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## Makeup as a Discourse Community

### Introduction

A discourse community is described as “a group of people who share ways to claim, organize, communicate and evaluate meanings” (Schmidt, Vande Kopple 1). In order to thrive in a certain discourse community, one must be very involved and knowledgeable on the goals and communication methods that belong to that group of people. Every community may have members of different levels of involvement included in their group.

If you log into any social media, chances are you will come across some form of a makeup post. This post may be captioned with something like “My face is beat!” Being an outsider, one might assume that he or she got into a fight and is seriously injured; however, if you’re an involved member of the makeup community, you are aware that this is just a way of saying that their makeup looks amazing. The makeup discourse community has grown exponentially in the past few years, largely due to its appearance all over social media. As somebody who does not belong in this community, there are many things you may not understand when one makeup lover is talking to another makeup lover. Some examples are when somebody talks about “baking” while doing their makeup; one may assume they may be talking about baking cookies, but they’re actually just waiting for their powder to set. When one says her favorite part of her

routine is to “highlight”, the first thing outsiders would imagine is the highlighter used to emphasize specific notes, but really, they’re using makeup to make parts of their face gleam. These are just a few examples out of many that show how makeup has its own form of communication. This group commonly communicates through social media; however, they may also meet at beauty events, such as the International Makeup Artist Trade Show or BeautyCon.

There are several different levels of makeup artists; there’s the newcomers, regulars, semi-professionals and professionals. I, myself, would identify as a regular in this community. Although this group is large and very diverse in involvement levels, there is a sense of togetherness within this community that only they would understand. Every person in this community may do their makeup for different reasons, however the goal of this community is to create self-confidence. The question I am researching is “Does being a member of different levels of the makeup hierarchy have an effect on why they do makeup?”

## **Method**

In order to determine if the closeness to the core of the makeup community relates to the reason some do makeup, I decided to do a short interview. To attain insight on the whole community, I needed to make sure that I interviewed people from each level of the group. I interviewed a newcomer, regular, semi-professional and a professional. My newcomer is Raneeta Sharma, who wears very minimal makeup, if any at all. The regular that I chose, Cindy Jaime, is somebody who wears makeup every day. Alyssa Bray, the semi-professional, wears makeup every day and she also gets

paid to go to people's houses to do their makeup. Lastly, the professional I chose is Tani Garcha, who used to work at Sephora, but currently works with big brands like Marc Jacobs. In the interview, I asked them how they view makeup and I gave them some choices to pick from. I also wanted to have some insight on how often they watched makeup videos. My most important question was asking them "Why did you begin to do makeup and why do you still apply makeup today?"

## Results

The following table includes the questions that were asked during my interview along with a summary of the key themes of the responses from the interviewees.

	<b>Newcomer:</b> Raneeta Sharma	<b>Regular:</b> Cindy Jaime	<b>Semi- professional:</b> Alyssa Bray	<b>Professional:</b> Tani Garcha
<b>How do you view makeup?</b>	Self-empowerment	Self-empowerment, talent	Self-empowerment, talent, hobby	Self-empowerment, talent, hobby, art
<b>How often do you watch makeup tutorials?</b>	Sometimes	All the time	All the time	All the time
<b>Why did you begin to do makeup and why do you still apply makeup today?"</b>	Saw other people doing it. Want to look more put together.	Saw other people doing it. Started to love doing makeup as an art.	Insecurities. Got better after watching Youtube videos. Now, she does it for fun.	Saw other people doing it. Found her own persona using makeup. Feels like makeup allows her to express herself. Works

				with big companies now.
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### **Analysis/Discussion**

Throughout this paper, you may have realized that the makeup community is extremely large. This discourse community has people of all levels of closeness to makeup. They all share a common method to enhance self-confidence through applying makeup and they also have their own unique language in which they may communicate. Though I claim to be a part of this community, there is still an aspect I wanted to know more about. The question I researched was “Does being a member of different levels of the makeup hierarchy have an effect on why they do makeup?” The outcome of my results portrayed an obvious pattern.

In my interviews, I was able to get a glimpse of how the members of this discourse community are able to communicate with each other as well as those who may be interested. Through my research, I found a common theme on how many of the members first became a part of this makeup group. All but one of the girls that I interviewed used makeup tutorial videos as a starting point. However, Cindy Jaime, the regular, used another member already in the community for help on getting started. As she started becoming more involved, she started watching videos as well. When asked if they knew what the term “beat” meant in our community, Raneeta Sharma, the newcomer, was the only one who was completely unsure. This shows how the more

these members watch videos and communicate with each other, the more tight-knit the community becomes.

The sources that I have found and the results of my interviews fall hand in hand. Mlotek explains her in her article, “To Wear Makeup or Not To Wear Makeup?”, how she “began to wear a full face of makeup in middle school, as a gesture of defeat, attempting to obscure hormonal breakouts...” However, she then described that as she got older she “didn’t so much want to look better as (she) wanted to be better [at applying makeup]” (Mlotek). This quote coincides with what Alyssa Bray, the semi-professional, explained in our interview. Bray elaborates on how she began wearing makeup in middle school because of her insecurities; however, later on she “got super good at it but after some time (she) didn’t feel the need for it anymore.” Based on my research, I am able to distinguish a very clear trend in this discourse community; members begin to apply makeup due to the desire to improve confidence, however their goal slowly starts to shift focus towards wanting to become the best they can be at the art of applying makeup.

While reading about the makeup discourse community, you will discover many different explanations of what makeup means to some people. An article published in The New York Times stated that “makeup is what you make of it. It is a choice” (Etkoff). The reason for the use of makeup can vary depending on what one wants to use it for. According to my interview results, you can see a pattern in the evolution of how makeup is viewed as you move up the makeup hierarchy. Beginning with the newcomer, Raneeta Sharma mentions how makeup is just something “to make yourself look better.” Raneeta uses makeup as confidence booster as she only wears it to “look more

put together”. As you move one level up, Cindy Jaime says “I wear makeup just to look presentable, but a lot of the time I apply makeup for the art.” Cindy also mentions how makeup is a way of enhancing her confidence, however, she also likes to get creative and use art to express her creativity. This is followed by Alyssa Bray, the semi-professional, who mentions that makeup “became kind of like a hobby.” In her interview, Bray emphasizes how she just likes to do makeup for fun whenever she has the time. And then we reach the top, where Tani Garcha, the professional, views makeup as “something to make yourself look better, a skill/talent, and a form of art.” To her “the art of makeup provides a platform for people where they can express themselves and bring their creative imagination to life.” Tani Garcha’s response is a combination of the views of each level of the hierarchy. Garcha uses makeup to help her confidence and for personal enjoyment; she also uses it as a platform to express her artistic visions. Tani has taken her love and knowledge on makeup and began teaching others interested in the makeup community through YouTube videos. As you can see, the views on makeup evolves more and more as you start to reach the top of this makeup hierarchy; from using makeup only for a confidence boost, all the way to using make-up to express yourself in an artistic manner whilst still using it as a way to higher your confidence.

## **Conclusion**

The makeup community shares a way of communication and method to reach the common goal of self-confidence. For this reason, the world of makeup can be viewed as a discourse community. In my research, my goal was to attain some insight on if the level of closeness one has with makeup effects the reason behind why they

apply makeup. After interviewing girls from each level, I discovered a very clear pattern. As one rises up the makeup hierarchy, the view on makeup evolves into a “form of self-expression and art, as well as something that should be regarded as a talent” (Allen). This research supported the hypothesis that I had before doing this paper, which was that the closer you are with makeup, the more you start to view makeup as an art rather than just something to cover up a few blemishes.

I believe that makeup as a discourse community will continue to grow in the future given the strong foundation this group has. This groups primary source of communication is through social media, which is also growing stronger. Through YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, etc., this community is constantly inventing new makeup techniques, terminology and purposes.



## **Reference List**

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