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**Master's Thesis of International Studies**

**Constructing Cosmetic Selves:  
An Analysis of Japanese Women's  
Makeup Practices**

화장으로 그리는 “나 다움”:  
일본 여성의 메이크업 문화와 자기정체성 형성  
과정에 대한 분석

**August 2023**

**Graduate School of International Studies  
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# **Constructing Cosmetic Selves: An Analysis of Japanese Women's Makeup Practices**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for a Master's degree in International  
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# Abstract

## Constructing Cosmetic Selves : An Analysis of Japanese Women's Makeup Practices

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Makeup has been a vital aspect of Japanese visual culture, especially in the formation of women's beauty practices for centuries. As beauty standards continue to diversify and the exchange of information for achieving such standards has become more active through various media, its significance has evolved to encompass more than a mere enhancement of her physical appearance, to a complex scape where self-identities intersect. This thesis examines the role of makeup in the self-identity formation of young Japanese women in their twenties, and how it serves as a medium for negotiating societal expectations and exercising agency. Through media analysis and semi-structured interviews, the thesis explores the cultural discourses, media representations, and personal narratives surrounding makeup in Japan.

The thesis is divided into two main sections, each of which discusses the public and the private aspects of selfhood. Chapter II explores the cultural value of *midashinami* (身だしなみ) and the idea of “natural makeup (ナチュラルメイク).” The analysis reveals the ways in which *midashinami* functions as a standard of appearance, shaping women's understanding of what is considered normal or acceptable in Japanese society. Chapter III examines the ways in which makeup serves as a tool for pursuing authenticity and self-expression for Japanese women. The chapter discusses the different ways women use makeup to create and appropriate their self-identities, and women's interaction with cosmetics, makeup, and media in their self-authentication process.

The observations indicate that makeup is a social and cultural scape, where young Japanese women negotiate between the contradictory yet interweaved discourse of social normalcy and self-authenticity, as women seek to create a self that is both acceptable to others and true to themselves.

**Keywords:** Makeup, Skincare, Women, Self-identity, Agency, Gender, Japanese society, Japanese culture, Beauty culture

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# I. Introduction

## 1. Research Background

A freshly launched YouTube video channel “[I HOPE.]Ch (化粧愛。)” published by the cosmetics brand KANEBO Inc., introduces its channel as below:

“人は、なぜ化粧するのか。  
化粧とは、一体何か。  
化粧を解体し、未来を考える「化粧愛」。  
私たちは化粧への希望をいかに語れるだろうか？  
縛られた価値観。決まった日常。そこから抜け出すのはたいへんだ。  
でも、誰かの力を借りれば新しい景色が見える。新しい場所へ行ける。  
そう信じて——。

Why do people wear makeup?  
What exactly is makeup?  
Deconstructing makeup and thinking about the future “love for makeup.”  
How can we express our hopes for makeup?  
Restricted values. Established routines. It’s tough to break free from them.  
But if we borrow someone’s strength, we can see new sceneries.  
We can go to new places.  
Believing in that...”

([I HOPE.]Ch (化粧愛。), 2022)

The channel has uploaded four videos, each of the video featuring a person or celebrity who departed from hegemonic Japanese beauty standards: Drag queen Vivienne Sato, former *gyaru* magazine model *mirichamu*, an Akutagawa Prize-nominated writer Suzumi Suzuki.<sup>1</sup> The cast members describe their makeup routines,

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<sup>1</sup> Graduated from Keio University Faculty of Environment and Information Studies and received her master’s degree from the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies, she worked as a journalist for Nikkei Inc., while also

their thoughts, and emotions around the concept. The contents of the videos of “I HOPE” boldly demonstrate that makeup is an expression of individual identities – makeup is “work, care, also communication (...) a creation or manipulation of an art (...)”<sup>2</sup> or a way to “expose” one’s “skin completely inside out until completely naked ([I HOPE.]Ch 2022; 2023).”<sup>3</sup> “There are many girls who go beyond the imagination of men who want them to put on makeup,” Suzuki states in the video she is featured. She celebrates the “girls” whose cultures may have been initiated or created by men, but “developed their unique culture on their own hands (それを手にした人達がものすごく独自の文化を発展させ)” and “bloomed it richly (豊かに花開いたもの) (2023 5:44).”

On the other hand, a commercial by another cosmetic company CANMAKE, introduces one of its promotional videos of the brand’s eyeliner product as it “looks natural, but surely making up the *kawaii* (自然に見えて、ちゃんとかわいいを仕込んでます。).” With a pastel, light color tone and bright piano music playing in the background, the commercial features a girl walking around a library, with a voiceover by a male voice inserted as: “Why is that? She naturally catches my attention. Those eyes... (キャンメイクCANMAKE 2022, 0:20)” The narrator turns out

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having experience in the pornography industry as an adult video actress. In 2013, developing from her master’s thesis, she published “A Sociological Study of Porn Stars (*AV joyū no shakaigaku*). Her two fictional novels as a freelance writer, *Gifted* (2022) and *Graceless* (2022) were nominated for the 167th and 168th Akutagawa Prize.

<sup>2</sup> [I HOPE.] Ch, “こうとしか生きられない自分を化粧に託す。ヴィヴィアン佐藤.” YouTube video, 2:05, December 23, 2022. <https://youtu.be/kUpVlAtv3OQ>.

<sup>3</sup> [I HOPE.] Ch, “いつの時代も想像を超えていく女の子たちが愛おしい。鈴木涼美.” YouTube video, 6:42, April 17, 2022. <https://youtu.be/lylylQZJcw8>.



to be a librarian who seems to fall in love with the girl at first sight, and the two smile at each other as the commercial ends. The commercial reinforces conventional themes found in romance films, by portraying Japanese makeup culture as designed for the male gaze, based on the patriarchic, heteronormative idea that women “make-up” the feminine look in order to appeal to the opposite sex.

It is hardly doubtful that the different target audiences of the two companies influenced the aesthetics of their promotional videos – nonetheless, this stark contrast between the celebration of empowerment in one video and the depiction of makeup to appeal to the male gaze in the other is noteworthy. It suggests that Japanese contemporary beauty culture is passing through a transitional period, where new and traditional ideas coexist, and actors from various social groups actively participating in the discussion of what “beauty” means in Japan.

Therefore, this study aims to unravel the intricate relationship between makeup and selfhood, focusing on the process of how young Japanese women produce, express, and transmit their selfhood to society. I embark on the “network” of makeup practice including actors exercising agency over each other under the Japanese beauty discourse (Latour 2007). In the Japanese makeup network, material and non-material subjects do not interact in one way – women not only internalize the image of femininity standardized and reproduced by social norms, but also appropriate such norms, and produce a sense of authentic self to be transmitted back to the outside world. I argue that makeup functions as a powerful medium for Japanese young women’s “making-up” of their selfhoods, incorporating both their public and private selves. By integrating the implications derived from cultural discourses, media representations, and personal narratives, I seek to shed light on

how women engage with makeup to navigate societal expectations, negotiate their self-identity, and exercise their agency within a complex socio-cultural landscape.

According to the aims of this study, I primarily pose three questions as follows: First, how do modern Japanese women create their own private and public selfhood through makeup, and how do especially female young adults construct their identities around makeup, compared to other age sets? Second, how does new media, such as web magazines, beauty blogs, video platforms and social networking services, affect such makeup culture and women's construction of their self-identities? In what ways do Japanese women and the media interact in the process of constructing Japanese beauty culture? Third, how can a makeup culture be existent as both standardized and personally unique? What kind of gap sits between the "selfhood" advertised by the cosmetics industry and the "selfhood" that women themselves try to construct within themselves?

## **2. Literature Review**

Contemporary scholarships in beauty culture are substantially shaped on the basis of the Bourdieuan theory on habitus and cultural capital. Based on the premise that bodies are objects for capital exchanges in the social economy, Bourdieu conceptualizes that bodies are where capitals are "visible and appropriable," what he calls an "embodied state" among three forms of cultural capital (Kukkonen 2021; Bourdieu 2002/1986). According to the cultural capital theory, cultural practices are acquired, accumulated, practiced, and transmitted through bodies, awarding one who possesses such appearances in exchange for capital, power, and status. In his discussion of sports and physical capital, he argues that such acquirement and embodiment of the desirable bodily features is "one of the few paths of upward

mobility,” which is “what the system of beauty prizes (Bourdieu 1978, 832).”

Grounded from his foundational thoughts, studies establish how faces wearing makeup have been operating as a status symbol, functioning as a performance of the upper-middle class, racially hegemonic groups. Jablonski (2012), in examining the biological and social implications of skin color, states that skin “is the meeting place of biology and everyday experience, a product of human evolution that is perceived within the context of human culture.” The common biases and perceptions of the skin are not “genetically programmed,” but have been “developed” and “transmitted.” It is not only merely a “physical distinguishment” but also sets a hierarchy of “intelligence, attractiveness, temperament, morality, cultural potential, and social worth (2012, 3-4).”

Gender theorist Judith Butler establishes a theory of gender performance and performativity, as “a regularized and constrained repetition of norms: A subject does not ‘perform’ such repetitions, but repetitions ‘enable’ a subject and “constitute the temporal condition for the subject (Butler 1993, 95). Butler conceptualizes that gender, sexuality, and identities are constructed and reinforced through “doing” in two forms: gender as performance, and gender as performativity. While gender as performance emphasizes the coercive aspect of social norms and expectations shaping individual behaviors, gender performativity addresses the possibility of the creation of enaction, rather than a mere reflection of reality (Butler 1999). In this regard, a wide range of studies analyze beauty culture as a structural force, highlighting its standards and practices serving as part of a larger apparatus, which regulates human behaviors and reinforces existing power differentials of race, class, and gender on one hand (Jones 2006; Glenn 2009; Hunter 2013; Borgerson and

Schroeder 2018; G.D. Johnson et al. 2019; Yip, Ainsworth, and Hugh 2019). Digital and printed media, corporates, and social norms are considered as institutions that contribute to the construction and perpetuation of beauty ideals, which shape individuals' self-identities according to their positions within the society. Such literature establish that beauty norms, as culture, are “encoded,” “acquired” and “used socially” by individuals who are “situated” in society – thus, they cannot be separated from politics and governing powers (Sawchuk 2001). Stretching from Butler’s idea of gender performance, scholarships in gender and women’s studies, specifically in connection with liberal feminist and anti-racist perspectives, focus on the beauty labor that women practice in a daily manner, in order to embody the ideal image of femininity scientifically and bio-medically framed according to patriarchic, Eurocentric values. They argue that such a cycle reproduces patriarchal gender hierarchies established by beauty culture, with makeup as a structural force into repressing women to fit into the desirable look for external gazes. Makeup, in this regard, is not a locus or expression of individual agency, but categorized as part of “affective labor” or “emotional labor,” that has to be practiced on commercialized bodies aligning with “company feelings (Hochschild 1983, 127).”

Oksala (2016) further develops the theory that in the contemporary setting where private and public selves are intermingled into objects of commodification, argues that the “exploitative social relations” of contemporary markets commodify “our everyday life,” extracting resources from what has been “honored” as private selves (296). In *Beauty Up* (2006), Miller explores specific beauty practices and body aesthetics in Japanese beauty culture from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, in order to unravel the practices of “beauty work” under the constructed cultural system

in the Japanese context. She establishes that the practice and consumption of beauty on female and male bodies are “linked to larger issues” of gender, ethnicity, and globalization (2006, 204). Although highlighting the significant phenomenon of *gyaru*, body piercing, or *amu-ra*, she remains critical about to what extent individuals hold agency of their beauty work, as they are inevitably located on “a mythology of transformation created by domestic and transnational corporations, which are happy to promote multiple local, embedded meanings (2006, 206).”

Postfeminist studies, on the other hand, highlight women’s individual choice, empowerment, and agency in their practice of embodying beauty (Gill 2007; Gill, K. Kelan, and M. Scharff 2017; Elias and Gill 2018; S. Johnson and Press 2017; Camacho-Miñano, MacIsaac, and Rich 2019; Martínez-Jiménez 2022; Swan 2017). In an extension of Butler’s theory of performativity, they provide a framework to explore how Japanese women engage with makeup as an expression of agency, navigating tensions between feminist ideals and societal expectations.

McRobbie (2004) specifies postfeminism as a “double entanglement,” where “neo-conservative values concerning gender, sexuality, and family life” coexist (McRobbie 2004, 255). McRobbie argues that conventional feminism is “necessary to dismantle” to comprehend new media’s depiction of women’s individualist agency and transform feminism to a more inclusive academic discipline, stating that “young women have come to the fore as the pre-eminent subjects of this new ethic.” The “relations of power” are “made and re-made” in media, by presenting female characters embodying and practicing both their feminist and traditional desires. She describes that postfeminism is paving a new “gender regime” based on such double entanglement (2004, 262). Gill (2007) theorizes postfeminism

as a “sensitivity” that is both reinforced by media and contemporary women themselves, “informed by postmodernist and constructionist perspectives” that departs from “one single authentic feminism (2007, 148). With the intensifying emphasis on individual choice and personalized contents on mass media, the notions of “being oneself” and “pleasing oneself” has been one of the focal points of postfeminism – in other words, a postfeminist female is a neoliberalist individual incorporated with a feminist subject (2007, 153).

However, while scholarships in postfeminist studies agree upon the Eurocentric, heteronormative view of feminism and the necessity of decolonizing conventional feminist ideologies, they are often notably critical with postfeminist “sensibilities”, as women are often framed as free agents while also overlooking existing inequalities (Gill, K. Kelan, and M. Scharff 2017; Martínez-Jiménez 2022; Swan 2017). For instance, Martinez criticizes that postfeminism “conveniently embraces certain feminist gains while at the same time disavowing feminism itself (2022, 4). Multiple analyses on new media and its portrayal of “female self-confidence,” emphasize structural inequalities on one hand but call for change to women by their self-betterment rather than the organization itself (Gill, K. Kelan, and M. Scharff 2017, 241). The postfeminist analyses thus provide implications for understanding mediated selves between the private (authentic) self and the public (presented) self. As the concept will be further discussed in Chapter II, the conflicting yet intersecting conventional and new ideas of femininity propose contemporary challenges that women are facing, their personal desires clashing with both feminist ideas and discriminatory gender norms in beauty culture. Looking at women’s makeup practices through the lens of postfeminism, including its critical

perspectives, poses implications to shed light on the dynamics of comprehending beauty culture.

Building upon the feminist and postfeminist analyses of makeup as both performance and performativity, consumer culture, media, and Japanese cultural studies examine the multifaceted role of makeup in various contexts, recognizing that the two discourses always coexist. As the concept of beauty has become politicized and commodified, a considerable strain of literature regarding makeup and its effects, are consumer behavior and media studies under the disciplines of social sciences (Friedman 1991; Umemura and Slater 2017; Yamashita and Madoka 2020; 互惠子 2021; 平松隆円 2020; 智穂 2020; 木戸 2009; 深田 and 梶本 2014; ポーラ文化研究所 2020; 恒之 2020; 川添 2013; 黄順姬 2019). Focusing on the marketing effects of Japanese media and circulations of makeup culture among women as their corresponding target audience, they analyze the psychologies and consuming behaviors of women in the cosmetics industries, discussing how marketing strategies, advertisements, and cosmetic branding influence or coerce women's choices and preferences, and how such strategies are related with economic, social, and cultural backgrounds.

Deriving from the Bordieuan ideas of habitus, cultural and social reproduction, Whang (2019) argues that makeup and fashion are “symbolic power (象徴的権力)” exerted by the society where bodies are symbols of social and cultural capitals, structurally repressing ones who are not able to embody such beauty labor. Whang conceptualizes that the practice of wearing makeup functions in two ways: The first is makeup handled as a tool for women to “make their faces or looks more valuable to be formed and consumed in their respective societies, giving a favorable

impression to others that are facing each other with them.” The second function is related to women’s emotional fulfillment, that is, “women are satisfied with their makeup, or the end-product of faces with their makeup on (黄順姬 2019, 116–17).<sup>4</sup>”

In this regard, Whang is also addressing the public and private selfhoods, by in which incorporating both the “internal (内面)” and “external look (外見).” By analyzing the cosmetics advertisements targeted to different age groups in Japanese and Korean women’s magazines, she makes a comparative study on how corporates can comprehend the motivations for women to consume and practice makeup.

Consumer and media studies suggest significant insights in relating beauty culture with women’s self-identity formation – They establish that makeup is one of the profound ways for women to express their selfhoods, which are composed of a complex interplay of multiple racial, ethnic, social, cultural, and gendered identities. Nevertheless, there are realms that such studies are inevitably limited to explore. In other words, “what produces consumption” is a center of attention in Japanese consumer and media studies, positioning women’s identities as passive acceptors of marketing strategies – identities are products, rather than producers, of values (Lamarre 2014). Hence, this study aims to redirect scholarly attention from the examination of consumption behaviors to the exploration of the affective dimensions inherent in women’s engagement with makeup practices, in order to examine the underlying mechanisms involved in the production of self-identity.

Japanese cultural studies, although deriving their foundations from Western

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<sup>4</sup> Original text in Japanese translated into English.



cultural and sociological frameworks, highlight cultural particularities of the Japanese context of beauty. It is clear that solely framing Japanese beauty culture from the lens of Western theories may not fully account for the need of a more contextually grounded approach. Ashikari's (2003, 2005) seminal work, in this regard, successfully opens the door to speculating the "Japanese" contextuality of beauty labor. By examining the discourse of skin whitening practiced by Japanese urban middle-class women, she argues that white skin functions as "an item of vocabulary in a symbolic language, which communicates gender relations." According to her, a whitened face is a language for women to not only reaffirm the ethnic, feminine "us (*uchi*)," but also communicate with the public life (*soto*) They "perform" the image of ideal women to enter the "men's world." Thus, the act of skin whitening is strongly connected to Japanese middle-class women's idea of "Japanese-ness" of "*uchi*" and "*soto*," offering a sense of security and belonging by enacting such performance. This collective identity forged through skin whitening has even given rise to notions of beauty nationalism, implied by multiple statements she has collected from interview data, with claims of Japanese possessing uniquely superior white skin compared to other ethnicities.

While Ashikari's studies make significant contributions to the understanding of this phenomenon, certain limitations necessitate further analysis. Primarily, her research heavily relies on fieldwork observations, encompassing casual observations of women applying white makeup and interviews primarily conducted with middle-class women, along with limited inclusion of male perspectives. Moreover, her investigation is constrained to middle-class working women, with a comparatively lesser academic focus on specific beauty practices

embodied and enacted by young Japanese women as an independent target group of study.

While there have been studies exploring makeup practices among various age groups and social categories, it is crucial to recognize the specific significance of young women, as makeup deep-seated in their life-stage transition from teenage to adult makeup culture, and their constant negotiations of their multiple intersecting identities, communicating through highly diversifying mediums between them and the outside world. Although temporarily slowed down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Japanese cosmetics market has been rapidly expanding: It has been the world's second-largest after the U.S., until 2012, and the third-largest from 2013 to 2019 (化粧品産業ビジョン検討会 2021). Furthermore, the presence of digital technologies – both in terms of hardware and software – in beauty culture, has only been gaining its significance. Transmissions of not only information, but also aesthetics and emotions, are developing new pathways for women to create new digital bodies and identities (Gill 2007; Banet-Weiser 2011; Belk 2014; S. Johnson and Press 2017; Elias and Gill 2018; Camacho-Miñano, MacIsaac, and Rich 2019; Hunter 2019; Hayashi et al. 2021). In such contemporary discourse, women in their 20s are considered as an ideal image of femininity. In Japan, 79.6% of cosmetics advertisement models are in their 20s, strongly indicating that young-adult (ヤングアダルト) women are set as representative faces of ideal beauty (黄順姫 2019).

Therefore, investigating the narratives of Japanese young adult women holds significance, as their experiences and perspectives reflect the challenges and aspirations of a generation navigating the complexities of rapidly transforming Japanese society. Peculiarly, women in their 20s are actively shaping the discourse

around beauty and self-identity through their engagement with media platforms, social networks, and online communities. Their narratives provide a lens into the understanding of the ways in which media technology intersect with personal agency, highlighting the dynamics of self-presentation in the digital age. It is crucial to acknowledge that the beauty discourse and the dynamics of makeup, nationality, and femininity have undergone substantial transformations since the publication of her works.

From the 2010s, the socioeconomic discourse around skin whitening in Japan has been much more diversified. Not only large multinational cosmetic corporations, but also entertainers, influencers, bloggers and video-makers who were previously part of the invisible consumers, are now able to publicize themselves as media producers (Glenn 2009). Exposed to such global-scale mass media, the Japanese younger generation no longer identify makeup as a status symbol or being the “Japanese” national, but situate their practice of makeup in a much diverse, transnational discourse. Japan’s increased interaction with foreign countries, such as the expansion of international marriage leading to a sharp rise of the *hafu* (ハーフ) population, or Japan’s exposure to Korean idol culture and absorbing its beauty ideals, are influencing such shifts in creating self-identities diverging both from the Western and “traditional” Japanese makeup culture.

In conclusion, existing literature offer a comprehensive examination of the relationship between beauty culture, makeup, and women’s self-identity from various disciplines of sociology, consumer and media studies, postfeminist studies, and Japanese cultural studies. By synthesizing these diverse perspectives, this study aims to address the identified limitations of the reviewed literature, by delving deeper

into the experiences of young Japanese women in a contemporary setting. Through exploring the narratives and experiences of these women negotiating the intersections of their public and private selfhood through makeup, I aim to contribute to a further understanding of the multifaceted dynamics of self-identity, and the active conversation of women, cosmetics, media, ideologies, existing structures interplaying on the discourse of makeup culture.

### **3. Research Methodology**

To explore the identity formation of Japanese women by makeup practices, the methodology of this study encompasses a media analysis and semi-constructed interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

#### **3.1 Media Analysis**

The research incorporates media analysis as one of the primary methods to examine the discourse surrounding makeup and its influence on Japanese women's public and private selfhood. Specifically, two types of media materials are analyzed.

One is Japanese “Mook” (ムック *mukku*)<sup>5</sup>, which includes the analysis of short publications by beauty influencers or cosmetics companies, including both elements of magazines and books. These publications feature visual images and aesthetic content focused on fashion and beauty. By analyzing these materials, I aim to gain insights into the construction and dissemination of beauty ideals within the Japanese society.

This study further includes an examination of “makeup tutorial videos,”

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<sup>5</sup> It is a combination of two words in Japanese Katakana, “Magazine” and “Book.”

which are widely distributed on a video platform YouTube, serving as a representative medium for analysis of makeup practices in the context of contemporary media culture. Such platforms, I argue, serve as a space for both public and private identities intersect, while also extending the postfeminist discussion of media reinforcing the neoliberalist ideology of self-help, individualism, and self-improvement, while pushing the responsibilities of conforming to beauty norms to the individual.

### **3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

To capture the individual voices and perspectives of Japanese women themselves, a semi-structured interview approach was employed. Eight women in their age of 20s with Japanese nationalities participated in the interviews. The sample was selected to include participants from diverse ethnic, educational and social backgrounds, to be provided a range of perspectives necessary for the objective of this study.

The interviews were conducted for about 60 to 90 minutes in average each, using a combination of in-person, online (Zoom), and written questionnaire methods. Five participants were interviewed in person, two via online video conferencing, and one through a written questionnaire. The following table provides a concise overview of the respondents participated.

**Table 1. A summary of interview respondent data**

| <b>Respondent Index</b> | <b>Interview Date</b> | <b>Interview Location and methods</b>   | <b>Language</b> | <b>Individual Profile</b> |                        |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---|-----------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
|                         |                       |   |                 | <b>Age</b>                | <b>Affiliation</b>     |
| <b>A</b>                | December 19, 2022     | In-person group interview, Tokyo, Japan | Japanese        | Early 20s                 | Student                |
| <b>B</b>                | December 19, 2022     | In-person group interview, Tokyo, Japan | Japanese        | Early 20s                 | Student                |
| <b>C</b>                | January 13, 2023      | Online conference                       | English         | 27                        | Public college teacher |
| <b>D</b>                | February 07, 2023     | In-person interview, Tokyo, Japan       | English         | 25                        | Student, journalist    |
| <b>E</b>                | February 11, 2023     | In-person interview, Nagoya, Japan      | Japanese        | 25                        | Office worker          |
| <b>F</b>                | March 05, 2023        | Online conference                       | Japanese        | 24                        | Student                |
| <b>G</b>                | March 14, 2023        | Written questionnaire                   | Japanese        | 27                        | Office worker          |
| <b>H</b>                | April 11, 2023        | In-person interview Seoul, South Korea  | Japanese        | 24                        | Student                |

The semi-structured interviews constituted a crucial component of this research methodology, enabling to extricate young Japanese women's individual voices on their perspectives on makeup through a series of eleven targeted questions. These inquiries delved into their perceptions of makeup, including their engagement with specific keywords, preferred media sources for beauty references, emotional responses, and contemplations on pivotal makeup concepts such as "natural makeup" or "skincare." The approach, therefore, offered a comprehensive understanding of the participants' multifaceted experiences, attitudes, and motivations concerning

makeup. Through the rich and diverse narratives shared by the interviewees, this research aims to illuminate the complex relationship between makeup practices and the construction of selfhood among young Japanese women in their 20s. The appendix further elaborates the specific questions that have been prepared for the interview.

## **II. Being "Normal" - The Public Self**

### **1. Grooming (*midashinami*) and Women's Makeup**

#### **1.1 *Midashinami*, Setting a Standard of Appearance**

This chapter discusses the ideas of “grooming (身だしなみ, *midashinami*)” and “lookism (レッキズム, *rukkizumu*),” and examines how such culture sets certain standards and expectations of an ideal, “normal,” Japanese woman. By taking a deeper analysis through the lens of natural makeup (ナチュラルメイク, *nachuraru meiku*), the following subchapter explores how makeup functions as an institutional device, by affiliating appearance not only to its literal meaning, but also with cleanliness, health, and moral values. The critical analysis of literature, media and personal narratives aims to provide an understanding of the complexities of beauty culture in Japan and its impact on social norms and individual well-being; that is, the public selfhood.

Japan is where bodily adornment is highly demanded according to one's organizational occupation and role in society. The concept of “身だしなみ (*midashinami*)” – a bodily posture or appearance that does not make other people feel uncomfortable; a culture or a performance that should be delivered according to one's status and circumstances – remains attached to the daily lives of the Japanese

(デジタル大辞泉 n.d.)<sup>6</sup>. The Chinese character for *tashinami* (嗜み) stands for “Exhibiting modesty in front of others and maintaining a humble attitude in daily life.” Such definition hints two significant points: First, the definition highlights that grooming is essential to appear suitable in public, not in a perspective of internal self-evaluation but from external views. Second, *midashinami* encompasses not only the grooming of one’s physical body, but also the appropriate selection of clothing, bodily postures, tone and behavior according to specific context and circumstances.<sup>7</sup> The concept is most used when explaining a “manner” for young adults, job applicants, entry-level employees, foreigners, highlighting the significance of performing or embodying the “right look” in order to leave a positive first-impression to their peer groups, potential employers, bosses and clients (Team.SH 2013; Adachi 2010; Khan 2010).

Contemporary Japanese women also consider *midashinami* as an essential part of makeup and skincare, according to a survey by POLA Research Institute of Beauty & Culture.

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<sup>6</sup> Japanese translated to English. “人に不快感を与えないように、言動や服装を整えること。また、その心掛け。「身嗜みに気を配る」。身分・境遇に応じて身につけておくべき教養や技芸。「上に立つ者としての身嗜み」”

<sup>7</sup> Japanese translated to English. “人前ででしゃばらないように控え目にふるまうこと・普段の心がけ”



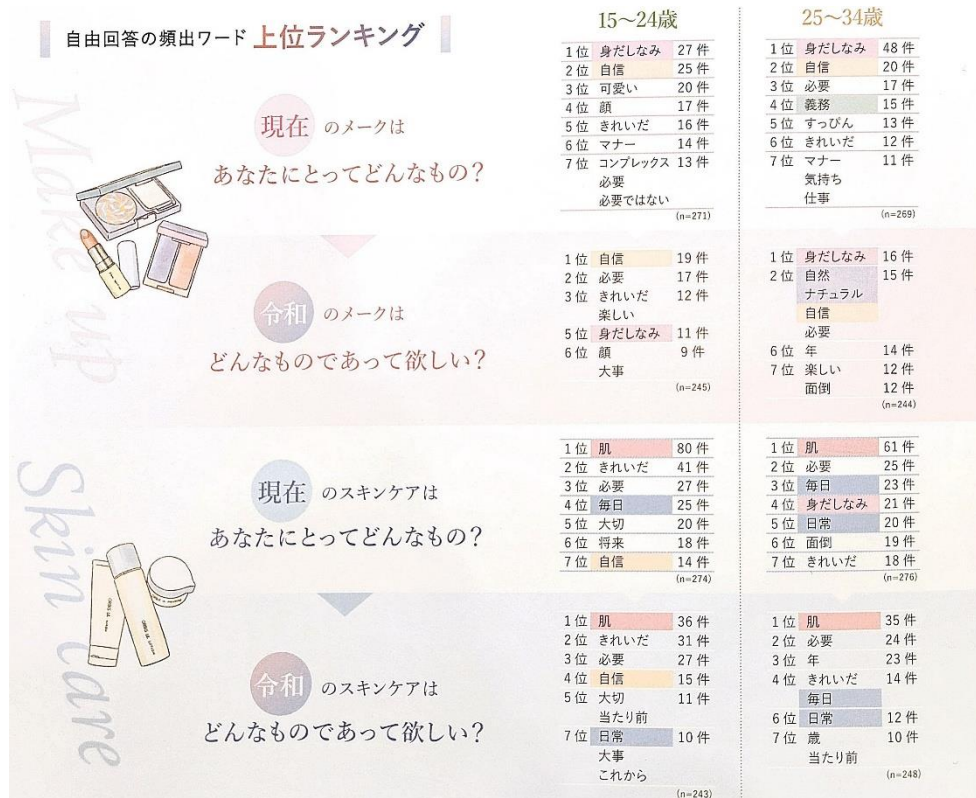


Figure 1. "What does 'makeup' mean to you currently? What would 'makeup' mean to you from the Reiwa era?" 「令和を生きる私たちは」, 平成美容開花, 2020

Figure 1 presents the results of a survey conducted on Japanese women with four questions: "What does 'makeup' mean to you currently?" "What would 'makeup' mean to you from the *Reiwa* era?"<sup>8</sup> "What does 'skincare' mean to you currently?" "What would 'skincare' mean to you from the *Reiwa* era?" (ポーラ文化研究所 2020).<sup>9</sup> The responses are categorized by age groups, and the excerpt provided is from the age groups of 15-24 and 25-34. The survey results

<sup>8</sup> From May 1st, 2019, according to the Japanese calendar. The current year 2023 marks the year "Reiwa 5."

<sup>9</sup> In fact, *midashinami* appeared to rank first for all age cohorts, up until age 64. It shows that makeup and skincare are significantly considered as part of basic personal grooming for Japanese women during their lifetime.

reveal that the concept of *midashinami* is the top-ranked response for both age groups regarding their current ideas on makeup. Particularly, including women in their late 20s, who are more involved in social activities compared to other age groups in schools and workplaces, ranked *midashinami* as the top response for both current and future perceptions of makeup. Additionally, for younger women aged 15-24, the keyword “necessity (必要)” has risen from the 7th rank in the ‘current’ section and to the 2nd rank in the ‘future’ section. Thus, the survey suggests that *midashinami*, which is considered a necessary aspect of social life, strongly influences the reasons and motivations for Japanese women wearing makeup.

Although slightly different versions exist, *midashinami* is known to have three principles: Cleanliness (清潔感, *seiketsukan*), functionality (機能性, *kinōsei*), and harmony (調和, *chōwa*). Other principles include elegance (上品 *jōhin*) and modesty (控えめ, *hikaeme*) interchangeably (Team.SH 2013; *TRANS.Biz* 2022). As previously noted, *midashinami* includes not only simple grooming practices but also the coordination of clothing and behavior, rendering its principles a set of virtues that individuals are expected to embody to be recognized as proper citizens and to avoid causing discomfort to others within the society. It is worth noting that the *midashinami* culture not only exists as an implicit social norm but is also explicitly codified in corporate regulations. The existence of makeup regulations in corporates means that individuals are obligated to wear makeup in a space that they spend the most time to produce economic and social values. In other words, by linking moral concepts such as cleanliness, functionality, and harmony with the appearance of other group members, company grooming regulations structurally establish specific social standards for a desirable appearance. Women’s makeup is also included in

these set of rules, and companies often require mandatory makeup only to female workers (プライムオンライン編集部 2019; Yamashita and Madoka 2020).



Figure 2. Major checkpoints for *midashinami* <sup>10</sup>

Figure 2 shows an example *midashinami* in Japanese corporate culture. For both genders, *midashinami* regulates the overall appearances, from hair arrangement to styles and colors of the shoes. However, gender differences are also noticeable: Only the female worker side mentions the “makeup (メイク) part, asking to wear a toned-down (抑えて, *osaete*) makeup, specifically to refrain from excessively curling their eyelashes. It is worth noting that how the figure presupposes women to wear makeup, but suggests seizing its application to a toned-down, appropriate manner. The figure is an exemplary visual representation of how different criteria of looks are applied to different genders, not only reinforcing gendered (and heteronormative) corporate culture. One FNN column, for instance, discusses if not wearing makeup

<sup>10</sup> 日本経済新聞. 「身だしなみで信頼感アップ頭から足元、注意するポイントは?」, March 06, 2019, <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGKKZO42053790V00C19A3TCN000/>.

in workplaces is a “violation of business manner” for women. It suggests women to wear a “natural makeup” to give a positive impression of looking “clean” and “organized;” in contrast, “flashy” makeup that “appeals yourself” does not suit in business settings (ブライムオンライン編集部 2019). The “Survey of Gender Differences in Internal Corporate Regulations 2019” conducted by Japanese Trade Union Confederation (JTUC/RENGO), states that Japanese corporates apply different standards of *midashinami* to male and female workers. Among 57.1% of respondents who answered that there are dress codes or grooming regulations in their workplaces, 15.1% responded that their companies regulate female (and exclusively female) workers to wear makeup, and 19.4% regulate heel lengths of women’s pumps (Japanese Trade Union Confederation (RENGO) 2019).

It is worth noting that women’s makeup is required but only to a “modest” or a “proper” degree, and being “flashy” or “appealing yourself” is considered unprofessional or inappropriate. This is a moment when makeup intrudes Japanese women’s daily choices of bodily adornment, cosmetic consumption, and self-caring behaviors as a structural force. At this moment, makeup becomes part of labor, during a process of “being” that a woman has to invest her time and effort, navigating the expectations in order to construct a public self that conforms to gendered norms (Raisborough 2011). Ashikari connects such culture with the Japanese concept of *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside), discussing in her findings that Japanese middle-class women who apply foundation or skin-whitening cosmetics reconfirm and reproduce their sense of inclusivity as an ethnic Japanese woman. White and firm skin is a “symbolic language” that “communicates gender relations,” which women perceive that it is basic etiquette to apply foundation when going outside (*soto*). For middle-

class women in her research, makeup is a performance of status, an action of constructing the public self in order to communicate with spaces where used to be perceived as a “men’s world (Ashikari 2003).”

In this process, makeup functions as an oppression over women to maintain a certain level of modesty and restraint. As what Miller calls “beauty manners” or “beauty work,” improving one’s appearances connects to disciplinary issues of etiquette or personal hygiene; those who do not conform to, unable to, or cannot afford to keep up the standards, fall into the anxiety of being irresponsible, both from internal and external voices (Miller 2006; Raisborough 2011). Thus, although makeup is an act of applying one layer of bodily transformation, not only such act of transformation itself is highly normalized, but also the transformed, made-up face is considered as a default for Japanese women to maintain their status instead of their bare faces. It appears that Japanese women’s primary motivation of plastic surgery (美容整形, *biyō seikei*) is also to fit into the standards of the “ordinary,” rather than to stand out in comparison with others (川添 2013). Therefore, in an environment that wearing makeup is an act of being the “ordinary” and the “normal,” the style has to be tailored to the taste of those in power, and applied uniformly to the group members, without much consideration of personal tastes.

In fact, many interviewees not only mentioned the word *midashinami* in relation to makeup, but also expressed negative emotions towards applying makeup on a daily basis, such as “tedious (*mendokusai*)” or “hard (*taihen*)”, when attending public events or going to work.

E: “If you are a member of society, you have to show that you have good manners with your appearances (...) I work for a Japanese company, and after I joined the

company, there was a training program for new employees. And, of course, they taught me about *midashinami* as well, and I was taught not to offend others with my appearances, which made me scared.”

B: “When you become a member of society, such as job-hunting makeup (*shūkatsu-meiku*), you know, you have to appear elegant and be in order (*shikkari-shite-iru*), to be seen as someone who is reliable and not playing around too much.”

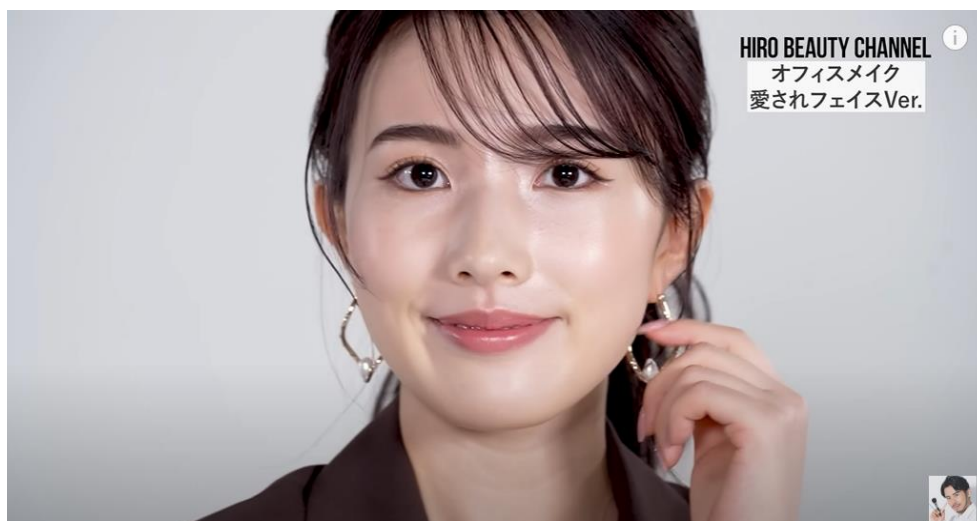
I guess in business settings, they prefer more delicate and more subtle glitters, not like blindingly shiny glitters. Like those eyeshadows that K-POP Idols wear, something that are used for night hangouts... not night particularly... but going out to play.”

To describe makeup styles that are considered “too much” or undesirable on business settings, the interviewees frequently used expressions such as being showy (*hade*), glittery (*lame*), styles with a bold or a strong presence (*shuchō no aru*). Undesirable makeup styles on business settings were also attached to ideas of entertainment, play and leisure: such as idols, K-POP, or night hangouts (*yoruasobi*). Such descriptions assert that in *midashinami* culture, which has been constructed upon patriarchal ideas of functionality, appropriateness and harmony with the organization, makeup is regarded as a virtue or etiquette for women, as long as it stays in a “modest” degree.

Such makeup style that is considered more appropriate for daily wear and for projecting a wholesome and approachable image, is commonly themed as “natural makeup.” The aim is to create a relaxed and carefree look that appears effortless and uncontrived. It is also characterized by minimal coverage and a focus on enhancing one’s “natural features” rather than masking them. *Midashinami* is

often paired with natural makeup, as its aesthetics is to create a harmonious and low-maintenance style that emphasizes simplicity and natural beauty suitable to business settings. However, such simplicity is constructed to appear effortless, in contrast to the actual steps that the “natural makeup” ideally suggests.

A recent YouTube tutorial video by a Japanese beauty influencer Hiro Odagiri, introduces an ideal “office makeup (*ofisu meiku*)” in one of his videos.<sup>11</sup> In about a thirty-minute-long video, Hiro uses 19 cosmetic products in order to finish the “office makeup” look.



**Figure 3. "Office makeup" by Hiro Odagiri. HIRO BEAUTY CHANNEL, 2022**

According to Hiro, an important aspect of “office makeup” is to create a “translucent skin (透明感, *tōmeikan*)” – which can be achieved by using a makeup base, highlighter, and concealer to produce a fair-skinned face with a three-dimensional, gradient effect (立体感, *rittaikan*) and a moist texture (潤い, *uruoi*). He further

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<sup>11</sup> 【好印象&愛され顔】2022年オフィスメイク完全版！人生を豊かにする洗練されたオフィスメイクのご紹介よ〜♡【社会人メイク】. HIRO BEAUTY CHANNEL 2022.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgyWjiZEpRQ> (Accessed May 13, 2023).

describes that taking the time to take care for one's skin is considered "directly linked to one's career success," as fair skin can make a positive first impression on colleagues, bosses, and clients, potentially leading to promotions and salary improvements for working women (2022 15:27).

Throughout the makeup tutorial, the theme of "modesty" of *midashinami* culture, is emphasized repeatedly. He uses an eyeshadow palette with orange and bronze colors that he describes as "colors that do not stand out too much (主張されないタイプ), recommending that they be spread out "modestly," while also suggesting to use "sparkling colors," so that the eyes "don't become too plain (2022 17:20)." Hiro puts a glitter shadow on the under-eye area to hide dark circles but does so "to the point where you can't tell if it's put on," reflecting the emphasis on subtle and natural-looking makeup. The use of an excessive amount of blushers is also discouraged, as it may create an overly playful look (2022 27:53). The theme of constructed natural-ness that subtly hints at a standard amount of self-care through makeup, therefore, aligns with the values of modesty and humility over ostentatious displays, which are highly prized in the ideal *midashinami* culture.

Thus, instead of the actual amount of makeup worn, it is the specific colors or styles associated with images of entertainment or leisure, are deemed inappropriate for the workplace as they may create the impression that the person invests an excessive amount of time and effort in non-work-related activities. However, as discussed later, despite the original intention of personal grooming regulations, women invest considerable time and resources in order to achieve the demanded look. In other words, rather than the intensity or presence of makeup are directly affecting women's abilities and productivity, it is more important to "appear"



as a productive person who fits in public standards.

## **1.2 Lookism, an Ability-based Society on Appearances**

In this regard, the current criticism of “lookism” within Japan is an extension of such discussion. First used by the *Washington Post* in the late 1970s, the word stands for a “prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of appearance (Ayto 1999, 485). As conceptualized in Warhurst and Hall (2012), In the wake of the industrial revolution and the development of service industries, the concept of “lookism” has emerged as the ability to provide emotional or aesthetic satisfaction to customers, namely through outward appearances, has become one of the major criterion for employment, evaluation, and promotion of laborers. It is unsurprising, therefore, that corporates demand exclusive grooming regulations to female workers, as women have been conventionally perceived as to be more suitable for providing emotional fulfillment (Hochschild 1983; Warhurst et al. 2012). Correspondingly, controversies over “lookism” has been about its structural inequality and discriminative aspect, especially the role of traditional gender, racial and social biases playing into judging a person’s job position, income, fame and status. In recent years, sparked by the #KuToo movement, there has been growing awareness and criticisms of lookism particularly among the younger generation. Rather than passively conforming to social norms and the desirable look, ideas of individuality, inner beauty, and self-authenticity are trending in the media, alongside the “body positivity” movement that encourages individuals to perceive makeup as a boost to enhance the fortes rather than concealing flaws.

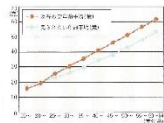
However, it is debatable whether such resistance have fundamentally transformed the structure that virtues women to wear makeup. Critics point out that

the new concept aiming to break away from lookism can rather establish a new hierarchy based on what Tsutsui calls “meritocracy regarding physical appearances (容姿の美をめぐる能力主義).” In other words, rather than the beautiful bodies themselves, but the ability to “recognize one’s bodily features” and “utilize it as an ingredient to coordinate beauty” becomes forefront (筒井 2021, 190–92). The new frame of beauty and makeup is now about skills and individual capability of care, transferring the responsibility of body adornment to the individual themselves – if one cannot keep up certain standards of “caring oneself” or maintaining a “healthy lifestyle,” she lacks capability to take good care of “herself.” As Tsutsui argues, the beauty and fashion industry have picked up the ideological shift, dissolved such neoliberal concepts of individualism and self-authenticity into commercials, integrating their conventional pressure of beauty work with new ideas (2021, 192). Thus, discourses of self-empowerment and self-discipline coexist in the new trend, as makeup styles are diversified and personalized, but only to a degree presentable and recognizable to the public. Returning to Ayto’s definition of lookism, the recent changes in discourse surrounding appearance-based discrimination shows little deviation from its traditional definition, only shifting the focus from succumbence to free choice and individual responsibility.

化粧や美容の情報は、マスメディアからTwitterやInstagramなどSNSへ急激に広がった。情報発信者によるスタイルが定着した。多様な個性は、それをコミュニティとして、それぞれに魅力あるミューズ、アイコンが存在し、その「言葉」「嗜好」「ビジュアル」によって自分の性格を表現した。美雑誌は「化粧と美容情報」の流通に加え、「女子力」を意味した自分「にお直し」することも可能な時代となるものの、東日本大震災が境線に、美容への向き合い方が変化した。人口100万人の時代に、いかに自分らしく、心豊かに生き残るかがすべての人のテーマとなった。「美容＝音楽を聴く」という短報は経緯、美容の目的や表現は、さらに自由に多彩に進化した。ここでは以下に、

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

またポイントマークなどのチャートが得意となった。  
しかし、平成20年代後半、「若さ」に関しに変化が現れ、  
「若さ」を消すは「若からず」になり、若さの定義に変わ  
り、「抑制、閉塞」は「開の方」のものさずを、引き上げ  
るという価値観へと変化した。「人生100年時代」「QOL  
」になるなど、人生のありかたも大きく変わっており、  
物質の累した状況にも変化が訪れた。「自然体」らしさを大  
胆に、そしてどこか「グレイヘア」に染めが深まり、大きな足跡  
となった。更なる若さや若さに生ずるための重要なテーマ  
とが議論が深まり、一人ひとりが美しく輝くための相贈、  
「若さ」や「若身」は今ますます時代され、各様な進化を求め  
て参る。

[illegible][illegible]

10代前半は男性より年上、20代前半は女性ほどに年同じ、20代後半以降は男性より年下になりだすという傾向に  
 加えて、男女の結婚率は25年調査  
 (表1)に示す通り、

メークは抜け感、癒やしへ

1990年代は、「最前線」に参画される、がんばりずばい

[illegible]

92 SNSの中の自己認識

[illegible]

As a result, ideas of individuality are blurred and mixed with ideas of conformation. Figure 4, excerpted from *Heisei Biyou Kaika* where it describes the beauty trends in the Heisei year 30 period (2009~2018), shows an exemplary of such mixture. The phrase “Various “shapes” that you want to show... (*misetai 'katachi' wa samazamani...*),” introducing the styles of celebrities who deviates from the conventional shape of Japanese beauty. But the “self” that are expressed are still on the public eye, to be “shown,” especially with the examples of celebrities whose bodies are highly commercialized. The book continues with a column explaining how the ideology of beauty shifted from being gazed to expressing self-authenticity (*watashi-rashiku*), is attached with the articles about anti-aging technology and cosmetics at the same page. While it is apparent that beauty ideologies shifted from

mere succumbence to considering diversified cultural and social backgrounds of an individual, such ideas are clashing with the established beauty structure of “beauty work” or the public self. Rather, the addition of terms such as “individualism,” “self-care” and “personality” to the discourse of lookism, has made it easier to evaluate an individual’s behavior patterns, lifestyle, and overall attitude towards life based on their appearance. Thus, the allocation of columns and themes in figure 7 indicates that ideas of individuality are often dissolved into, and presented alongside with strong ideas of conventional ideas of beauty as labor.

## **2. The Natural Makeup (*nachuraru meiku*) and a Sense of Missing Something (*nukekan*)**

The trend of “natural makeup” is a prominent example of Japanese beauty culture, where makeup is ideally utilized for personal empowerment and self-expression. However, the aesthetics have been assimilated into the dominant beauty standards, perpetuating their hegemonic influence on beauty ideals. The expression of the “natural” entails multiple meanings: subtle, non-noticeable, organic, healthy, authentic, and self-representing. To sum up, it is a style that minimizes the artificial touch while still transforming the body into a better, more beautiful state. Rather than heavily re-created faces, the “natural” makeup that extracts the “innate beauty” of oneself is considered much more desirable in current trends. However, such looks are mostly heavily constructed underwater, requiring significant amount of time and resource; As a result, however, such processes need to be concealed of its presence, and the makeup has to be shown “subtle” or “effortless” to the public.

## **2.1 Natural Makeup as Lifestyle Media**

These trends have been further reinforced with the development of media platforms that provide makeup artists, influencers, and members of entertainment industry with increased opportunities to communicate with their audiences. Makeup tutorials are one of the categories of video content genres in new media, where content creators show the overall process of applying makeup to their audiences. They are borrowing the form of multimedia featuring how-to guides instructing audiences to follow through the process of wearing makeup. Instead of traditional media that presented how-to-guides by written text and imprinted illustrations, makeup tutorials show the steps in continuous movement and voiceovers. Creators appear on the screen with a closed-up angle above their shoulders, delivering a feeling as if the viewer is looking at the mirror, or sitting right in front of their personal makeup counselor. Their contents include a brief introduction of the video's makeup theme, cosmetic products used, and specific steps of their appliance. During the process, the creators share their knowledge and techniques visually and verbally, deliberately taking advantage of the characteristics of video-sharing platforms such as YouTube. Launched in 2005, YouTube has gained its worldwide popularity as a self-creating, self-presenting, and self-branding platform. Among its ever-expanding diversity of contents, beauty-related contents including makeup and skincare tutorials, cosmetics hauls and product recommendations, remained as one of the most popular; in 2017, the total views of beauty videos on YouTube reached 219 Billion, recording a 60% year-over-year increase (Pixability 2017). New media is one of the primary sources to acquire information about beauty trends for Japanese women as well. An awareness survey conducted by ROI Inc. shows that Instagram (36%), WEB

media (26%), paper magazines (23%), internet research (23%), television (22%) and YouTube (15%) consist of the top sources of beauty trend information circulation, most of them consisting new media. It is noteworthy that the most viewed and consumed category of videos related to beauty is “レクチャー系,” which means “tutorials (株式会社ROI 2022).”

This drastic increase in consumption of new media and emerging popularity of makeup tutorials in a realm of beauty culture, is connected to the prevalent narrative of neoliberalist ideas of self-improvement. The how-to-guides, often including expert instructions of transforming oneself into a better version, form a basis of makeup tutorials. The state or politics do not coerce individuals to passively conform into their rules. Instead, the neoliberalist system demands individuals to be a better self (which, the society approves) by their own choice. In this regard, the makeover paradigm poses significant points to the discussion of makeup tutorials and its relationship with the construction of selfhood. Raisborough (2011) suggests that “lifestyle media are technologies of neoliberalism (84),” by her exploration of the cultivation of selfhood under the makeover paradigm. Lifestyle media, according to Raisborough, mediates our every day, “ordinary” lives to the “happy ending” of self-betterment, which includes an “imagining of a past and present self” and “a future, happy self (2011, 2-4).” Based on neoliberalist values, lifestyle media highlights a stage of “becoming” or “doing” as much as, if not more, “being” something better. Because the media incorporates “narrowcasting” in their marketing, consumers are convinced that the contents are personally tailored for their individual taste and consider that consuming such media is a display of individuality and an expression of self-identity. However, ironically, the “happy ending” of self-

betterment is entangled with the notion of responsibility. She argues that the process of self-transformation includes two significant aspects – *becoming a citizen*, and being *a becoming citizen*, which, she expresses, as a person “in place,” “who belongs” and is deemed “appropriate (2011, 54).” To achieve this, lifestyle media also mediates the “inside (bodily organs and the inner self)” through “specific frames of health and personal responsibility.” It defines what an abject life is, and who the “type” of person living such life are, then celebrate the “becoming” citizens who manage to transform their life that the society, economic, and cultural norms could approve (2011, 91). That is, the “self” formed through a mediation of lifestyle media is not only the self as an individual, but also the self as a part of a collective. Raisborough’s conceptual framework of lifestyle media also applies to the “natural beauty” narrative of makeup tutorials, as they are one of the most representative examples of “celebrating” the transformation. Makeup is a lifestyle, which the media tackles the problems of everyday, ordinary lives, then suggests makeup as a solution to resolve such problems. By self-adorning labor, an expert’s assessment and advice, and products ready for consumption, a person can better oneself to a self-expressing, self-empowering individual that, ironically, “fits in” the prescribed role that recognizes the empowered self.

Postfeminist analysis on makeover culture presented through contemporary digital media also poses implications for understanding a mediated self (Gill 2007; Banet-Weiser 2011; Chae 2021). Postfeminist media culture incorporates neoliberal ideologies of selfhood with both feminist and anti-feminist themes (Gill 2007, 149). Postfeminist identities, stressing women’s personal empowerment based on free will, being a sexually “desiring object” rather than being objectified, and exercising

agency on their seemingly “free choice,” match with the model of a “psychological subject demanded by neoliberalism (2007, 154).” As postfeminism has developed a new “sensibility” of subjectivity where contradictory gender relations intersect, the analysis suggest that such intersection is also a constant negotiation of an individual self – an authentic self with power and agency – and collective self – a presented self being recognized and approved. Banet-Weiser (2011) extends this discussion by examining the construction of postfeminist self-branding of girl’s video production on YouTube. She argues that the videos produced by teenage girls presenting and commercializing their bodies are “both a public and private performance,” as the videos are displayed to the global networking site, but also provide individuals an opportunity to answer the question of “who am I (2011, 21)?” The platform invites individuals to a world of self-production where they can express their unique self, feeling empowered and confident by free choice. On the other hand, the explicit presentation of commercial brands, the content creators’ self-presentation to invoke consumption, and the platform’s characteristics of high interactivity –where creators could receive direct “surveillance, judgement and evaluation” from feedbacks–, shows that the “self” expressed through videos are not merely an attributed, authentic self-but a negotiated self “within a cultural and economic context of recognizable and predetermined images, texts, beliefs, and values (2011, 12).”

## **2.2 Natural Makeup and Selfhood: Focusing on Beauty Tutorials**

When the keyword “ナチュラルメイク (*nachuraru meiku*, “natural makeup”)” is searched on YouTube, the video titles enlisted on the search results associate the word with other subtitles such as “毎日メイク (*mainichi meiku*, “daily makeup” or “everyday makeup”)” or “もともと美人風 (*motokara bijinfuu*, “Born-beautiful



style”).” Other videos feature specific themes related to occupations, such as 大人メイク (*otona meiku*: Grown-up makeup), 学生メイク (*gakusei meiku*, student makeup), 就活メイク (*shūkatsu meiku*, Job-hunting makeup), and オフィスメイク (*ofisu meiku*, office makeup). The narrative of the “daily,” or “everyday” makeup directly asserts to the marketing of lifestyle media that problematizes the present “ordinary,” “everyday” life (Raisborough 2011). Considering their purpose of creation, such videos provide step-by-step guides for consumers, encouraging them to self-improve their daily lives by transforming their bodies into their better selves. As McCabe et al.’s research subjects, the subtitles of the “everyday” suggests that one will feel confident, will be ready to start the day with their own practice of self-empowerment (2020). On the other hand, such individual self-enhancement is intersecting with the narrative of a collective self, that the empowered, presented self should be approved in one’s social occupation. The makeover not only helps individuals to boost their sense of individuality, but also reassures who will recognize, approve, and celebrate their individuality.

The top-viewed “natural makeup” videos do not often include “clickbait” images of drastic transformation of before-after photos on their thumbnails. However, the titles explicitly mention that they show the whole process from their bare faces, emphasizing the aspect of transformation (ゆきりんワールド 2022)<sup>12</sup>. Ostensible display of the before-after is not uncommon in makeover culture – however, what deserves attention is that the bare face to the made-over transition in “natural makeup”

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<sup>12</sup> “すっぴんから最新のメイク解説します！,” February 19, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJDQ3neEzcY>. Accessed June 15, 2022.

tutorial videos especially make this “natural” transformation publicly visible. Such a display could be explained by the comments of such videos, where the audience praise the creators being “real” and truthful to oneself (and the public). One video “【川口春奈のできるまで】メイクのしかた、スッピンから全部見せます！【お家で練習】 (川口春奈オフィシャルは一ちゃんねる 2020)<sup>13</sup>” features an actor, model, and channel owner Haruna Kawaguchi, showing her makeup routine with her hair and makeup stylist Atsushi Takatori. Interestingly, she does not do the makeover herself, but Takatori does – Kawaguchi’s role is to ask questions for tips and additional information for people who do not have similar facial features with her. Takatori answers Kawaguchi’s questions or talks directly to the camera to instruct the audience. The public highly appreciates the professional guidance (which is another central part of makeover culture), and the “authenticity” of the content. One viewer commented that he/she always wanted to see a professional applying makeup to the actress rather than the actress doing herself in this kind of videos (Ch Y). Kawaguchi also mentions in the video that she does not do her makeup herself very often, which suggests that taking a how-to-makeup video with her stylist is a performance truthful to her occupation as a celebrity, and the audience praises such choice. As a result, not only the finished makeup itself is “natural,” but also Kawaguchi’s “becoming,” a process of being naturally made over with a display of her “real” self, is also “natural (authentic)” putted in a central emphasis of judging the validity of the video (Raisborough 2011). Kawaguchi’s makeover with her stylist thus implicates an ironical intervention of social forces, demanding cultural labour on an individual

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kD\\_3mTCh\\_nA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kD_3mTCh_nA). Accessed June 14, 2022.

during the process of self-authentication.

Representative characteristics of “natural makeup” featured in the videos include the following: minimal use of colored products, choosing colors that look “natural” on one’s body, intensive skincare and contouring, subtle appliance or omission of foundations, and extension, rather than recreation, of one’s facial features. These features are marketed that the “natural makeup” allows individuals to successfully negotiate the collective self into their individuality. The style is not only socially appropriate but also self-satisfactory. In other words, the “natural makeup” featured in tutorial videos directly touches upon people’s desire to exercise individual agency, power, and control of their own bodies, but drags a collective self shaped by social norms and ideologies into exercising individual agency. What explains this complex intermingling relationship of the individual and collective self, is the discussion of “flaws (*kusumi*)” and “sense of imperfectness (*nukekan*)” prevalent in the Japanese natural makeup discourse. The word *Nukekan* (抜け感) could be directly translated as “a sense of something missing.” It describes a state that makeup is not perfectly and fully worn, but intentionally leaving some “flaws” uncovered. Natural makeup tutorials emphasize the “natural flaw (*shizen na kusumi*),” which means that one should not put too much effort trying to hide their facial “flaws,” but rather, it is desirable to subtly show them.

“The pores, or downy hair, or ‘oh, I forgot to pull out one eyebrow,’ or something like that, the ‘missing part?’ I think it’s cute. Maybe it’s the ‘*nukekan*?’ There are various insecurities and I have one myself, but I’m always careful not to hide them too much.”

(川口春奈オフィシャルはーちゃんねる 2020, 20:30-20:51)

As Kawaguchi commented on her video, the natural makeup seemingly offers women being able to choose what “flaws” they want to hide and the ones they do not want to. By this, they enhance their self-esteem and reconfirm what their “true” self is by identifying and deciding not to conceal their bodily insecurities. Putting the *nukekan* aesthetic into makeup is a journey of discovering and accepting such boundaries, forging the look of imperfectness.

In the video “【垢抜け】洒落顔になる13のメイクテク (2021),<sup>14</sup>” Yūko Sugamoto (stage name *Yūkосу*) associates natural-ness with *nukekan* (imperfectness) and *sharekan* (fashionable). The description of “fashionable” does not seem to match with the “natural” – however, her description of the makeup is highly focused on expressing the “natural feeling,” frequently using the word “*nachuraru*” and “*nukekan*.” Her tips include using “just a bit of foundation,” “only one color of an eyeshadow,” “just a bit of eyeliner,” “not curling eyelashes too much,” and “no blushers.” The process and the steps of applying cosmetics products are not simplified in any sense, but the tips instruct the audience how to carve out a “look” of imperfectness, which, according to her, is “fashionable.” At the first part of the video, Sugamoto describes the words *nukekan* and *sharekan* in her terms: Showing the sense of “I didn’t put much effort in it” for the “natural” part such as skin or eyes, and boost parts where you can show your character, such as eyebrows (2021 1:26). Although it is unclear in what criteria she divides the body parts, her description of leaving some of the “natural” parts and modifying the other parts where you can show the “character” both implies an expression of individuality, the “true” or

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3i9k-eUs9I>. Accessed June 16, 2022.

“authentic” self.

On the other hand, the natural makeup promises to empower and express the individual self by driving the public self in, considering the fact that the *nukekan* is a bodily aesthetic that is performed to be consumed and gazed. As much as tutorial videos of natural makeup emphasize individual uniqueness, self-expression and self-satisfaction, the same videos deliberately address that the makeup is also for external judgement and recognition. In describing of what could be achieved by applying certain cosmetic products in particular stages of makeup, gender ideologies, social norms, organizational roles and expectations intermingle into the “new ethical selves” that can “sit in” under the governance of neoliberalist personhood (Gill 2007; Raisborough 2011). Featuring the conventional how-to-guide media, tutorial videos put moral and emotional value on “becoming” and “being” the made-over self, and such values could be attained by being shown to others. For instance, revisiting Sugamoto’s video, the foundation should be minimally applied because it gives a woman an image that “she can afford (*yoyū ga aru jyosei*).” An eyeliner should also be applied minimally, because “it makes you look cute as the *nukekan* comes out (*nukekan ga dete kawaiiyone*) (ゆうこすモテちゃんねる 2021 3:55-12:00). Another video produced by Akari Yoshida, who also describes her theme of the video as “natural beauty makeup (ナチュラル美人メイク, *nachuraru bijin meiku*),” highlights a “sense of happiness (幸福感, *kōfukukan*) as a core characteristic of the style. What is noticeable is that the “happiness” she asserts is not the innate feelings of a person wearing a makeup, but a sense that others feel looking at a face wearing natural makeup (“These days, beautiful faces give a feeling of happiness... (YoshidaAkari

2022)<sup>15</sup>). Thus, the lines between the public self conforming to gender relations and social norms, and the individual self who exerts agency and power by free choice, are blurred and mediated through the embodied natural makeup. Rather, the notion of the “individual” are dissolved into reinforcement of hegemonic beauty ideals, especially through “tutorials” that instruct women to follow the guidelines of how to construct such natural-ness.

### **III. Being "Me" - The Private Self**

#### **1. Seeking Authenticity – Negotiating the Public and Private self**

The preceding chapter has expounded on the mediating role of makeup between women’s public selfhood and the external world. In this regard, makeup, as posited by Butler (1999) and Raisborough (2011), serves as a performative act for Japanese women to conform to external gazes, social norms, and expectations. The public self faces the challenge of fitting into the standards of normalcy, the “natural look” for women in specific occupations. The *midashinami* culture and discussions around “natural makeup” elucidates Japan’s strong sense of making up one’s appearance that fits or harmonizes with the larger organization, dissolving such ideologies within the conventional patriarchal structures. Feminist interpretations of makeup have often viewed it as an effective tool for subjugating women into their traditional roles as being gazed and consumed, by enforcing repeated performance of certain looks to reproduce and maintain gender hierarchies (Butler 1999).

However, such discussions that only categorize makeup as empowering or

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3aw-aPgfZY0>. Accessed June 17, 2022.

disempowering, overlook the fact that makeup is also imbued with strong private narratives. Park and Hong (2019) on (trans)national, gender, and racial identities in Korean skin whitening culture, emphasizes the importance of considering the intersectionality of makeup; As globalization and technological advancement enabled consumers to acquire access to countless styles, products and techniques from around the globe, the younger generation's perceptions around grooming, caring and "making up" one's appearances intersect with their diversifying gender, social, and cultural identities. While there is a "public self" that must satisfy others, there is a significant portion of navigating the "private self." This entails engaging in the overall process of procuring and applying cosmetic products, experiencing the aesthetic and sensual dimension of these products, and finally, reproducing her own ideas of makeup, utilizing her transformed face as a medium. The latter is particularly significant, as it indicates that applying makeup is a deeply personal process that involves a complex interplay between the actor's self-image and external factors.

By analyzing the private narratives through the voices of young Japanese women themselves, this chapter discusses how makeup can be a tool for exploring the "self" in their most private spaces. Through the lens of Japanese skincare culture, the chapter aims to highlight the significance of private worldviews affecting Japanese young women's thoughts on makeup, and how such process is strongly connected to acceptance and exploration of selfhood.

### **1.1 Five Keywords Regarding Makeup**

The interviewees were asked to elaborate on five keywords that first come up to their mind when thinking about the term "makeup (メイク)." Table 2 presented

below elaborates the result, along with the respondents' abbreviated individual profile (see appendix 1 for further reference).

**Table 2. Five keywords that first come up to your mind when thinking of a term "makeup"**

| Respondent Index | Individual Profile |                        |  | Keywords  |
|------------------|--------------------|------------------------|--|---|
|                  | Age                | Affiliation            | Cultural background  |   |
| <b>A</b>         | Early 20s          | Student                | Born and raised in Japan   | ちゃんとする<br>(to do it properly or neatly)<br>武装 (armament, equipment)<br>男性受け (appealing to men)<br>強くなる (getting stronger)<br>整える (to tidy up, to groom) |
| <b>B</b>         | Early 20s          | Student                | Born and raised in Japan, studying experience in Canada  | 美肌 (beautiful skin)<br>K-POP アイドル (K-POP idols)<br>気合を入れる<br>(to motivate, get psyched)<br>可愛い (to be cute, <i>kawaii</i> )<br>強さ (power)               |
| <b>C</b>         | 27                 | Public college teacher | Half German and half Japanese. Born in Japan, lived in both countries back and forth                                 | Clown<br>Beauty<br>Gendered<br>Social norms<br>めんどくさい (tedious)   |
| <b>D</b>         | 25                 | Student, journalist    | Half American and half Japanese. Born in the U.S., came to Japan from 16, received education in international school | ハーフ顔メイク<br>("half-blood" makeup)<br>Clean girl makeup<br>Cultural appropriation<br>Overpriced<br>Micro-trends   |
| <b>E</b>         | 25                 | Office worker          | Born and raised in Japan, received education in international school   | 自分をよりよく見せる方法<br>(a way to show your better self)<br>大変 (hard)<br>めんどくさい (tedious)   |



|          |    |               |   |   |
|----------|----|---------------|---|---|
|          |    |               |   | マナー・身だしなみ<br>(manner, grooming)<br>華やか (being fancy or flashy)  |
| <b>F</b> | 24 | Student       | Born in Japan, raised and educated in the U.S., resided in both countries back and forth    | 手間 (effort)<br>落とすのが大変<br>(hard to wash it off)<br>未だにやり方がよくわかってない<br>(still not sure how to do it)<br>よれる (get distorted)<br>似合うものがわからない<br>(not sure what suits me) |
| <b>G</b> | 27 | Office worker | Born in Japan, multiple experiences living outside Japan (Korea, U.S., Canada, and Hungary) | 可愛くなる (being cute)<br>おしゃれ (being fashionable)<br>コスメ (cosmetics)<br>ファンデーション (foundation)<br>ナチュラル (natural)   |
| <b>H</b> | 24 | Student       | Born and raised in Japan, currently studying in Korea as a graduate student                 | ナチュラルメイク (natural makeup)<br>韓国コスメ (Korean cosmetics)<br>セルフラブ (Self-love)<br>Self-acceptance<br>楽しいもの (Something fun)  |

The keywords presented in Table 2 explains how the public and private selves are intersecting in the respondents' individual perception towards makeup, in relation to their social occupations and cultural backgrounds.

Among all interviewees, a common theme is that using makeup improves their appearance and enhancing their appeal to others, mentioning the word such as “appealing to men (*dansei uke*),” “being cute (*kawaii*),” and “being fancy (*oshare*, *kirei*).” Another similarity includes the effortful nature of applying makeup, indicating that the process can be time-consuming and demanding activity. Words such as “tedious (*mendokusai*)” and “hard (*taihen*),” are frequently chosen in one of

their keywords. Ideas of grooming or properly preparing one's appearances, which are discussed in the previous chapter, are indicated on words such as "grooming (*midashinami*), "to tidy up (*totoonoeru*)," or "manner (*mana-*)." Connecting to expressions of negative emotions that wearing makeup is "tedious" or "hard," the keywords suggest that makeup can be seen as an expression of women's public selfhoods, using makeup to appear more appealing or conforming to societal standards. On the other hand, others mentioned using makeup to feel more powerful or confident, suggesting that makeup can also be empowering and transformative. Words such as "armament (*busō*)," "power (*tsuyosa*)," "being stronger (*tsuyoku naru*)," "self-love" and "self-acceptance," addresses that makeup can also be used to enhance and empower themselves.

However, individual responses reveal that the concept of makeup is, in fact, strongly correlated with the respondents' personal narratives. Makeup is a tedious and demanding obligation on one hand, and a weapon that empowers and strengthens oneself on the other hand. The keywords "cute" and "fancy" are highly subjective standards for assessing physical appearances, making it difficult to distinguish whether these are positive or negative expressions towards makeup. Furthermore, while makeup still exists as a social norm, the respondents also express a tendency to explore their personal identity, combining with their own experiences, individual hobbies, and interests. For instance, respondent A accepts the concept of makeup as means to express her public self, which is implicated in words such as "to do it properly or neatly," "appealing to men," "to tidy up, to groom." In contrast, she also implies that makeup can be used to become stronger, through expressions such as "armament" or "getting stronger," indicating that her perception towards makeup is

not simply constrained by social norms. Respondents E and F's responses reveal their constant struggle negotiating their private and public self. As seen in the expression "a way to show your better self," the theme of makeup as self-development is prominent; however, such words are also intertwined with the involvement of the public self, as shown in the phrase "to show." Respondent F's answer expresses further ambivalence. Rather than judging makeup as either positive or negative, she discloses her uncertainty in utilizing makeup for self-expression through phrases such as "still not sure how to do it" and "not sure what suits me."

To sum up, the five keywords question was asked to grasp the range of perceptions and attitudes towards makeup among young Japanese women. According to the result, while some respondents (such as respondents C and D) were relatively clear on their critical stance, significant others expressed ambiguity. Respondents demonstrated a varied range of attitudes: Makeup can be burdensome and tedious but also can be fun and empowering.

## **1.2 Appropriating the Self**

Within the context of contemporary society, the act of applying makeup serves as a means of self-appropriation. Women, in particular, often utilize cosmetics to fashion and present various iterations of their identities. It is found that makeup operates as a tool for women to accept, negotiate, appropriate, and express their own selves in ways that are personal and meaningful to them. In addition, to attach such personal meanings, women continuously negotiate multiple – often conflicting – identities.

Some examples of such appropriation were internal conflicts between their pre-university, student identities and the "*shūkatsu* face," their new identities as

adults. As the previous sections discussed, the “tediousness” or “hardship” of wearing makeup has been frequently associated with adulthood, especially when women engage in job-hunting or working in companies with *midashinami* rules. Such confusion occurred based on a sudden transition that most of the respondents, like other average Japanese female youth, have been banned from wearing makeup until high school, until they experience a sudden release and peer pressure to wear a uniform, “modest” degree of makeup once they enter university.

Yet, women also described their process of negotiating norms, adapting their selfhoods with numerous border-crossing identities and attempting to take the initiative to their bodily adornment, represented by the response made by B.

B: I’m the total opposite. Orange or soft colors don’t suit me. When I looked up job-hunting makeup (*shūkatsu meiku*), I found out that everyone had to wear the same traditional-style makeup at first, and I thought, “The colors don’t look good on me, is this what I am expected to be?” So, when I had that struggle, I couldn’t be myself. But gradually, I started to think that even if it’s part of “job-hunting makeup,” I may look cute with some of the colors if I just try them on. Then I felt like I was getting closer to finding the colors that suit me.

Respondents C and D, who clarified their political stance as a feminist, also expressed frustration of having internal conflicts when wearing makeup. On one hand, they were aware with the “toxicity” of makeup emphasized by Western feminist ideas, but also, they desire “healthy, youthful skin” or want to “care” for herself by wearing makeup on the other hand.

C: This is where I’m in conflict between, like the Western concept of being “natural” and it’s “normal” to get wrinkles and age spots, it shows how you lived your life

and it's nothing to be ashamed of. But also for me, coming from those two cultures, yest, I understand I want to show that I lived a life that I loved (...) but also being like, I want to not look too old, or I want to have a healthy skin even when I get older (...) I think there's value in having a healthy skin and to maintain and to continue that even when I grow older. And apparently you have to start young, you have to start now.

D, who has been in leadership in Voice Up Sophia University, shared similar criticisms and internal crises as C. Her transnational identities as being half Western and half Asian, and her identity as a Japanese student and a feminist influenced by Western scholarships, had created insecurities and uncertainties around the discussion of makeup. As a product of her appropriation of multiple identities, she utilizes makeup to express her feminist manifestation, by wearing makeup when she goes to school campus to resist the patriarchal environment in her university.

D: Especially, since coming to told that *Tōdai* (abbreviation of Tokyo University) is so misogynistic, on that sometimes as an active rebellion, I will wear a lot of makeups, so that whenever I go to the library to study, it's mostly men in Komaba in the library, so many men, and I usually study on the second floor where there's a bunch of roundtables, and there's six roundtables and usually it's just me and then five other guys. And in that environment, I already feel Japanese people stare at me all the time because I'm tall and I'm white, so I know that people notice me, and I really want to counter this supposed idea... showing that women can be smart and also look pretty.

A lot of the *Tōdai* girls that I speak to, they told me there's this weird pressure

where if you put too much effort into the way you look, people assume that you're not very smart or that you don't study a lot. I think there's that weird stereotype and I think as a form of rebellion against that, I will dress up just to go to the library to be, "look at me, I can look good and also be smart and I can be in the same space as these men."

How women embrace the norms and "standard looks" of makeup, appropriate their "self" and express them into a different form, hints that makeup generates – produces – new possibilities (McCabe, de Waal Malefyt, and Fabri 2020; 박소정 2022). As much as the prevalent neoliberalist ideals of self-betterment, self-surveillance, individual responsibility and the micro-trends of consumerist society, makeup functions as a bridge connecting such norms with the women's private, inner desires of beauty, generating a new pathway of navigating "selfhood" that does not completely endorse into one side.

Within the broader context of appropriating the self through makeup practices, it is crucial to examine the interplay of individual desires and generational factors, particularly when considering the contrasting perspectives between different age groups of Japanese women. Notably, women in their current 20s perceive makeup as a more individualized and personal matter compared to their previous generation, leading them to actively engage in the appropriation of their selfhoods through careful selection and expression of cosmetics.

Although this research does not primarily focus on the comparative study between women in their 20s and older generations, many respondents mentioned the generational differences. The older generation of Japanese women, as discussed in

previous discussions, embraces makeup as a means of appropriating their selfhood within established societal norms. For these women, makeup is seen as an essential aspect of their daily grooming routine, comparable in significance to wearing clothes. It is perceived as a requirement to present oneself properly in public, adhering to conventional beauty ideas.

In contrast, the younger generation represented by the respondents, reveals a departure from the perspectives of their older counterparts. They express a relatively lower pressure to wear makeup and emphasize their freedom to go outside without any makeup on. This shift in attitude reflects a growing desire among younger women to assert their individuality and authenticity in the realm of makeup culture.

D: My mother, yes, she cannot go outside without wearing makeup. She has to do a full phase before going outside. But it's interesting because when I compare myself to her, I can go outside without makeup, whereas she can't even if it's going to the vending machine (...) my mom, the product that she uses, she doesn't really care what the product is, she just uses the cheapest thing and she doesn't really look up tutorials and how to look more beautiful or anything, she'll just buy the cheapest thing cause she has to use that every single day. Whereas for me, I feel different where I have to use good quality, expensive products if I'm going to do my makeup. I have to really invest (...)

E: My mom, really, she doesn't care about what product she is using, as long as they're cheap. She picks the ones that she can use the longest. She doesn't yearn for famous brands, but the ones that she can use the longest with the cheapest price. Even when she is just going out to walk our dog, she wears makeup on, so I think

there's a strong feeling for her that wearing makeup is a must. (...) I asked why, and she said, "Because I would look ugly without it." She worries that people would feel uncomfortable looking at her. (...) I'm totally okay with not wearing makeup when I go to places nearby. I don't feel shameful, and I don't think that people care about my face that much.

The interview data reveals that the younger generation approaches makeup as a tool for self-enhancement on their choice, rather than feeling pressured from the outside. They prioritize personal preferences and carefully choose cosmetics that match their unique features, such as considering their skin color and type. Compared to their mothers, whose motives for consuming and wearing makeup primarily depending on the gazes of others, the respondents expressed that makeup is more like self-care and expression of their beauty standards. This selective approach demonstrates their inclination towards high-quality cosmetics that align with their individuality, even if they come at a higher cost.

Understanding these generational differences emphasize the autonomy of younger Japanese women in shaping their beauty standards. The contrasting perspective of the older and younger generations reflect broader societal changes, including shifting notions of femininity, increased emphasis on individuality, and the influence of global beauty trends. The subsequent subchapters will further elaborate such shifting ideas of beauty trends and makeup, in relation to the respondents' diversifying self-identities crossing multiple borders.

### **1.3 Transnational Identities**

It was discovered that the dynamism in the respondents' answers have a strong relationship with the respondents' (trans)national identities; in other words,



how women personally identify themselves based on their cultural background, educational environment, their national and ethnical identity, and their own border-crossing experiences that all have shaped their private worldviews. In fact, many respondents mentioned the “foreign influences” that changed not only the Japanese beauty industry, but also their attitudes towards makeup. Respondent B, for instance, described her experience studying in Canada as below:

B: Most of the Japanese and Korean people wore a lot of makeup, but for example, Canadians didn’t really care about their body hair and still seemed to be happy about it, so I started to not worry about it (body hair) too much as well.

Interviewer: Did your experience change your makeup style as well?

B: Even after I came back to Japan, I have a lot of days that I go out with just the bb cream on. The number of days that I put on full makeup decreased a lot.

I think for sure, your style really depends on the environment around you. When I got to meet people of various nationalities, I felt that the makeup styles of Koreans and Japanese people were much different from those of Canadians or Western countries. Almost only Japanese and Koreans around me put on makeup every day, and for example, a lot of people from South America only put on makeup on special occasions like hanging out in the city, so I also stopped putting on makeup.

Respondent E, who is born and raised in Japan but educated in an international school from her third year in elementary school, agreed that her environment have also influenced her lesser sense of “pressure” to wear makeup.

Interviewer: Have you ever thought that growing up in an environment full of friends from various cultural backgrounds influenced how you think of makeup

and your style?

E: A global influence, right. I think, usually, Japanese high school girls put on makeup since they were pretty young, but many of the students in my school didn't put on makeup very much at school, so even after I turned 18 or 20, I didn't feel much pressure to put on makeup, so I went to school without makeup until the second half of college.

I think foreign influences made Japanese people think differently about makeup. For example, in the past, many people would never be able to go out without putting a double-eyelid tape on, but now I think people don't wear makeup as much as before. The fashions or freckles that I mentioned earlier are also foreign influences, because people are starting to think that they look cuter with the spot patch<sup>16</sup> on. Well, I guess we're in an era where we're able to see the characteristics of other countries' faces and things that used to be considered shortcomings.

Respondent D, who is half Japanese and half American, frequently mentioned her experiences as a *hafu* in Japan. Her transnational identity of possessing both Asian and Caucasian facial features constantly intersected with her experiences around appearances and makeup, as also described in her five keywords (see Table 2). For instance, she realized that her eye shape is more "Asian" so she could not follow most of the beauty tutorials by Western creators; On the other hand, the comments she received as being white skinned than the average Japanese influenced her habit of applying whitening sunscreens.

D: It's like when you put me next to a white person, I look Asian, and then when

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<sup>16</sup> Patches that heal acne or hide freckles and spots on one's skin.

you put me next to a Japanese person, I look white. (...)

I was raised by western beauty influencers, and I think now, more or less, I've leaned towards Japanese, Asian makeup side on Tiktok, because I realized my eye shape is more Asian than Caucasian. (...) so I can't really follow western tutorials for eyeliners, for example. It's just doesn't make any sense for me.

(...) Another one, interestingly, I use sunscreen that's whitening. I don't know why, I'm already white, I'm already pale. And yet, for some reason, I still feel comfortable using whitening sunscreen. It is a part of me, I think. When I was young to be half Japanese, a lot of Japanese people will come up to me and be like, "Oh, your skin is so pale, your skin is so white!" and I grew up being told that that's beautiful and that's a good part of me, and I think I don't want to lose that. I feel if I lose my paleness, my whiteness, I will start to be unattractive, I will start to be unvaluable.

Compared to other respondents who are born and raised in Japan or had experiences of residing in foreign countries, there was a stronger tendency for D to make clearer distinctions between the "Japanese" and "Western" culture. Similarly, respondent C, half-Japanese and half-German, reminded the interviewer and herself of the difference of "Japanese" and "Western" culture by introducing a webpage published by Shiseido at the beginning of the interview.

C: It's an article on the official Japanese Shiseido website, it was written in Japanese, and the audience it was targeting was kids, basically explaining to kids about what is "*Keshō*."<sup>17</sup> The Japanese term for makeup in a sense. But also, that's

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<sup>17</sup> *Keshō*, (化粧) is another Japanese term to describe "makeup" in English, with more nuances of traditional Japanese style than the Katakana term *meiku*. The two terms are used interchangeably in different contexts.

not that easy, simple. Because in Japanese, we also use “*meiku*,” right? And what I gained from that article is that they had the distinction between those two. “*Meiku*” was really much like the colors you put on your face, like the foundation, lipstick and eyeshadow. And then the “*keshō*” is like, I would say it included the English terms of skincare and grooming AND makeup. (...)

It is worth noting that she uses the term “Japanese” or “Japan” in high frequency in her response, as if to highlight the strongly “Japanese” aspect of makeup when she defines the term, and to distance herself from it. Notably, her transnational identity as *hafu* is only reinforcing cultural distinction between her Asian and Western identities. Like D, C also struggles to identify herself to both Asian and Western communities, mentioning that she feels “German in Japan but Japanese in Germany.” Especially, C, who has expressed sourness of highly gendered aspects in Japanese makeup culture, ironically discovered her interest in skincare products from Korean cosmetics – from the Other that she does not have to struggle in her identity crisis. The affordability and intimate marketing of Korean skincare products made it easier for her to put down the guard of uneasiness around Japanese and Western beauty culture. While she is aware that following the standard steps of skincare and consuming cosmetics may appear to conform to societal norms, she actively negotiates such thought with her innate desire to maintain a healthy skin.

C: I feel like Japanese skincare, it’s very much still, for the rich and people who can spend a lot of time and money on skincare. I feel like skincare in Japan can be very expensive and Korean skincare is very accessible for everyone. When I visited Korea with my friends and listening to them who were very interested in Korean cosmetics, I felt like “oh okay, this is interesting, I’ve never heard of this, it is very

cheap and it's very easy to get, you can do it at home by yourself and I don't have to spend so much on those products." And the second motivation is like, I watched a lot of K-Dramas, and there are product placements in every episode, right? It's very obvious, and it's presented in those dramas with descriptions of how important skincare is in Korean culture. So, I feel being in Japan then having these influences of consuming Korean media, it is where it came from that I got interested in skincare.

Therefore, the respondents' dynamism in makeup preferences and attitudes are significantly affected by their (trans)national self-identity, and their personal perception of ethnical and racial differences based on their own experiences. The "foreign influence" stated by respondents B and E, or the *hafu* identity of respondents C and D, shows that makeup touches upon one of their most private parts of their worldviews. The women's own transnational experiences and personal emotions are found to be accumulated in shaping how they think of makeup. While recognizing the conventional structure and social pressures of women's makeup, the respondents were also appropriating, debating, and arranging ideas from the outer world with their personal ideas regarding beauty.

#### **1.4 Self-Authentication Through Media**

Inquiring to the ways in which Japanese women engage with makeup, it is necessary to turn the attention to the fundamental question of how these women negotiate and ultimately discover their private selves. Specifically, if makeup can be a vehicle for the expression of the women's innermost identities, how makeup works as self-authentication acts –in other words, the relationship between their search of the authentic self and their interpretation of themselves– should be further explored.

Theories of self-authenticity and authentication establish that what is perceived as the “original” me is always discovered from realizing the difference between the original and presented “me.” According to Peterson (2005), self-authenticity is not an innately attributed, but always subjective: That is, authenticity is “socially constructed,” and can only be “gained by establishing one’s personal presentation of self.” Therefore, authentication requires “authenticity work,” which is a constant “quest” or “effort” to construct one’s authenticity in comparison with others (2005, 1086). Such authenticity work includes what Goffman addresses as “remaining true to the presentation of self one claims (1959),” specifically, living a life that one perceives to be “truthful” to their “authentic self” that they present, consists as a crucial part of self-authentication.

In this regard, makeup is one of “self-authenticating acts,” as women put their bodies as subjects alongside others, with makeup as a medium expressing their own ideas of what the “right look” is on them, while also leaving room for change and negotiation from outer beauty norms. For women, whose bodies are especially commodified and fragmented on mainstream media, the negotiation of “inner and outer beauty,” which McCabe et al. also puts as the private and public self, creates a sense of wholeness or completeness, which offers them “identity benefits” to settle down their identities by themselves (McCabe, de Waal Malefyt, and Fabri 2020).

The findings from the interview data also suggest that the respondents also utilize makeup as a tool of self-authentication, creating and presenting an impression that are consistent with their self-concept. While being aware of the transformative effect of makeup, they seek to achieve a sense of authenticity and coordinate their makeup practices aligning with their diverse self-identities.

As discussed in the previous chapter on makeup tutorials, there are aspects of recent new media contents pursuing individual uniqueness or imperfect looks, while also commodifying such ideas to a trendy aesthetic that still reproduce conventional ideas of makeup as beauty labor. In order to investigate the extent to which women, as main consumers, have agency in consuming such media, respondents were asked about the types of media content they mainly use and the reasons for choosing such contents or platforms. As a result, the main criteria for the selection of media to learn makeup, were found as following: whether it was the closest to their current appearance, whether the contents align with their makeup goals (what they want to achieve through by wearing makeup), and whether they could empathize with the contents. Based on these criteria, the respondents actively described what contents of particular media types were suitable or unsuitable for them.

Among the options given, respondents chose option A the most as a media type that they mainly refer to when they seek information about makeup skills, followed by option B and E. When asked to elaborate more specifically, some disclosed that they prefer other new media platform such as Instagram or Tiktok over YouTube, depending on how the contents are designed, organized and presented. For instance, respondent D, who previously described that the white-dominated beauty tutorials on YouTube did not suit her appearance as a *hafu*, added to her reasoning to shift her attention to Tiktok that the allocation of contents in the videos on YouTube did not match her style of consuming beauty tutorials.

D: I don't really watch YouTube for makeup anymore, it's more just like for other things, I think now it would be Tiktok. Because all the YouTube videos that I used

to watch was like, I don't care about what you ate for breakfast, please just tell me how to do this, that's only what I want to know, and I end up having to watch, like, a ten-minute video whereas on Tiktok, I could just watch one-minute maximum. To the point, it's comprehensive and it's a lot easier to engage with.

Respondent E, on the other hand, elaborated why she exclusively prefers YouTube than other new media platforms or fashion magazines.

E: Basically, I may not have checked anything other than YouTube, because I don't have Tiktok, and I don't buy magazines or learned anything about makeup from books, so the easiest way to watch someone wearing makeup are videos distributed by YouTube.

Interviewer: Do you have specific reasons why you chose YouTube, or why you didn't choose other platforms?

E: Because YouTube is free, while for magazines, you must buy it. Of course, I can read it for free at the stand, but if I want to read it carefully, I have to buy it, so it's a bit troublesome. And I don't need that much information. Because magazines contain not only about makeup but also a lot of information, like fashion. If you're not interested in fashion, it's troublesome to just look for the parts you need. (...) It's easy to watch videos that are only related to my interest.

Respondents F and H discussed their preference of using Instagram over YouTube, describing how the presentation of beauty contents are different between the two platforms.

F: I don't really use YouTube or fashion magazines as reference, because the faces shown on such videos or articles are completely different from mine. On the



contrary, I refer to the makeup technique on Instagram because few people show their whole face, they usually just show their eyes or just the lips, so only the part of their faces. (...)

Of course, if you think the final product of makeup itself is cute, you might want to try it out even if the whole face is shown on the contents, but for me, I can't imagine how it looks on me. If the original face base is a little different, I don't think it will look as good as this person, because my face is not the same.

H: Probably because, for Instagram feeds, you can see the person's style on one view, right? Their clothes and lifestyle as well. So, the makeup inside of it, I want to refer to the makeup as a part of that whole person.

In summary, the younger generation who have access to a wider variety of media types than their previous generations, engage in an active process of selecting contents, creators, and platforms that align with their personal preferences. To establish standards for their selection, such action requires women to first comprehend their own appearance, aesthetic, and purpose of makeup; in other words, an understanding of their own "self." Women reflect and redefine their sense of self by seeking out new makeup information from media sources that resonate with their own identity, underscoring the significance of self-awareness in setting criteria for media selection.

The role of media in the process of women's self-authentication through its use has become increasingly important in the post-pandemic era, with the rise of remote activities and the "studio effect" of Zoom's features, such as filters that changes skin tones, eyebrow drawing, and lipstick application. This is highlighted by the interview questions about whether to use these features. When asked if they

wear makeup on non-confrontational social activities, the respondents elaborated diverse answers: One of them answered that she still wears full makeup (respondent A), while some others answered that they wear significantly lighter makeup (respondent B, D, F, G) or no makeup (respondent C, E, H). While respondents had different degrees of makeup application post-corona, when asked whether they are aware or already utilizing the studio effect function, all 8 respondents answered that they do not use the feature. While this tendency can be seen as a natural result of the emergence of masks as a material barrier, which allowed women less pressured to wear a full-face makeup that they do not always have to show to the public; However, to take a step further, there is a need for attention considering why these women do not use the studio feature to conveniently enhance their appearance during remote activities.

Interviewer: Recently, there have been a lot of non-face-to-face classes and meetings because of COVID-19. Do you often wear makeup during such non-confrontational social activities? Also, are you aware that there is a function in the program Zoom, called studio effect, that you can draw your eyebrows or change the color of your lips, or use filters to brighten up your skin tone?

A: I do wear makeup in my room, too. Just to be mentally prepared to study from now on... To make me feel like I'm going to study. I don't use the studio effect function.

B: I stay in my comfortable state during zoom sessions (laughs), but at least I draw my eyebrows myself. There are important occasions that I have to speak in class, that's when I draw them.

C: I don't use it (the studio effect) because it's obvious, you can tell that it's a filter,

and that makes me uncomfortable. I only wear lipstick, lip tint, or a colored ChapStick or something just so that I have some color to my face, mostly because I'm a teacher and I do a lot of online lessons, and I feel if the teacher looks dead, then it kind of leaves an impression on my students.

E: In my company, remote meetings are increasing quite a bit, but in such cases, my company is okay with camera off, so I'm participating completely without makeup. So, when I don't have to show my face, I basically participate with my bare face. Even when I have to show my face, I don't use the filter or the studio effects, in that case, I would apply makeup on my own.

Women have expressed discomfort in using the studio effect features and even considered them fake. If only to assume that makeup is a performance only for external presentation and a symbol of the public self, the "studio effect" would be one of the most convenient tools for women to significantly retrench their time and resources to apply makeup, while maintaining the standard of *midashinami*. However, as stated from the answers, they would rather apply a toned-down degree of makeup by themselves in occasions that they have to. Especially highlighted in respondent A's answer, makeup is a material representation of a changing environment and expression of their identities as students, office workers and teachers – a semiotic that they are about to change the atmosphere to start studying, working or engaging in conversations. It can be argued, therefore, that applying makeup physically to her face, using her chosen cosmetics and colors, and expressing her "self," is the essence of makeup and her self-expression. And such ideas, although mixed with the anxiety of showing or not showing their faces in remote social interactions, are internal as much as external.

## 1.5 Experimenting Materials, Exploring Selves

By applying the information they have acquired from various mediums, women aim to express the image of their subjectively discovered, reflected, and redefined “self” through makeup. What they seek to achieve is to create a look of the “self” that they perceive as right, appropriate, authentic or truthful for their needs. As makeup allows women to gain “identity benefits,” women constantly explore new tools, colors, and techniques to advance their skills, a concept referred to as “experimentation” in McCabe et al (2020). Challenging to new makeup products with different materiality (colors, scents, textures, ingredients, etc.) that they have not tried before, is also getting out of a “safe zone” of self-imagery. As a result, as authenticity work, the “quest” of exploring a world of makeup is also a creative process of navigating the “self”: whether it is discovering a new realm or renewing their sense of security of their old territory.

The respondents were also actively engaging in searching of cosmetic products and looks, continuously updating the information of what expresses themselves best. Respondent A and B, when asked if they think their usual makeup express themselves, answered specific colors, products, and other material features that “suit” them. Respondent A stated that the makeup styles that “suits her (*jibun ni niau*)” and “truthful to her (*jibun rashii*)” are different, but she enjoys wearing them for her own enjoyment rather than external views.

A: I think orange color looks good on me. “Orange makeup” expresses my skin color best, and my eye bags are big, so I try to express that with makeup. I wear color contact lenses about three days a week, but I don’t think they are expressing myself. It feels quite fake... because my impression changes quite a lot with them

(the lens), after all.

B: Well, I think I settled on what expresses myself best about five years after I entered university. I received a personal color diagnosis, and I'm also the type of person who doesn't wear contact lenses. I had a lot of thoughts like "I don't dye my hair and I don't wear contact lenses. Can I live with that?" But after I got comfortable with myself, it is fun to choose the mascara I want to wear, use the color I want to use, choose the look I want to make, and I'm enjoying it. I'm having fun thinking if this is "truthful to me (*jibun rashii*)" or "suits me (*jibun ni niau no*)," and I try to express that. I think that my makeup expresses myself.

A: Oh, makeup that suits me and makeup that is truthful to me... I think they are different. I get negative feedback when I put pink around my eyes, but I apply it anyways because it's fun. I think girls wearing that color are cute. It doesn't look good on me, after all, but it's fun to use them, so I sometimes wear pink.

B: Even when I wear flashy (*hade na*) makeup, I'm aware that certain things don't suit me, for example, I'm the type who looks good with cool-tone colors. So when I want to have an atmosphere like a cute orange feeling like A, I can still enjoy it by changing the color of my base makeup.

The distinction between two ideas that respondents A and B are making, a makeup that "suits me (*jibun ni niau no*)" and makeup that is "truthful to me (*jibun rashii*)" is intriguing. Often, women incorporated makeup into self-authentication by delicately choosing the materials matching with the materiality of their bodies, such as the tone of foundations that are closest to their "original" skin color (makeup that suits them).

On the other hand, there is also a side of emotional contentment, which falls

in a category of makeup that feels “truthful” to them. Their self-authentication process includes steps to channel the “mood” or “atmosphere” surrounding them, with makeup as a medium to connect their bodies with the surroundings. Such transformations happen by changing their own emotions, their private selves. In other words, not only women are channeled to change their makeup compliant to the time and place (TPO) around them, but women themselves also have agency on making transformations on the “mood” at a specific space, at a specific moment. For instance, makeup is an emotion-booster for some respondents, such as A, who wears makeup “to be mentally prepared to study” before class, who frequently expressed her thoughts on makeup in terms of self-esteem or self-enhancement. For others, makeup is what they only do “when they feel like it,” and having the “mood” or “feeling” to wear makeup is their primary motivation to initiate the activity.

H: It's my mood rather than the situation. For example, I watched this movie last night, so I want to put on makeup that looks like the main character. Or, I don't feel very good today, so I'll make me feel better with makeup.

To conclude, At the same time that these women experience significant transition in their identity, they also confront new levels of consumption, aesthetics, and norms of makeup. By appropriation, authentication, and exploration, women undergo a process of “settling down” the turbulent, diverse identities that they have to confront or let go, such as adulthood represented through *midashinami* rules, internal clashes of their transnational identities, encountering a new environment of remote work, and adapting themselves to new mediums, cosmetics, styles and techniques. Settling down to the “makeup” that they feel “like herself,” thus, also entails a process of “becoming” a “being” of herself that she feels comfortable with.

## 2 Skincare, Beautiful Skin (*bihada*) and the Self

### 2.1 Skincare and better self – A Neoliberalist Discourse of Skincare Marketing and Consumption

The pursuit of beautiful skin, or “*bihada*,” has been an integral aspect of Japanese beauty culture for centuries. In recent years, the emphasis on skincare has been only intensified, with a growing number of products, treatments, and rituals promising to enhance not only one’s appearance but also one’s sense of self. As established in the discussion of the postfeminist analysis of natural makeup and Raisborough’s (2011) discussion of lifestyle media, the discourse of adorning one’s appearance, its marketing and consumption, are deeply entangled with neoliberalist ideologies, impacting on women’s perceptions towards the “self,” or the “better self” that they can be by adornments. This subchapter further investigates the blurred boundaries between skincare and makeup, and the extent to which skincare is perceived to achieve a natural. It addresses the public and private selves in the discourse of skincare and the implication of such a discourse for individuals’ self-expression and identity formation. By analyzing the intersectional discourse of skincare, looking selfhood through the lens of Japanese skincare will shed light on the complex junctions between beauty culture and self-identity for contemporary Japanese women.

A website “キッズのためのキレイクラブ (A Kids’ Club for being Beautiful)” published by one of Japan’s representative cosmetics companies Shiseido, intriguingly distinguishes concepts of “makeup (メイク),” “skincare (スキンケア)” and

“*keshō*.<sup>18</sup>”

“でも、化粧品を使うことをお化粧というとしたら、  
化粧水乳液、クリームなどを使う肌のお手入れもお化粧。  
これを「スキンケア」と呼んでいます。  
「スキンケア」とは、肌をいたわる、お手入れをするという意味です。  
ということは、洗顔フォームや化粧石で顔を洗うこともお化粧のひとつ。  
さらに、シャンプーやリンスを使って髪かみを洗ったり、髪型かみがたをととのえることも、お化粧仲間に入りますね。  
からだにある毛は髪かみの毛のほかにもあって、  
ひげをそったり、ひげをのばして形をととのえたりするのは、ひげのお化粧です。  
香水やお香で、よい香をまとうのもお化粧けしょう、反対にからだの悪いにおいを消すのもお化粧。  
毎日の生活の中で、お風呂に入り、歯をみがき、つめを切り、髪かみを切っていますね。これらも広くお化粧ととらえるなら、みんな毎日お化粧しているといってもよいかもしれません。  
生まれた赤ちゃんは、すぐにお風呂に入れられてからだをキレイに洗ってもらいます。また人が死んだときもからだをキレイに洗ったあとに「死化粧」というメイクをします。  
人の一生は、お化粧にはじまりお化粧に終わるのです。

However, if we consider using cosmetics as *okeshō*,<sup>19</sup> then putting effort to your skin, such as using toner, lotion, and cream, is also a part of *okeshō*.

This is called “skincare.”

“Skincare” means taking care of your skin. So, washing your face with facial cleanser or using a facial puff, is also one form of *okeshō*.

Furthermore, washing your hair with a shampoo and conditioner and styling it with

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<sup>18</sup> Further Information about the website and the term *okeshō* is previously elaborated on page 56, in respondent C’s interview.

<sup>19</sup> In this context, an honorific prefix “o” is used in front of “*keshō*.” As the website elaborates, an overall practice of grooming and making up one’s appearance is caring for oneself with respect and honor.



a comb or brush, can also be considered as part of *okeshō*.

In addition to the hair on our heads, we also have hair on our face,

So shaving or styling our beard is also a type of makeup.

Wearing a perfume or incense to have a pleasant body odor is also a type of *okeshō*.

In our daily lives, we take a bath, brush our teeth, cut our nails, and trim our hair.

If we broadly consider all of these as *okeshō*, we could say that everyone applies *okeshō* every day.

When a baby is born, they are immediately washed to keep their body clean.

And when someone dies, their body is cleaned, and then makeup, called “*shinikeshō*,” is applied.

In this way, a person’s life begins and ends with *okeshō*.

(Shiseido, 「お化粧のおはなし」<sup>20</sup>)

How Shiseido describes makeup in comparison with the “English” term *meikyappu*, summarizes how Japanese beauty culture frames practices of skincare. According to Shiseido, the act of skincare starts from applying cosmetics to one’s face, then expands to an overall consternation of every ontological part on human skin, such as trimming facial and body hair, managing body odor, brushing one’s teeth or cutting one’s nails. In this manner, the concept of skincare is intimately attached to taking “care” of one’s health and body in a broader sense.

Accordingly, as *midashinami* culture does, the Japanese skincare discourse is often extended to the overall enhancement of individual well-being, and the Japanese notion of the “beautiful skin (美肌, *bihada*)” has been promoted as one of the core characteristics of Japanese beauty culture (J-Beauty). For instance, promoters of Japanese beauty frequently adopt the ideas of achieving the fair,

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<sup>20</sup> Refer to the original website for additional information. <https://corp.shiseido.com/kids/jp/makeup/index.html> (Accessed March 27, 2023).

“translucent” skin affixed with living a proper neoliberal lifestyle – which encompasses self-awareness, self-betterment, and continuous consumption activities as means of an investment for better future. Cultivating a beautiful skin leads to youth, a body in shape, and ultimately, good life – and the process can be gone and vice versa.

Despite the emphasis on distinguishing skincare from makeup in Japanese beauty culture, the boundary between the two is not always clear-cut in practice. A considerable amount of Japanese skincare products are formulated with cosmetic ingredients, such as pigments, highlighters, or color correctors. For instance, the cosmetics brand Bioré offers 13 different kinds of sunscreen, with many products formulated to enhance skin appearance in addition to UV protection. While the Bioré UV Aqua Rich Light Up Essence is advertised to “enhance skin translucency” with an asterisk indicating its makeup effect, the Bioré UV Aqua Rich Watery Essence is specifically designed for reapplication or double layering before and after makeup. The Bioré UV Barrier Me Cushion Gentle Essence, on the other hand, not only prevents the “adhesion of fine particles such as pollen,” but also contains moisturizing ingredients (Kao Corporation. n.d.).<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, Shiseido’s self-owned facility “Beauty Square” provides not only hair and makeup styling but also personalized skin counseling and lifestyle management lessons “to care for your skin and look (Shiseido Japan Co.,Ltd. n.d.)<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Retrieved from the official website of Kao corporation product catalog <https://www.kao.com/jp/en/products/bioresarasarauv/> (Accessed May 13, 2023).

<sup>22</sup> Retrieved from the official website of SHISEIDO Beauty Square <https://beautysquare.tokyo/> (Accessed May 13, 2023).

As a result, many Japanese women consider skincare to be a form of self-care and stress relief that transcends the boundaries of applying cosmetics to managing their diet, postures, behaviors and lifestyles, just as significant as makeup is attached to their everyday routines. As both practices are viewed as integral parts of achieving an overall beauty, the distinction between skincare and makeup is often unclear by individuals, depending on how women as practitioners define well-being and self-care.

## **2.2 Is Skincare Part of Makeup?**

The previous section establishes that skincare, as an integral part of grooming or making up appearances for Japanese women, are positioned in an ambiguous area between self-care, healthcare, and makeup. To examine the relationship between skincare, makeup and women's construction of selfhood, the respondents were asked if skincare (スキンケア) should be viewed as an integral part of makeup (メイク) or as a separate entity.<sup>23</sup> They were also asked if they feel any differences of attitudes, steps, and emotions between the two concepts. Table 3 elaborates the steps they take to wear their “usual” makeup, and each of their answers regarding the question of whether they think skincare is part of makeup.

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<sup>23</sup> The question specifically used the word “makeup” instead of “makeup routine,” as the word “makeup” could vaguely open possibilities of various answers depending on how women perceive what “makeup” is, while “makeup routine” may offer an impression that the question is asking about the material aspects and specific steps of makeup.

**Table 3. Do you think skincare is part of a makeup routine?**

| <b>Respondent Index</b> | <b>Makeup Routine</b>  | <b>Integration or separation of skincare</b>  |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| <b>A</b>                | Toner<br>Sunscreen<br>Eyeliner<br>Eyeshadow base<br>Eyeshadow<br>Eyebrows<br>Lips  | Yes. Because it is part of self-care, and also making myself clean/beautiful (綺麗, <i>kirei</i> ).   |
| <b>B</b>                | Toner/skincare<br>Base makeup<br>Concealer<br>Foundation<br>Powder<br>Lips<br>Eyeshadows, looking at the overall balance.<br>Eyeliners<br>Mascara<br>Eyebrows<br>Blushers<br>(Sometimes) highlighters  | Yes. Because if I "skip (さぼる)" skincare, it makes makeup harder to apply the next day, so I put effort in skincare to make my makeup look beautiful.  |
| <b>C</b>                | Makeup: Only eyelashes and lipstick<br><br>Morning Skincare: Wash face, eye cream, lip balm<br><br>Evening Skincare: Face wash, serum, moisturizer, lip balm, eye cream, facemask (once or twice a week)   | No. "From the English perspective" skincare and makeup are linguistically divided, two different terms and meanings.<br><br>Color palettes, whatever you put on your face to be presentable outside is makeup, but skincare is private thing, part of self-love routine.<br><br>But if I "switch to my Japanese brain," skincare may be part of makeup              |
| <b>D</b>                | Before COVID-19:<br>5-step skincare routine<br>Primer<br>Foundation<br>Concealer<br>Powder<br>Contour<br>Blusher<br>Setting spray<br><br>After COVID-19:<br>Sunscreen<br>Eyebrows<br>Curl eyelashes<br>Wear mascara or baby cream when feeling like it | No. makeup washes off, but skincare is long term, such as anti-aging preventative measures, something that you have to do regularly for long term effects.<br><br>However, makeup and skincare are two symptoms for the same problem (to please men for short term or long term)<br><br>Also think that the narrative around skincare is more damaging than makeup. |

|          |   |   |
|----------|---|---|
| <b>E</b> | Base makeup/toner, lotion <sup>24</sup><br>Foundation<br>Eyebrows<br>Eyeshadow<br>Mascara<br>Eyeliners<br>Lips<br>Setting spray                     | No, I recognize skincare as something else than makeup. Skincare is what I do at home even on days when I don't wear makeup, and makeup is what I wear as a "plus alpha" upon skincare on days when I have to wear it   |
| <b>F</b> | Toner or lotion<br>Sunscreen<br>Base makeup<br>Concealers<br>Eyebrows<br>(eyebrow mascara, shaving)<br>Eyeshadow<br>Mascara<br>Lips<br>Highlighters | No. Skincare is different from makeup and prefers skincare much more than makeup.<br>When I do skincare, I feel secure that the day is finally over now, and it's time to take good care of myself.<br>skincare is time to take care by using something as gentle as possible and taking time to find something that suits you the most. It takes a long time to think about my skin.<br>For skincare, when your skin gets rough, you get judged of your general lifestyle outside of makeup or skincare. |
| <b>G</b> | Skincare<br>Base makeup<br>Eyebrows<br>Eye-makeup<br>lips   | Yes, I think it is part of makeup because it makes your skin look beautiful   |
| <b>H</b> | Base makeup (primer)<br>Cushion foundation<br>Powder<br>Contouring<br>Eyeshadow<br>Eye-makeup<br>Eyebrows<br>Lips                                   | Yes. I used to think of skincare as a completely different kind aside makeup, like brushing my teeth, but recently after I got my skin very rough once, I try to take care of my skin more carefully. Tries to apply natural makeup as minimum as possible, so recently thinks skincare as part of "natural makeup," and part of "healing meditation."  |

Table 3 elaborates the respondents' attitudes towards skincare and makeup, focusing how they describe their makeup routines, and to what extent they differentiate the idea of "skincare" and "makeup." From the responses, two significant points can be addressed as follows.

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<sup>24</sup> When the interviewer asked if her *shitaji* (base makeup) includes skincare, she said "oh, so from skincare!" and started to describe specific steps of *shitaji*, which included steps of applying toner and lotion. This aligns with her response, that she thinks base makeup and skincare are separate entities.

First, the findings indicate that while the beauty industry or makeover culture differentiates skincare to color makeup, the steps of “skincare,” “base makeup” or “makeup” are interchangeably described, implying the ambiguity of how women identify “skincare” rather ambivalently in practice. Some respondents specifically mentioned the word “skincare” before describing their makeup steps, such as respondents B, D, and G. On the other hand, other respondents interchangeably used the word “base makeup,” which typically included toners, creams, lotions and primers – some respondents, such as E, F, and H, separated toners and lotions from “base makeup.” Such steps of “base makeup” or “skincare” are included and excluded, made visible or invisible among the answers. This indicates that despite the prevalent, established discourse that scientifically categorizes skincare related to well-being and dermatological health, the range of “skincare” is ambiguously defined by individuals.

Second, there are also divergent answers regarding if the respondents perceive skincare as a separate entity to makeup. Among 8 respondents, 4 (A, B, G, H) answered that they consider skincare as part of makeup, while others (C, D, E, F) responded that they do not. Those who answered that skincare is part of makeup, strongly related to skincare with a presentable self – that is, skincare is needed to make the “beautiful skin (respondent A and G),” or it is part of making a good base for a “beautiful makeup (respondent B).” For those who considered skincare as a separate entity from makeup strongly associated with dermatological health and personal hygiene. In particular, skincare is what “heals” or “calms down” the skin from the “damage” of makeup, and “fixes” the “roughness” or “troubles” of the skin in scientific terms, such as acnes and pores. This aligns with the findings of the

previous studies that women's skin has underwent the process of "scientification," associating with gendered ideologies of women being "uniquely weak" from pollution, convincing them to consume cosmetics in order to "fix" or "heal" their "vulnerable skin (Jablonski 2012; Hunter 2013; Mire 2019)." Considering the prevalent discourse of neoliberalist, self-help ideologies on media and Japan's beauty culture of strongly associating appearance with competence (*midashinami*), skincare is no doubt, a part of performance of Japanese women's public selfhood.

### **2.3 Being and Producing "Me" by Skincare**

Despite that, it is significant to note that the reasoning behind their "Yes" and "No" answers about if they consider skincare as part of makeup, are often overlapping between the two groups. A significant common theme of skincare for both groups, is a bold notion of self-care – In other words, regardless of the ambiguity of the boundaries of what "skincare" is, the respondents similarly perceive that skincare is a private activity including processes of self-appreciation, self-exploration, and self-care. As skincare is something that does not show instantly and intimately with other people's bodies, the respondents made strong ties between skincare and 'self (セルフ/自分), as respondent E elaborated that skincare is what she does even when she stays at home, and makeup is a "plus alpha."

The self-care or self-loving aspect of skincare could be divided to two perspectives: the physical and psychological. The physical self-care perspective celebrates skincare as improving her bodily health, providing the necessary nutrition and prevent their skin from damage, uncleanliness and sickness (often described as "roughness"). Selecting the right ingredients of skincare products that "fits my skin" is considered equivalent to providing sufficient nutrition. For instance, respondent F

stated that she considers skincare as part of her diet, because it is what she allows to “penetrate (shinntō)” into her body:

F: I think skincare could penetrate as a part of my body. But I don’t want makeup to penetrate my body, so I have an image that it (skincare) is like an extension of my diet, because skincare can improve my body like food does. Of course, there is a more complex process of how skincare is reflected in the skin, so there will be obvious differences, but it’s similar to taking good care of yourself and choosing healthy food or ingredients. I choose skincare products that I allow to penetrate my body or ones that seems to have a positive effect on my body, so in that sense, I choose something that I think it is okay to become part of my body.

Respondent A also stated the physically nourishing aspect of skincare, reasoning that because her body is “irreplaceable.”

A: I use cosmetics that moisturizes my skin, I guess the reason is that my bare skin is irreplaceable, so I want to cherish it. I feel more self-esteem when I take good care of myself.

Interviewer: Do you feel like you’re doing something good about yourself when you do skincare, like as part of self-care?

A: Yes, like massaging your feet.

Interviewer: Do you think that as part of makeup, or is it like a lifestyle or healthcare?

A: No, it’s close to makeup. It’s about self-management, but also about making yourself beautiful...

In order to find the “right ingredient” that matches their skin type, women



also explore and experiment new cosmetics with different material features. Respondents E and F especially mentioned that they explore more products in skincare rather than “makeup (color)” cosmetics, because during their private times, night care after work allows more time to do “firm and slow care” and “increase the processes to try various things, which is more fun (respondent E).” This aligns with the findings regarding self-authentication and exploration discussed above, that exploring cosmetics incorporates a process of discovering or reaffirming authentic selves.

The psychological effect of skincare highlights that skincare routines make one to reflect herself, by confronting with her bare skin in front of the mirror. Skincare is “me-time” that “myself” surveils, appreciates, and nourishes my face. Thus, for respondents, skincare brings up both positive and negative emotions, as they confront their “real” self with what they consider as shortcomings of their appearances.

C: Skincare routine, especially in the evening, coming home after a busy day, when you prepare to go to sleep, it's just “me-time.” It's “quality me-time” when you really can wind down and just, you know, be with yourself and your real thoughts, maybe, or not even think about that at all and just apply moisturizers and serums that are much calming down. Just spending time with yourself, I feel that's very important.

F: I think it's time to take good care of yourself, feeling safe and appreciating yourself. And it makes me, in a very positive way, “oh, I'm alone.” I like skincare a lot more than makeup because it makes me feel lonely. To tell you the truth, I've tried more things on skincare than makeup. For skincare, you can try various

combinations. I always wear the same makeup style that suits me, but for skincare, I change my skincare accordingly to the situation and environment, like before my period starts, for example.

Respondent D, in particular, described how skincare is more “emotionally taxing” than makeup, because she has to configure with her insecurities.

D: Doing my skincare is so much more emotionally taxing than doing makeup, because makeup, every step of the way I feel better, I feel more “put together”, but skincare, every step that I take, I feel worse. The amount of time that I’ve cried after doing my skincare, is actually embarrassing... especially since I have acne prone skin, its rosation (skin turning red), my skin is just red all the time no matter what I do (...) so it just doesn’t look good (...) Every time I look at me, every time I care for me, I’m reminded that, it makes me hate myself, and it makes me feel really ugly and not beautiful. (...) You’re spending the most time in front of a mirror where you’re not seeing the immediate results. It’s just moisturizing, you’re just giving it care.

Such emotions of self-appreciation and self-surveillance, is based on the respondents’ view of skincare’s nature that it does not “show” to others “immediately” which entails that skincare is not only a process of constructing a standard look, but also a part of being and becoming the “real me,” or the “authentic me.” Skincare’s ambiguous location between its transformational, “beautification” aspect but also effecting the physical, “original” body of the self, allows women to perceive skincare as a utility to establish and produce their identities in a private manner.

## **2.4 Individualizing Selfhoods in the Skincare Discourse**

Park elaborates that although her research subjects frequently described skin

whitening as a process of “finding my innate skin color,” she concludes that the concept of “innate” or “authentic” look of self is always transformative, subject to various intersections, assemblages of beings and desires of becoming (2022, 329). She also establishes that the “desire for beauty” for contemporary Korean and Asian women are not based on their sense of incompleteness or deficiency, but from an “undefined desire” that freely crosses over bodies and boundaries of gender, ethnicity, nationality, race, social occupations, and age (2022, 239).

Park’s analysis on skin whitening also resonates with the intermingling of the private and public selfhood in skincare discourse. In contemporary Japan, ideas of skincare are closely connected to their emotions in private emotions, thoughts, time and space, providing a desire of makeup/skincare to fluidly intersect with internal and external environments, opening its possibilities for new production of identities.

The book あ、「美白」の時間始まるよ。 [*Oh, it is Time for Skin Whitening*] (2020) represents such growing dynamics of “being me” in the beauty discourse. The author, Tawamure-chan, is an influencer and YouTube video creator who possesses over 450 million followers. She produces contents focusing on makeup and skincare: What she is fascinated, and describes that she is an “otaku,” is skin whitening (*bihaku*: 美白) – the book aims to provide guidelines of how to lighten (whiten) the skin and maintain it. At first glance, her “obsession” towards white skin, seems to be reproducing the existing hegemonic, and traditionally continued trends of skin whitening, as argued in Ashikari (2003, 2005) Mire (2019) and Hunter (2013). – To protect her white skin from UV light, she elaborates that she always wears sunglasses, long sleeve clothes with a parasol outside. Even if she puts immense effort into skin whitening, it is not for “showing” to a random public, as she always hides her skin

outside to “protect” it. Noticeably, nor her made-over face is for “showing.” She is known for also wearing sunglasses and masks on her YouTube videos, even when she films beauty tutorials.

According to Tawamure-chan, she initially felt "embarrassed" about her interest in beauty and her decision to pursue skin whitening. The reason behind her initial hesitation was rooted in the perception of herself as an "*owarai-kei*" within her family and circle of relatives, a lively character known for making others laugh. This self-perception created a sense of embarrassment towards developing a strong interest in beauty and skin whitening, which were seen as more “feminine.” Rather than conforming to the expectations of femininity, Tawamure-chan struggled with embodying an image of Japanese femininity that did not align with her existing personality.

Furthermore, she has consistently utilized beauty practices to enhance her abilities and overall wellness in her life. She not only self-studied the subject, but also devoted herself to basketball club activities and academics as a student, and even worked part-time to save money to purchase high-quality cosmetics from expensive brands. Tawamure-chan explains that her enjoyment of purchasing expensive cosmetics stems from her delight in experimenting with new products and the pleasure of exchanging such information with like-minded individuals.

As illustrated in Figures 5 and 6, a distinctive feature of Tawamure-chan is her decision to conceal her face with sunglasses and a mask, despite being a beauty influencer involved in activities such as cosmetic reviews. She attributes this choice to the nature of SNS platforms, where one's face can be consumed as a fleeting visual image. By covering her face and focusing on skincare product reviews as the main

content, she aims to maintain the emphasis on the products rather than her personal appearance. This aligns with the sentiments expressed in interviews, such as F's comment about preferring makeup tutorials that showcase only the necessary parts of the face, directing attention to the product itself.



Figure 5. Tawamure-chan's YouTube video production. 「あ、『美白』の時間始まるよ。', 株式会社文友舎, 2020

Figure 5 displays how Tawamure-chan exposes herself in the book and her YouTube videos. She does not ostensibly present her attractive face, but instead, shows her white arms making a comparison with the white dress that she is wearing. In her photos on video-taking, she is wearing long sleeves, even hiding her arms as well.

Nonetheless, According to Tawamure-chan, the benefit of having white skin is “expanding the possibilities.” First, skin whitening automatically brings healthy skin, as it includes heavy skincare steps. Secondly, white skin expands one’s

choice of fashion, as it expands the colors and styles of clothes “matching” the skin color. Third, white skin also expands the choices of cosmetics products, as you do not have to hesitate to find the “right color” based on if you are “yellow-based” or “blue-based” skin.<sup>25</sup> Fourth, intensive skincare routines would maintain the skin youthful and trouble-free, which connects to the first point about the “healthy skin.” Fifth, it brings self-esteem, as you “put effort” in yourself “without comparing with others (戯ちゃん。2020, 10).”

For Tawamure-chan, skin whitening is not only about grooming and adorning – it is related to every aspect of living: Alongside her tips of cleansing, choosing and applying cosmetics, and taking supplements for better skin health, her tips expand to drinking enough water, stretching every morning and night, sitting with a straight posture, having a positive mindset, rewarding yourself for self-empowerment, and cooperating with like-minded peers. Chapter 7 of the book illustrates a “room tour” of Tawamure-chan, introducing both makeup and non-makeup-related aesthetics of her room.

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<sup>25</sup> This point also resonates with the point interview respondents A and B have mentioned, that they “enjoy” exploring new colors even if it does not match their “original” skin color, when they described makeup that “expresses yourself (*jibun rashii*).”



Figure 6. Tawamure-chan's room tour. 「あ、『美白』の時間始まるよ。', 2020

As shown in figure 6, her room tour strongly entails a concept of healing and constructing a therapeutic atmosphere for “herself,” which, apparently, is part of a process of skin whitening and self-care. The “room” is a space that individuals

spend their most private times, adorned and designed according to their personal desires, initiatives and choices. Thus, what could be derived from her “room tour,” is that on the same visual material, makeup can become multiple dimensions of selfhood, extremely commercialized and public, but also extremely private, touching on the innermost desires and tastes.

It cannot be doubted that the book is highly consumerist, tailored to its target audiences’ desire for the hegemonic beauty ideals and designed for commercial success. However, the book also poses a discussion of what makeup discourses can “produce,” instead of focusing on what “produces” the beauty discourse (박소정 2022). The blurred lines of public and private selfhood in the skincare discourse poses a different view from Ashikari (2003, 2005)’s findings, that skin whitening practices of middle-class Japanese women are “symbolic language” to communicate with the outer, public life or performances of their reconfirmation of their ethnic identity as a heterosexual, middle class, ethnic “Japanese woman.” According to the findings, women’s production, construction and presentation of their skin has penetrated one of the most private time, emotions and spaces; however, at the same time, women transmit their private selves to the outside world, utilizing skincare as a product of self-exploration.



## IV. Conclusion

In a Japanese beauty discourse, notions such as the “desired appearance by society” and “makeup influenced by the gaze of others” are often constructed as passive, conformation, and lacking agency. However, perceiving the embodiment of societal beauty standards as a depletion of selfhood would leave out the ongoing transition and new possibilities created by young women. As revealed through the analysis of interview data and the exploration of beauty discourses shared among women in their 20s, the idealized image propagated by society is, in fact also an integral part of the self-construction process in which women actively participate, drawing upon a multitude of backgrounds that shape their choices. Although the concepts and images of “self” in a neoliberal society should be critically evaluated, makeup, as highly intimate and daily acts of production, is touching upon the most personal parts of women’s thoughts and behaviors.

Revisiting the cosmetic advertisement videos of KANEBO and CANMAKE, what can be observed is a mixture of contradictory discourses regarding makeup: one emphasizes the creation of the look of normalcy, a certain beauty standard for others’ gazes and organizational fit, while the other emphasizes the revelation of the “authentic self” through makeup. This is because the women who utilize makeup as an act of creation, constantly contemplate what their “self” looks like, how it appears to others, and how it should be appeared (presented). Previous academic discourse on makeup, thus far, has been limited to discussing the outcomes of makeup application or the triggering factors behind purchasing behaviors, focusing on makeup as a token for exchange between commodities from a capitalist perspective: Exchanges between capitals, status, and objectified bodies.

However, with the blurring of the boundaries between the private and public selves and the coexistence of physical and digital selves, as well as the plurality of cross-boundary identities that intersect in multiple dimensions in an individual's identity, there is a need to move beyond debates about what makeup symbolizes or what the outcomes of transformations are, and to engage in discussions of what possibilities makeup can produce.

In conclusion, this study has attempted to provide a comprehensive examination of the role of makeup in the construction of selfhood among young Japanese women. Through an academic lens, it highlights the complex interplay between the “public” and “private” self. The subsequent chapters, Chapters II and III, specifically inspect on how makeup operates as a medium between the Japanese beauty discourse and women's creation of selfhood, focusing on how women develop their public and private selves from three dimensions of Japanese beauty culture: grooming (*midashinami*), natural makeup (*nachuraru meiku*), and skincare.

The public self, influenced by neoliberalist ideals of individualism, self-help, consumerism, and meritocracy, represents the self that conforms to societal norms and occupational rules. It is a self that seeks validation and recognition within the public sphere, conforming to established standards of beauty and comportment. On the other hand, the private self emerges as a dynamic space where individuals engage in a constant negotiation between external gazes and personal desires. In this realm, Japanese young women embark on the process of self-construction, navigating and appropriating norms from the outer world to shape their individual identity. Makeup assumes as an actant in which women get affected by, but also utilize it to express their emotions, moods, and attitudes. Thus, every component of

makeup practices – from its transmission through beauty ideals and images, to women’s application of cosmetics on their bodies and non-material emotions and ideologies entangled with the process – holds its own agency, influencing and interacting with one another.

The findings from the data reveal that women’s negotiation and appropriation process of numerous material and non-material aspects surrounding makeup practices, incorporate aspects of both the externally and internally generated ideas of beauty, contributing to an overall formation of selfhood. Makeup extends beyond being a mere symbol or performance; it is a scape that boundaries are crossed and reaffirmed, processes made visible and invisible, making makeup transformative yet ordinary.

Therefore, the research highlights the expanding participation of women themselves in beauty discourse, in shaping their self-identities by engaging in the act of makeup drawing upon both societal expectations and personal desires. Firstly, Japanese women in their twenties, positioned at the transitional period between adolescence and adulthood, actively negotiate two dimensions makeup as a private, playful activity, and as a public, mandatory bodily performance for professionalism. The *midashinami* culture and the concept of “natural makeup” demonstrate how neoliberalist and postfeminist ideas, permeating social norms and media, may implicitly coerce women to reproduce conventional feminine beauty ideals under the guise of free choice and individualism. However, the interviews conducted for this study also revealed that women actively negotiate the “mandatory makeup culture” they face, seeking ways to wear makeup that align with their personal desires. In contemporary beauty culture, it is considerably utilized to redefine beauty norms and

subvert societal pressures as well.

The second research question aimed to explore how new media influence makeup culture and women's self-identity, and how women and the media interact in the process of constructing Japanese beauty culture. The findings illustrate the blurred boundaries between creators (producers, or transmitters) and audiences (followers, critics, listeners or receivers) in highly participatory media forms, such as makeup tutorials, resulting in the coexistence of public and private selfhood within makeup discourse. While the commodification and self-branding of bodies through multiple layers of images on new media have raised issues of lookism, the interview respondents exhibited awareness of the "fake" nature of partial media contents, utilized their internal standards to choose media types that "suit" their bodily features, emotions, and aesthetics. Thus, the transmission of makeup as a self-creating and self-authenticating acts, occur interactively from media to women and vice versa.

Lastly, the research aimed to explore the existence of makeup culture as both standard and unique, and the gap between the "selfhood" marketed by the cosmetics industry and the ones women generate by themselves. The observances indicate that Japanese media promote a selfhood based on the notion of the female individual who is self-aware, self-enhancing, and takes meticulous care of herself, seamlessly wearing effortless makeup in the public sphere, while engaging in intensive skincare routines in the private sphere. Makeup tutorials, intended to "guide" women in expressing their own strengths and "shortcomings" of their bodies, often reproduce images of the hegemonic beauty ideals, teaching women how to recreate, specific looks considered acceptably "beautiful." On the other dimension, however, the study reveals a more complex interplay of self-images women construct

for themselves. Personal histories, encompassing educational, ethnic, racial, social, and cultural backgrounds, along with individual experiences, shape women's unique worldviews. Women observed in this study actively appropriate external images through their own ideas of beauty, resulting in multiple, often conflicting, identities in their perception and enactment of makeup. Respondents negotiated their identities as Western feminists and Asian females, appropriating and utilizing makeup in their unique ways. While prevalent neoliberalist ideals of self-betterment, self-surveillance, individual responsibility, and micro-trends of consumerist society shape makeup culture, it also serves as a bridge connecting these norms with women's private, inner desires for beauty, producing new pathways of navigating selfhood that do not conform to any one particular ideal.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study. First, the exploration of sexuality expressed through makeup was limited due to the hesitancy of some interviewees to openly discuss their sexualities. Future research should delve deeper into the intersection of sexuality and beauty culture, recognizing the marginalization of sexual minorities within the hegemonic beauty standards. Secondly, the research subjects within the age group of the 20s were limited to office workers and students, thereby narrowing the discussion. To capture a more diverse range of experiences, further research should include women from various backgrounds, considering factors such as marital status and occupations within working women.

In sum, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on makeup, selfhood, and the interplay between personal agency and external influences. It underscores the significance of understanding how makeup practices shape the

identities of young Japanese women, offering implications into their experiences, attitudes, and motivations of wearing makeup. By examining the multifaceted nature of makeup culture and its impact on self-identity, this research opens avenues for future exploration and invites further understanding of the complexities of self-formation and self-expression in a rapidly transforming society.

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## Appendix

### Interview Questions<sup>26</sup>

1. あなたの文化社会的な背景を簡単に紹介してください。国際的な環境で育てられた経験、もしくは海外に滞在したことはありますか？

First, please briefly introduce yourself. Your name, current occupation, and your cultural background.

2. 普段、メイクアップスキルを伸ばしたり、新しいメイクアップスタイルを試してみたりする時、どのようなものを参考にしますか？

- a. Youtubeなどでアップされるメイクのチュートリアル画面
- b. 女性雑誌、ネットでのファッション記事
- c. コスメ会社から発行されたメイクのガイドブック
- d. ユーチューバー、もしくはファッション系のインフルエンサーが発行した本、もしくはブログ記事
- e. 友人、知り合いから教えてもらう
- f. その他

When you want to improve your makeup skills, or want to try a new makeup style, what media do you use the most often? Please select from below (you can choose multiple options).

- a. Makeup tutorial videos uploaded on video platforms such as YouTube
- b. Women's magazines, fashion articles on websites
- c. Makeup guidebooks published by cosmetics companies
- d. Books or blog articles published by Youtubers or fashion influencers
- e. Learn from friends or acquaintances
- f. Others

3. 「メイク」、もしくは「メイクをする」ことについて思い出せることを 5 つのキーワードとして表現してください。

Please describe 5 keywords that comes up to your mind when you think of a concept of "makeup" or "wearing makeup."

4. あなたご自身が「普段」やっていると思うメイクアップのステップを簡単に説明してください。

Please describe the steps you make when you wear your "usual" makeup.

5. あなたは、ご自身がやっているメイクアップが自分のことをどのくらい表現していると思いますか？その理由を教えてください。

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<sup>26</sup> The same questions were used for the questionnaire sheet distributed to one respondent who was interviewed in a written response.

How much, do you think, that the makeup that you are wearing is expressing yourself? Please describe your reasons.

6. 状況や環境によって、メイクアップの付け方やステップ、使う商品、色の組み合わせなどが変わることはありますか。

Does your style of makeup, cosmetic products, or use of colors, change depending on the circumstances or environment around you?

7. あなたは、「スキンケア」はメイクアップの一部だと思いますか？スキンケアについての考えを自由にご記入ください。

Do you think that "skincare" is a part of makeup? Freely describe what you think about the concept of "skincare."

8. スキンケアをする時に「機能性」コスメ製品をよく使いますか？（ホワイトニングケアなど、肌の色を改善しようとする商品、毛穴を消す商品、肌に潤いを与えたり、光彩を与えるものなど）、その理由は何ですか？

Do you frequently use "functional (kinousei)" cosmetics (products that improve the skin's color tone such as whitening care products, products that erases your pores, or products that gives your skin watery glow and texture) when you wear makeup? Why do you choose to use them?

9. スキンケアをする時、どのような気持ちになりますか。もしくは、どのような気分が浮かび上がりますか。それが他のメイクアップのステップとの違いがあれば、どのような違いがありますか。

When you do skincare, how do you feel? What emotions do you bring up? Do those feelings or emotions different from the ones when you do other steps of makeup?

10. 「ナチュラルメイク」についての動画や記事を見る時の気分や思いを自由にご記入ください。どんな時にコンテンツやメイクアップスタイルが「自然的」だと思いますか。

Freely describe what you think when you see videos or articles about "natural makeup." When, do you think, the contents feel "authentic" or "natural" to you?

11. zoom 会議(授業)など、非対面の社会活動の時にもよくメイクをつけることはありますか。あるいは、zoom の「スタジオ効果」機能を使ってまつ毛、リップの色を変えたり、顔を明るくするフィルターを使ったことはありますか。その理由を自由に述べてください。

Do you often wear makeup in non-confrontational social activities as well, such as zoom meetings? Or, have you ever used the "studio effect" in zoom meetings to draw eyebrows, color your lips, or add filters to brighten up your skin tone? If yes, describe your reasons.

## 국문 초록

화장 (메이크업)은 수 세기 동안 일본의 표상문화, 특히 여성들의 자체적인 문화 형성에 중요한 역할을 차지해 왔다. 미의 기준이 다양화되고 미를 달성하기 위한 정보 교환이 여러 매체와 매개를 통해 활성화됨에 따라, 메이크업은 더 이상 단순히 물리적으로 외모를 개선시키는 수단으로만 이용되는 것이 아닌, 다양한 자아정체성이 상호 교차되는 장(scape)으로써 행해지게 되었다. 본 논문은 일본의 20대 젊은 여성들의 자아정체성 형성에서 메이크업이 수행하는 역할을 탐구한다. 특히, 사회적 기대와 개인의 주체성 사이를 조율하는 매개체로써 작용하는 메이크업의 기능에 초점을 맞추었다. 미디어 분석과 인터뷰를 통하여 일본에서의 메이크업에 대한 문화적 담론, 미디어 표현, 그리고 생산자, 재생산자와 행위자로서 동시에 존재하는 여성들에 대해 고찰하고자 한다.

이에 따라, 본 논문은 각각 공적 자아와 사적 자아를 다루는 두 개의 장으로 구성되어 있다. 제2장에서는 일본에서 중요시되는 “미다시나미(身だしなみ)” 문화와 “내추럴 메이크업(ナチュラルメイク)” 문화를 통해, 일본 사회에서 통용되는 “보통의 외모”라는 관념이 형성되고 인식되는 과정과, 여성들이 이를 재생산하는 방식을 탐구한다. 제3장에서는 여성들이 메이크업을 주체적으로 활용하여 자신의 정체성을 형성하고, 이를 통해 “나 다움,” 즉 “자기 진정성”과 자기 표현을 추구하는 일련의 과정을 다룬다.

여성들은 자신에게 교차되는 복수의 정체성을 확인하고, 조정하며 창조하기 위해 메이크업 문화를 활용하며, 이는 여성들의 신체, 화장품, 미디어 등의 요소들이 복합적으로 작용하는 과정이다. 현대 젊은 일본 여성들에게 메이크업은 타인에게 적합한 모습으로써 받아들여지기 위함과 동시에 자신의 만족감과 정체성을 충족시키는, 사회적 표준으로써의 미와 자기 정체성 실현으로써의 메이크업이라는, 모순적이면서도 합치된 담론을 협상하고 있음을 알 수 있다.

**주요어:** 화장, 메이크업, 스킨케어, 여성, 자아정체성, 주체성, 젠더, 일본 사회, 일본 문화, 뷰티 문화

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