Background

Artifactual communication, also known as nonverbal communication, “all send messages to receivers who interpret messages whether we intend for them to or not” (Zilley, 2007). These messages can include the clothes an individual wears, body modifications, and also the makeup applied. Originally, makeup, “was the earliest form of human ritual” (Power, 2010). When worn, too much makeup can “draw undue attention and can send the wrong signals” (Ivy, 2009). However, in a professional setting, how much is the right amount? Does how much makeup an individual wear affect how they are viewed professionally?

We also were concerned that in some jobs, makeup is required for women. This was the case in Jaspersn v. Harrah’s Operating Co., where a bartender was found to have been legally fired for refusing to wear makeup. The Supreme Court created a precedent in this case “where [they] set forth the applicable legal standards governing workplace dress and workplace standards” (Patrick 2006). These “grooming standards” can include makeup, and be regulated by the employer. Must women have to wear makeup to be considered competent and thus employable?

Methods

Our group created a survey instrument on Survey Monkey to test our hypothesis that makeup would impact the perception of competence levels for women. One of our group members posed for three “looks” comprised of a natural (no makeup) look, an average (medium makeup) look, and a heavy makeup look drawn from a similar study. Participants in this study included 36 females and 12 males, for a total sample size of 48 individuals. The majority of the participants were female Caucasians. There was not a single question that asked for personal information. This was done to allow anonymity for all of the participants, protecting the privacy of their responses. The images used were of a candidate who was a 19 year old college female.

She was photographed with a neutral facial expression, and the final images were cropped to remove any outside influences. The candidate was photographed without makeup and with two following makeup styles ranging from minimal to intense (see “Survey Photos” section). The respondents of the study were presented an online survey. The survey was distributed through various social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. Each participant was able to look at all three pictures of the candidate with the varying levels of makeup. Questions asked for the respondents to select the candidate that embodied the following qualities the most: professionalism, attractiveness, likability, trustworthiness, competence, and hireability.

Results

Analysis of the results showed that there was a strong correlation between candidate 2 and the percentage of people willing to hire her compared to the other two candidates. Candidate 3 did not receive any votes, while candidate 1 only received between 8-9% (dependent on what gender was voting). Additionally, the analysis of the data showed the same trend demographically across the board. Regarding the traits deployed, candidate 2 was chosen more frequently than the other candidates, though candidate 1 received more votes than candidate 3. In 2006, regarding the Jaspersn v. Harrah’s Casino Co., we found results showed a correlation from the implications of this court case (requiring women to wear makeup) and the case made by the defendants. However, this implication is biased. While all of the candidates had the same level of qualifications, a candidate was hired more often, based on the fact she was viewed as more attractive, competent, likable, professional, and trustworthy. This implies that equally qualified individuals may be turned down by what could be interpreted as a sexist connotation. The candidates who received lower marks wore either no or an intense level of makeup. When compared to the results from candidate two, this implies that one must not only wear makeup, but must wear the correct amount of it. How can qualified females be turned down for a job based on the fact, while she is wearing makeup, she is not wearing the correct amount? Additionally, how can women ever expect to accomplish equality in the workplace when they deal with the unnecessary burden of having to wear makeup to be considered not only professional, but hirable as well? This study is important for employers who may be unaware that hiring managers may hold an implicit bias that can impact which women are hired, and how they are evaluated and thus, promoted or demoted.

Conclusion

Our group studied makeup as a nonverbal artifact and created an online survey to ascertain if there was a connection between the amount of makeup that a woman wore and her perceived levels of competence. Moreover we wondered whether or not this would ultimately effect whether or not she was hired. We created an online survey instrument and garnered 48 survey respondents who reacted to three photographs of one of our female team members in various degrees of makeup ranging from natural to heavy. The respondents were generally professionals associated with S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematical) companies. We discovered that there was a correlation between the amount of makeup that a woman wore and her perceived levels of competence and hireability.

References


