1991. *Dishing it out: Waitresses and their unions in the twentieth century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1991. *Blackfeminist thought*. New York: Routledge.
- Davis, Kathy. 1995. *Reshaping the female body: The dilemma of cosmetic surgery*. New York: Routledge.
- DeVault, Marjorie L. 1991. *Feeding the family: The social organization of caring as gendered work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Deveaux, Monique. 1994. *Feminism and empowerment: A critical reading of Foucault*. *Feminist Studies* 20:223-47.
- Fisher, Sue, and Kathy Davis. 1993. *Negotiating at the margins: The gendered discourses of power and resistance*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1979. *Discipline and punish*. New York: Vintage.
- Frankenberg, Ruth. 1993. *White women, race matters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Giuffie, Patti, and Christine Williams. 1994. *Boundary lines: Labeling sexual harassment in restaurants*. *Gender & Society* 8:378-401.
- Gutek, Barbara. 1985. *Sex and the workplace*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Jackson, Linda A. 1992. *Physical appearance and gender: Sociobiological and sociocultural perspectives*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. 1977. *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

Makeup at work: negotiating appearance rules in the workforce.

Kitzinger, Celia, and Sue Wilkinson. 1993. Theorizing heterosexuality: Editorial introduction. In *Heterosexuality: A feminism and psychology reader*, edited by Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger. London: Sage.

Lakoff, Robin Tolmach, and Raquel L. Scherr. 1984. *Face value: The politics of beauty*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Leidner, Robin. 1993. *Fastfood, fast talk: Service work and the routinization of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lorber, Judith. 1994. *Gender paradoxes*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

McDowell, Linda. 1995. *Body work: Heterosexual gender performances in city workplaces*. In *Mapping desire: Geographies of sexualities*, edited by David Bell and Gill Valentine. London and New York: Routledge.

Pringle, Rosemary. 1988. *Secretaries talk: Sexuality, power, and work*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

--. 1989. *Bureaucracy, rationality, and sexuality: The case of secretaries*. In *The sexuality of organization*, edited by Jeff Hearn, Deborah L. Sheppard, Peta Tancred-Sheriff, and Gibson Burrell. London: Sage.

Radway, Janice A. 1984. *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Rich, Adrienne. 1980. *Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence*. *Signs* 5:631-60.

Rubinstein, Ruth. 1995. *Dress codes: Meanings and messages in American culture*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Segal, Lynne. 1994. *Straight sex: Rethinking the politics of pleasure*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Smith, Dorothy E. 1979. *77w everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

West, Candace, and Sarah Fenstermaker. 1995. *Doing difference*. *Gender & Society* 9:8-37.

Wolf, Naomi. 1991. *The beauty myth: How images of beauty are used against women*. New York: William Morrow.

Woods, James D., with Jay Lucas. 1993. *The corporate closet: The professional lives of gay men in America*. New York: Free Press.

Kirsten Dellinger is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research interests include gender, sexuality, culture, feminist theory, and qualitative methodology. Her dissertation research examines individual and organizational management of gender and sexuality in two workplaces in the magazine publishing industry.

Christine L. Williams is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Texas, Austin. She is the author of *Gender Differences at Work and Still a Man's World*. She is currently working on a study of sexual harassment and other forms of sexual expression in work organizations.

AUTHORS' NOTE: We gratefully acknowledge the helpful comments of Beth Schneider and the other reviewers at *Gender & Society*. We would also like to thank Susan Marshall, Teresa Sullivan, Jeff Jackson, Patti Giuffre, Kristine Hopkins, Julie Winterich, Carolyn Pevey, Edie Elwood, and Martin Burton for their assistance and advice. This article was prepared in part while Christine Williams was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford.