Gender benders and job contenders: cosmetics in selection contexts for women and men

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of the present study was to contribute to the workplace diversity literature by experimentally manipulating gender expression through the use of makeup among women and men to determine makeup's impact on interpersonal discrimination in a real-world job selection context.

Design/methodology/approach – In an experimental field study, we applied either real (i.e. tinted) or placebo (i.e. transparent) cosmetic products to women and men confederate applicants. The women and men engaged in job inquiry and pre-interview conversations with store personnel in 136 retail stores across 3 shopping malls that were randomly assigned to one of 4 conditions in a 2 (confederate gender: women versus men) by 2 (cosmetic usage: real versus placebo) experimental design. The confederate applicants were accompanied by confederate observers and recorded interactions were later analyzed by naïve coders. The applicants, observers, and naïve coders rated interpersonal discrimination from store personnel in each interaction.

Findings – As hypothesized, women who enhanced their femininity through the use of makeup experienced significantly less interpersonal discrimination than women who did not. In contrast, there was no significant difference in interpersonal discrimination for men as a function of visual gender expression.

Originality/value – These findings highlight the pervasive gender norm expectations for women at work by examining gender non-conformity of women and men.

Keywords Cosmetics, Field experiment, Discrimination, Selection, Gender

Paper type Research paper

Perceptions of gender serve as a foundational framework from which individuals make assessments, generate expectations and alter their behavior toward others (Heilman, 2012; Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). Indeed, gender is among the first noteworthy characteristics individuals observe in others, which is used to generate stereotypes and align one's behavior with schemas and social norms of communication with the gendered individual in question (Contreras *et al.*, 2013). Gender has been found to have several important implications for workplace outcomes both for women (Bielby and Baron, 1986; Heilman, 2012; King *et al.*, 2012) and for men (Rudman and Mescher, 2013; Vandello *et al.*, 2013). As a result, individuals manage or alter their expression of gender based on interpersonal and contextual cues in the workplace. In addition to initial assessments of others' genders, facial features and expressive cues provide important information such as whether an individual is a threat, a good leader, cooperative, or selfish (i.e. stereotypes, Andreoni and Petrie, 2008; Hugenberg and Bodenhausen, 2003). A common method of altering or enhancing one's features in gendered ways is through the use of facial cosmetics, which can influence others' perceptions.

People devote large amounts of time applying cosmetic products (i.e. makeup), which sustains over a five-billion-dollar industry (Biron, 2019; Dahl, 2014). Individuals may rationalize their use of cosmetics based on a variety of personal philosophies, including

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attempts to express themselves authentically or as an instrument to manage others' impressions of them. An abundance of empirical and theoretical scholarship suggests that individuals who possess devalued characteristics – such as womanhood – employ strategies to manage the possible negative impact of those identities in a workplace setting (Clair *et al.*, 2005; Jones *et al.*, 1984; Roberts, 2005). Cosmetic usage is a form of both gender expression and impression management typically used by feminine presenting people to adapt their gender presentation or alter others' perceptions of their faces. However, men are increasingly using cosmetics as well, a trend that has yet been unexamined in workplace contexts.

Although the only factors that should influence personnel selection are the job-relevant knowledge, skills and abilities identified through job analytic techniques, a multitude of unrelated individual characteristics have been found to introduce bias in hiring interactions, such as body size (King *et al.*, 2006), religious identity (King and Ahmad, 2010), drug use (Young *et al.*, 2005), and sexual orientation (Singletary and Hebl, 2009). Importantly, women face a dilemma in which they face hostility for not adhering to societal gender norms, particularly in work contexts. Indeed, in *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins* (1989), Ann Hopkins sued her employers for sex discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 after being denied partnership for not adhering to others' expectations for feminine appearance and behavior, including (lack of) cosmetic usage. This poignant example is indicative of a pervasive pressure for women to adhere to traditional gender norms related to physical appearance in work contexts. However, there have been few concerted efforts to understand the impact of cosmetic usage in organizational settings, particularly in recent years.

Selection contexts are particularly likely to elicit bias from perceivers due to a lack of prior information about applicants and subsequent heavy reliance on stereotyping to efficiently process information about applicants (Madera and Hebl, 2012; Singletary and Hebl, 2009). Therefore, it is imperative to examine whether individuals' experiences in selection contexts are biased by the application of cosmetics. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of gendered expression through cosmetics on women's and men's experienced interpersonal discrimination in a field experimental study within a selection context.

Our study offers several contributions to the literature. First, it expands the interpersonal discrimination literature by examining the influence of visual gender expression on interpersonal discrimination among both women and men. Prior literature has demonstrated interpersonal discrimination in several job-related selection-based experimental field studies directed at individuals on the basis of body size (King *et al.*, 2006), religious identity (King and Ahmad, 2010), drug use (Young *et al.*, 2005), and sexual orientation (Hebl *et al.*, 2002; Singletary and Hebl, 2009). Within this stream of literature, hostile and benevolent sexism been examined toward mothers (Hebl *et al.*, 2007) – inherently gendered phenomena – yet gender expression unrelated to parenthood has yet to be examined within the interpersonal discrimination literature.

Second, the present study extends the femininity stigma literature (Rudman and Mescher, 2013; Tilcsik, 2011; Heilman and Wallen, 2010) by examining the effects of visual gender expression. Traditionally, the femininity stigma literature has focused on men who behave in stereotypically feminine ways (e.g. requesting family leave or engaging in romantic relationships with men). The femininity stigma literature has yet to examine how perceivers react to men who engage in visual feminine gender expression – like wearing feminine attire or using facial cosmetics.

Finally, the present study complements prior qualitative literature that examined reasons why women wear makeup at work (Dellinger and Williams, 1997; Schilt and Connell, 2007). Dellinger and Williams (1997) found that women experienced internalized pressure to wear makeup at work, despite acknowledging concerns about internalized sexism associated with conforming to gender norms by wearing makeup, even when they did not want to. Schilt and

Connell (2007) examined social experiences of transgender employees at work while transitioning. Schilt and Connell (2007) found that women who had transitioned were pressured – even in seemingly positive ways, like teaching of cosmetic skills – into more feminine expression than they desired to enact. The present study aims to quantitatively examine and validate the perspective of those who deviate from typical gender stereotypes by examining subtle interpersonal punishments in the form of interpersonal discrimination.

Cosmetic usage in workplace contexts

Research has shown that people regularly engage in strategies to facilitate positive social interactions with others (i.e. impression management, Leary and Kowalski, 1990) and this is likely particularly effective for individuals who possess socially devalued characteristics (van Knippenberg, 1989). Though makeup products may be used to adapt oneself to desired social norms regarding gender and attractiveness, personnel selection contexts provide a unique situation in which concerns related to self-presentation are high but organizational norms related to self-presentation are not yet known. As such, there are several reasons makeup is worth examining in a workplace setting. First, makeup is a central component of many individuals' – particularly women's – morning routines to prepare for work. Based on a survey of American consumers in 2017, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the population wears makeup daily (Ali, 2018). Second, drawing on Gibson's (1978) theory of object perception, people's faces provide adaptive information about social interactions. For example, based solely on facial features, perceivers can ascribe perceptions of trustworthiness (Buckingham *et al.*, 2006), determine one's sexual orientation at above-chance rates (Rule, 2017; Rule *et al.*, 2016; Tskhay and Rule, 2013), and make assumptions about interpersonal dominance (DeBruine *et al.*, 2006). As such, altering one's facial appearance through cosmetic usage can have important consequences for person perception and work decisions. Third, although makeup has historically been used predominantly by women, there has recently been an increase in makeup usage among non-women as well (Hall *et al.*, 2012). However, empirical research has not yet considered the impact of cosmetic usage among employees who are not women; thus, we consider both women and men.

Women, makeup, and workplace contexts

Cosmetic usage among women represents the double standard that women employees face in most work settings. Specifically, women may be rewarded for adhering to these gendered beauty norms but also simultaneously penalized for subscribing to a patriarchal system that inherently disenfranchises women (Dellinger and Williams, 1997; Deveaux, 1994). Historical gender norms have placed a premium on women's attractiveness and an expectation that women employees should adhere to feminine standards of behavior – with an emphasis on beauty (Kwan and Trautner, 2009) – which is commonly achieved through alteration with makeup. Unfortunately, it is well documented that women who adhere to feminine gender norms are more likely to elicit benevolent and helping reactions from others (Hebl *et al.*, 2007) and women who violate gender norms (i.e. by being assertive, dominant, or otherwise unfeminine) elicit hostile and harassing reactions from others (Berdahl, 2007; Rudman and Glick, 2001). However, even those who adhere to feminine gender norms and elicit seemingly positive helping reactions experience penalties in work contexts like discrimination in selection (Hebl *et al.*, 2007).

Some empirical work has examined women's internal tension between seemingly positive desires to wear makeup at work and the associated looming knowledge of conformity to oppressive patriarchal systems. To understand women's experiences with using makeup in the workplace, Dellinger and Williams (1997) conducted qualitative interviews to examine why women do or do not wear makeup while working. Although many participants reported enjoying

wearing makeup, they also reported experiencing pressure to wear makeup, which inherently limited their abilities to express themselves as desired. In general, women either experienced or expected that they would experience negative social consequences if their makeup was not applied or not applied completely. These participants also reported that makeup usage was associated with coworkers' assumptions about health, heterosexuality, and credibility. Without makeup, participants learned to expect comments or concern related to their quality of sleep or health status (e.g. "you look tired" and "are you not feeling well?"). Participants who identified as lesbians were concerned that a lack of makeup would signal their sexual orientations to others (see also Hamilton *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, women reported a concern that a violation of makeup norms may be interpreted as disrespect of men or supervisors at work.

Other research focused on perceivers' reactions to makeup usage at work has demonstrated that cosmetic use does indeed influence the perceptions and actions of others in organizational settings. For example, in both field and laboratory studies, female waitresses received more tips from male patrons when wearing red lipstick (Guéguen and Jacob, 2012) or facial makeup (Jacob *et al.*, 2010) and a recent experiment showed that women wearing makeup were perceived as being more capable and having a higher earning potential in a recruitment scenario compared to women not wearing makeup (Tommerup and Furnham, 2019). Thus, it is clear that cosmetic usage among women can have important practical implications for their workplace experiences.

Men, makeup, and workplace contexts

Norms about men's gender expression in general, and cosmetic usage in particular, have become substantially more inclusive in recent years. For example, the top two contributors to the beauty and cosmetics community on the video-based social media forum YouTube are men, James Charles and Jeffree Star (Social Blade, n.d.). Moreover, the most popular television show of 2018 was *RuPaul's Drag Race*, a show that highlights drag queen culture in which men perform wearing elaborate makeup and feminine dress (Nolfi, 2018). In addition, growing awareness and acceptance of gender diversity (e.g. transgender and gender non-binary individuals; Flores *et al.*, 2016), particularly among younger generations, provides relevant stereotypically masculine role models who violate traditional gender norms.

Despite the rise in popularity of stereotypically masculine people wearing makeup, men who wear makeup may lose social status as they represent clear masculine gender-role violations. *Femininity stigma* occurs when acting stereotypically feminine deprives men of masculine agency (e.g. perceptions of competence and assertiveness) and condemns them as having negative stereotypically feminine qualities (e.g. weakness and uncertainty; Rudman and Mescher, 2013). This phenomenon has been shown to have important workplace consequences. For instance, men who are ostensibly gay have been rated as being less suitable for masculine-typed jobs (Tilcsik, 2011) and men who ask for time off from work to care for family members are rated as being less masculine and thus more highly penalized and less highly rewarded (compared to men who did not ask for such leave; Rudman and Mescher, 2013). Furthermore, men who are portrayed as successful in a job stereotypically suited for women are met with less respect than women in the same position or men in positions stereotypically suited for men (Heilman and Wallen, 2010). Thus, despite the increase in men who wear cosmetics and thus violate appearance related norms, men who visually violate gender norms through the use of cosmetics in work contexts are likely to be penalized.

Interpersonal discrimination in workplace contexts

Because overt discrimination on the basis of gender in employment contexts is federally illegal (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 US 483, 1954), prejudiced perceivers of those who deviate from social norms on the basis of their gender expression are likely to enact more

subtle forms of discrimination – interpersonal discrimination. Interpersonal discrimination has been defined as "a set of behaviors (e.g. increased interpersonal hostility, decreased eye contact, abbreviated interactions;" Ruggs *et al.*, 2011, p. 29). Subtle forms of discrimination can be more harmful to targets than overt forms of discrimination because the reason for the discriminatory behavior can be unclear, leaving the target to ruminate over the event, question the perpetrator's intent, and be unsure whether discrimination had occurred or not (Ruggs *et al.*, 2011). Indeed, meta-analytic results have demonstrated that subtle discrimination is at least as detrimental on a variety of individual, organizational, and health-related outcomes as overt discrimination (Jones *et al.*, 2016).

Interpersonal discrimination is likely to be experienced by individuals who deviate from social norms as perceivers may be more likely to experience discomfort in such interactions (Valentine and Shipherd, 2018). Discomfort from perpetrators of interpersonal discrimination may stem from interacting with a type of person that they do not normally interact with, a desire to avoid interaction, or an inability to mentally categorize and, therefore, determine one's own optimally aligned behavior (Goff *et al.*, 2008). As such, women who wear makeup and men who do not wear makeup could be considered in line with social norms compared to women without makeup or men with makeup. The theoretical orientations discussed suggest that both women who do not wear makeup and men who wear makeup represent clear gender-role violators who are likely to face interpersonal sanctions. Thus, we predict the following:

H1. There will be an interaction between gender and makeup usage in selection contexts such that wearing makeup will elicit less interpersonal discrimination for women (H1a) and more interpersonal discrimination for men (H1b), compared to those who do not wear makeup.

Method

Participants and procedure

Participants in this study were 136 employees working in local retail stores. Research assistants served one of 3 roles in data collection and coding: confederate applicants, confederate observers and naïve coders. The confederate applicants were 5 traditionally college-age men and 3 traditionally college-age women from a large public university in the Pacific Northwest. Observers were 10 different research assistants (7 women and 3 men) who covertly watched the interactions between applicants and store personnel and provided their perceptions. Naïve coders were another 10 research assistants (6 women and 4 men) who rated an audio recording of the interaction and were therefore unaware of confederate applicants' experimental conditions or study hypotheses. Audio recording devices were placed in a shirt pocket of each confederate applicant to record their interactions with employee participants, which was approved by the university's institutional review board [1]. Each audio file was coded by 3 of the naïve coders to obtain mean ratings and improve accuracy. We used an experimental field design similar to that of previous research (Hebl *et al.*, 2002, 2007; King and Ahmad, 2010) with a 2 (cosmetic: tinted vs transparent) × 2 (gender: women vs men) between-subjects design.

Trial location selection

All experimental trials took place in 1 of 3 shopping malls in the Pacific Northwest. We screened a total of 214 stores and found that 143 were accepting applications at the time. We excluded cosmetic retailers to avoid any potential discussion between applicants and store personnel regarding confederate applicants' cosmetics, which would have made them aware of their experimental condition. We randomly assigned confederate applicants and observers to a cosmetic condition and retail store. Of these experimental trials, we discarded 4 because the

stores were closed, inaccessible, or confederate applicants became aware of their experimental condition prior to or during their interaction with store personnel. Therefore, the results are based on a total of 136 interactions with 136 store employee participants. Each store was visited only once by a confederate applicant and were not revisited by another confederate.

Confederate training

Confederate applicants and observers received thorough training for all procedures preceding, during, and following interactions with store personnel. To standardize any potential influencing factors, all confederate applicants wore similar attire: dress pants and a dark button-up shirt with a collar and front chest pocket. Women who acted as applicants wore their hair in a ponytail. Men who acted as applicants had short haircuts. Prior to entering each store, applicants turned on a small audio recorder and placed it in the front pocket of their shirt, concealed from view.

Confederate applicants then entered the business to ask a series of 6 scripted questions: (1) "Hi, I was wondering if I could speak to a hiring manager?" (2) "Are you hiring right now?" (3) "Can I fill out an application?" (4) "What sorts of things would I be doing if I worked here?" (5) "When should I expect to hear from you?" and (6) "Could I have your contact information?" If the hiring manager was unavailable, applicants spoke with store personnel who were available at the time. Applicants were trained extensively to avoid deviation from the script, including respectfully steering conversations back to scripted topics.

Observers entered stores shortly before the applicants, pretended to browse items in the store, and avoided any association with the applicant. If approached by store personnel for assistance, observers were instructed to state that they were "just browsing" to keep store personnel available to the confederate applicant. After the interaction, observers remained in the store for a few minutes to maintain the perception of disassociation with the applicant. Applicants and observers completed post-interaction surveys and prepared for their next interaction at a designated meeting station in a low-traffic area of the mall. Confederate/observer dyads were not permitted to discuss the interactions, as discussions could have altered perceptions of future interactions.

Cosmetic application procedure

A professional makeup artist volunteered their services for this study. In collaboration with our makeup artist, we devised a cosmetic design similar to that which one would likely encounter in the workplace: it was obvious to others that confederate applicants were wearing makeup when assigned to the experimental condition, but not excessive or out of the ordinary. It was imperative that confederate applicants remained naïve to their condition to avoid self-fulfilling prophecies or confirmation biases. As such, we devised a cosmetic application procedure that was identical from the perspective of the wearer regardless of the condition to which they were assigned. All confederate applicants wore noise-canceling headphones playing loud music while the cosmetics were applied to ensure they could not hear any remarks being made by the researchers or makeup artist that would reveal their experimental condition. Additionally, they closed their eyes during the entire application procedure except for the mascara application.

The tinted makeup application consisted of foundation mixed with a fragrant lotion (to mimic the scent in the untinted, placebo condition); setting powder; pink blush; highlighter (top of cheekbones, top of eyebrows, forehead, nose bridge, above upper lip, eye inner corner, and brow bone); contouring (under cheekbones); eyelid primer; skin-toned glitter eyeshadow on the lid; matte brown eyeshadow in the crease; black winged eyeliner; black mascara; a lip color slightly darker than confederates' natural color; lip liner; and fragrant makeup setting spray. The untinted placebo cosmetic application consisted of fragrant facial lotion (to mimic the scent

and feel of the foundation in the tinted condition); clean brush strokes in all areas where a brush was used to apply makeup in the tinted condition; clear eyelid primer; clear mascara applied with clean brush as winged liner (not visible) and clear mascara (the applicant opened their eyes for this, but the brush was black and looked identical as in the tinted condition); mint-scented shine-free chapstick; fake lip liner (we coated a lip liner in clear nail polish and moved it around the confederate's lips); and fragrant makeup setting spray (untinted). In the tinted condition, a research assistant held the mint-scented chapstick near the confederate's nose during the lipstick application to mimic the smell of the chapstick in the placebo condition. In addition, the entire cosmetic application procedure was scripted such that the amount of time for each phase (e.g. applying lipstick/chapstick) lasted the same amount of time across conditions and the makeup artist made fake "mistakes" and "corrections" in the placebo condition to further mimic mistakes and corrections that sometimes occurred in the tinted condition. These procedures resulted in identical experiences for the applicant regarding the timing, physical touch, and scents associated with both the tinted and placebo condition preparations. Indeed, applicants were not able to guess which condition they had been assigned to following the procedures at better than chance rates. Applicants were also trained to avoid looking at reflective surfaces like store windows, mirrors, or cell phones once they had been assigned to a condition.

Measures

After each experimental trial, confederates and observers rated their perceptions of the interaction using a modified version of the interpersonal discrimination measure previously used by Hebl *et al.* (2002). As noted above, interpersonal discrimination refers to more subtle and implicit forms of discrimination – compared to explicit formal discrimination – and includes behaviors such as increased interpersonal hostility, decreased eye contact, and abbreviated interactions (Ruggs *et al.*, 2011, p. 29). The surveys for confederate applicants and confederate observers included a shared set of 21 items using 7-point Likert-type scales measuring perceived interpersonal discrimination (e.g. the store employer was [. . .] "helpful," "standoffish," "nervous," "hostile," "interested" and "friendly"). The confederate applicant survey included 2 additional items ("the employer stood too close to me" and "the employer was overly friendly"), and the confederate observer survey included a single additional item ("the employer referred to the applicant using endearing terms"). Naïve coders listened to audio recordings of the interactions and provided responses to the 16 items from the total pool of items that did not require visual information to assess (i.e. "they pursed their lips" was not included for naïve coders). All confederates indicated their agreement with the extent to which store personnel engaged in specific interpersonal behaviors using a 1 (not at all) to 7 (very strongly) scale. Thus, confederates, observers, and naïve coders all provided their independent ratings of each interaction. We reverse-scored the positively-valenced items (i.e. the employer was "helpful," "interested," "friendly," "gave the impression they wanted to hire the applicant," and "paid attention to the applicant") and combined these with the rest to create a composite score of interpersonal discrimination. Cronbach's alphas were acceptable across all perspectives ($\alpha_{applicants} = 0.92$, $\alpha_{observers} = 0.92$ and $\alpha_{coders} = 0.90$).

Results

Data structure

The data structure is such that cases are nested within individual confederates, with each confederate having visited between 7 and 35 stores. Linear regression results indicated that, controlling for confederate gender, there was not significant remaining variance attributable to individual confederates in each of the three outcome measures (all bs $\leq |0.03|$, standard errors (SEs) ≤ 0.05, and ps ≥ 0.403).

Confederate applicant perspective

Table 1 displays all means and standard deviations for all conditions. To test our hypotheses, we conducted a 2-way ANOVA with confederate gender (data points included 69 women and 67 men) and cosmetic usage as predictors, mall location as a covariate to control for idiosyncratic location-based effects, and interpersonal discrimination from the applicant's perspective as the outcome. Figure 1 and Table 2 display the results for applicants. The interaction between condition and confederate gender on interpersonal discrimination was marginal but not significant by conventional standards, $F(1, 101) = 2.71$, $p = 0.10$ and $\eta^2 = 0.06$. However, planned comparisons by condition within gender designed to test our hypothesis indicated that there was a significant difference for women applicants, such that women who wore placebo makeup, mean (M) = 3.03 and standard deviation (SD) = 1.50, perceived more interpersonal discrimination than women who wore tinted makeup, $M = 2.21$, SD = 0.81, $t(31.44) = 2.39$, $p < 0.05$ and $d = 0.72$, providing support for Hypothesis 1a among applicants. By contrast, for men, the difference in experienced interpersonal discrimination between those who wore tinted makeup, $M = 2.95$ and SD = 1.08, and those who wore placebo makeup, $M = 2.49$ and SD = 0.90, was not significant, $t(57) = 1.74$, $p = 0.09$ and $d = 0.46$. Thus, Hypothesis 1b was not supported among applicants.

Confederate observers

A similar ANOVA with interpersonal discrimination from the observer's perspective as the outcome revealed a significant interaction, $F(1, 121) = 4.99$, $p < 0.05$ and $\eta^2 = 0.03$ (see Figure 2 and Table 3). Follow-up comparisons by condition within gender indicated that women who wore placebo makeup, $M = 3.02$ and SD = 1.28, were perceived by observers to receive more interpersonal discrimination than women who wore tinted makeup, $M = 2.42$, SD = 1.40, $t(66) = 1.86$, $p = 0.06$ and $d = 0.45$, providing tentative support for Hypothesis 1a. By contrast, for men, there was no significant difference in experienced interpersonal discrimination between those who wore tinted makeup, $M = 2.36$ and SD = 0.92, and those who wore placebo makeup, $M = 2.38$, SD = 0.94, $t(63) = 0.08$, $p = 0.94$ and $d = 0.02$. Thus, Hypothesis 1b was not supported among observers.

Naïve coders

Finally, a 2-way ANOVA with interpersonal discrimination from the naïve coders' perspectives revealed that there was not a significant interaction between condition and confederate gender on coder's perceptions of interpersonal discrimination, $F(1, 102) = 0.04$, $p = 0.85$ and $\eta^2 = 0.01$ (see Figure 3 and Table 4). However, the results of our planned analyses to test our hypotheses revealed an overall pattern that matched those of the observers and applicants, such that naïve coders perceived more interpersonal discrimination for women confederates when they wore placebo makeup, $M = 2.74$ and SD = 0.83, than when they wore tinted makeup, $M = 2.43$, SD = 0.76, $t(44.84) = 1.42$, $p = 0.16$ and $d = 0.40$, and the difference between men's tinted, $M = 2.48$ and SD = 0.62, and placebo makeup, $M = 2.53$ and SD = 0.66, conditions was not significant, $t(52.45) = 0.32$, $p = 0.75$ and $d = 0.08$.

Discussion

Our results highlight a double standard on the basis of gender expression using makeup in hiring contexts. When women did not emphasize their femininity through the use of makeup, counter to gender norms and stereotypes, they elicited higher interpersonal discrimination as a penalty compared to when they used tinted makeup. In contrast, men did not suffer a penalty for appearing in ways that were counter-stereotypical of their gender (i.e. femininity through the use of makeup). Importantly, confederate applicants were trained extensively and

	M (SD)						*Correlations*	
	Men			Women				
	Makeup	Placebo	Total	Makeup	Placebo	Total	Applicant	Observer	Naïve coder
Applicant	2.95 (1.08)	2.49 (0.90)	2.76 (1.02)	2.21 (0.81)	3.03 (1.50)	2.56 (1.21)	(0.92)		
Observer	2.36 (0.92)	2.38 (0.94)	2.37 (0.92)	2.42 (1.40)	3.02 (1.28)	2.72 (1.37)	0.50**	(0.92)	
Naïve coder	2.48 (0.62)	2.53 (0.66)	2.50 (0.63)	2.43 (0.76)	2.74 (0.83)	2.57 (0.80)	0.48**	0.41**	(0.90)

Note(s): Standard deviations of the means are presented in parentheses below. Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are on the correlation diagonal
** $p < 0.01$

Table 1.
Means, standard deviations, and correlations for interpersonal discrimination ratings by experimental condition and confederate gender

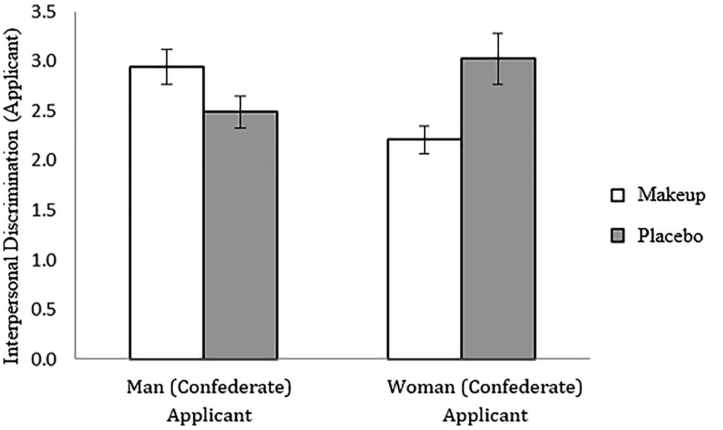

Figure 1.
Applicant mean interpersonal discrimination

Note(s): For women, the difference in experienced interpersonal discrimination between the makeup and placebo conditions was statistically significant. For men, this difference was not significant

Table 2.
Three-way analysis of variance predicting applicants' interpersonal discrimination

	Type III SS	df	F	η_p^2
Gender (G)	0.46	1	0.40	0.00
Condition (C)	5.66	1	4.98*	0.05
Location (L)	2.06	2	0.91	0.02
G × C	7.47	1	6.57*	0.06
G × L	0.59	2	0.26	0.01
C × L	9.02	2	3.97*	0.07
G × C × L	1.81	2	0.80	0.02
Residuals	114.77	101		

Note(s): *$p < 0.05$

experienced identical placebo or tinted makeup application procedures prior to interactions with store personnel, meaning that their behavior was not influenced by their appearance. These results were demonstrated not only from the perspective of the confederate applicants, but were also matched by the interaction observers and naïve coders – although the naïve coder perspective was not statistically significant. Observer and naïve coder perspectives contributed great rigor to the present study considering they are theoretically less likely to notice interpersonal discrimination compared to targets. Indeed, interpersonal discrimination is inherently subtle, meaning that targets are often more conscious of such behavior compared to those who observe it (Ruggs *et al.*, 2011).

Theoretical implications

The current research makes important theoretical contributions to the literature on interpersonal discrimination (Hebl *et al.*, 2002; King *et al.*, 2006; King and Ahmad, 2010; Singletary and Hebl, 2009; Young *et al.*, 2005) and femininity stigma (Rudman and Mescher, 2013; Tilcsik, 2011) and extends prior qualitative findings examining women and transgender employee experiences with gender expression through the use of cosmetics (Dellinger and Williams, 1997; Schilt and Connell, 2007). First, the present study extends prior interpersonal discrimination literature by demonstrating that interpersonal discrimination can occur as a response to gender norm

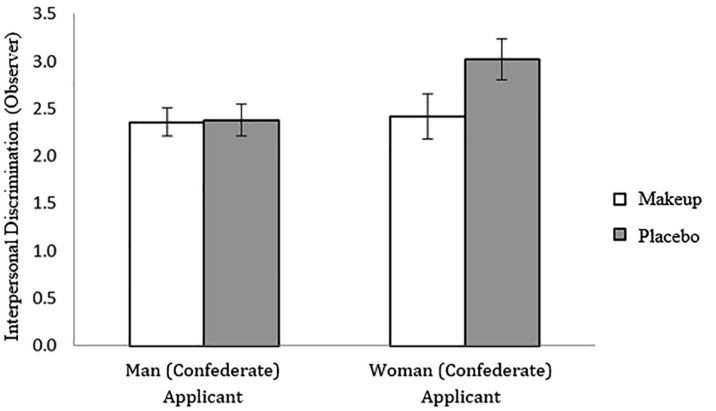

Figure 2. Observer mean interpersonal discrimination

Note(s): For women, the difference in experienced interpersonal discrimination between the makeup and placebo conditions was marginally significant. For men, this difference was not significant

	Type III SS	df	F	η^2
Gender (G)	0.23	1	0.21	0.00
Condition (C)	0.86	1	0.75	0.01
Location (L)	14.16	2	6.14**	0.09
G × C	4.75	1	4.12*	0.03
G × L	8.44	2	3.66*	0.06
C × L	1.52	2	0.66	0.01
G × C × L	11.81	2	5.12*	0.08
Residuals	139.59	121		

Note(s): $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table 3. Three-way analysis of variance for predicting observers' interpersonal discrimination

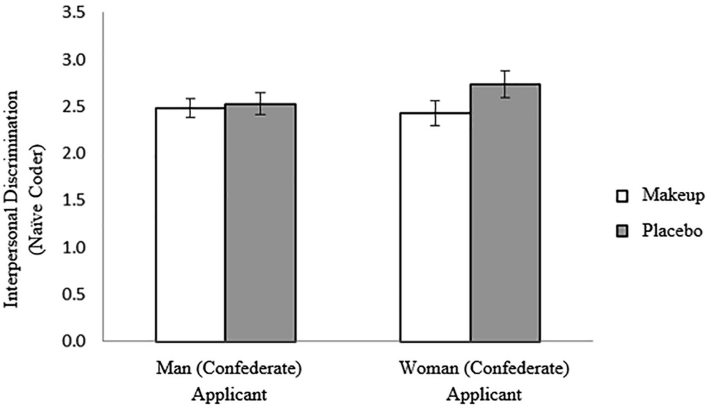

Figure 3. Naive coder mean interpersonal discrimination

Note(s): For women, the difference in experienced interpersonal discrimination between the makeup and placebo conditions did not reach conventional standards for statistical significance. For men, this difference was not significant

deviations. Interestingly, majority group members (i.e. men) did not experience interpersonal discrimination as a function of cosmetic usage. Majority group members may be less likely to experience interpersonal discrimination even when violating norms compared to marginalized populations. Second, the present study extends the femininity stigma literature by examining the effects of visual gender expression in feminine ways as opposed to the more commonly examined stigmatizing effect of engaging in feminine behaviors (Rudman and Mescher, 2013; Tilcsik, 2011). Considering men confederates did not elicit negative reactions for violating esthetic gender norms, femininity stigma may not be as salient when men physically express themselves in stereotypically feminine ways compared to when they engage in stereotypically feminine actions or behaviors (i.e. requesting family leave; Rudman and Mescher, 2013). This is likely because initial interactions are used to form schemas and categorize individuals, from which behavioral norms are subsequently expected. Because men in the tinted makeup condition did not establish themselves as masculine prior to the interaction, they were likely not seen as being in violation of their gender norms (i.e. they may have been subtyped into a special category of "feminine man retail worker"). Third, femininity may be of more value in the retail industry and hence although men wearing visible cosmetics may incur a penalty in other situations, this negative effect may have been buffered by the context.

Finally, the present study bolsters and provides additional context to prior qualitative findings indicating that women and transgender employees experience subtle and overt pressures to use cosmetics due to patriarchal workplace expectations (Dellinger and Williams, 1997; Schilt and Connell, 2007). Specifically, both aforementioned studies provided qualitative accounts of the pressures that women and transgender employees experience at work to express themselves in gendered ways – including through the use of cosmetics. Our findings quantitatively support these qualitative findings by demonstrating that employees can experience interpersonal discrimination as a subtle punishment for gender norm deviations. Furthermore, contrasting findings between experiences of women and men applicants further highlight the pervasiveness of patriarchal expectations in the workplace. Whereas women were punished for not adhering to stereotypical standards of feminine beauty, men experienced the freedom to visually express themselves without penalty, even in stereotypically feminine ways. Based on these findings, it is evident that subtle forms of oppression of women in the workplace and in selection settings may remain both pervasive and relevant, as women who did not meet societal expectations of gender presentation (e.g. cosmetic application) received poorer treatment.

However, these results may indicate positive implications for gender-queer individuals. Specifically, store personnel may behave in more positive ways toward gender non-binary or transgender individuals, in particular those who appear to be stereotypically male, and engage in feminine forms of gender expression, such as cosmetic usage. This possible increase in acceptance of non-binary or transgender individuals who wear makeup or engage in feminine visual gender expression is crucial to their experiences in the workplace and key organizational

Table 4.
Three-way analysis of variance for predicting naïve coders' interpersonal discrimination

	Type III SS	df	F	η^2
Gender (G)	0.02	1	0.05	0.00
Condition (C)	1.59	1	3.51	0.03
Location (L)	0.31	2	0.35	0.01
G × C	0.79	1	1.74	0.02
G × L	0.53	2	0.59	0.01
C × L	3.65	2	4.01*	0.07
G × C × L	4.48	2	4.93*	0.09
Residuals	46.39	102		

Note(s): *$p < 0.05$

outcomes, considering one's ability to express oneself authentically is associated with important workplace attitudes (i.e. job satisfaction; Martinez *et al.*, 2017). Although we limited our investigation by using confederates who all identified as cisgender men or women, we see expanding beyond the gender binary as an avenue for future research.

Practical implications

Organizations and employees should be made aware of how cosmetic usage can bias behavior in the selection process that may result in differential selection as a function of makeup usage –a visual expression that is not likely to be job related. Specifically, these results illuminate a means by which selection errors may occur, either due to biases from hiring personnel on the basis of gender presentation or because applicants may elect to work in locations where they have more positive interactions with personnel. For this study, applicants did not apply to work in cosmetics retail stores and hence their makeup was irrelevant to their qualifications for the jobs for which they were applying. It is reasonable to expect that applicants would be less likely to be offered, or even accept, a position at an organization in which they experienced interpersonal discrimination from prospective coworkers. Interpersonal discrimination due to gender may influence applicants' access to employment in detrimental ways, particularly for women who do not wear makeup, and may also limit an organization's ability to attract, select, and retain the most qualified staff.

One seemingly intuitive application of this research would suggest that women should wear makeup to reduce interpersonal discrimination when applying for jobs, but this conclusion is inherently problematic. Specifically, the conclusion that women should wear makeup to reduce interpersonal discrimination further reinforces a patriarchal structure in which women are pressured to engage in stereotypical gender expression strategies to appease others, rather than to fulfill their own desired modes of self-expression. As Dellinger and Williams (1997) found, women are aware of gendered expectations in society and behave intentionally regarding their makeup choices in various contexts, with associated internal conflict. Furthermore, employers are able to legally require reasonable and non-discriminatory appearance and grooming standards through dress codes in order to protect the brand and image of the organization (SHRM, n.d.). Although many organizations avoid creating different requirements for men and women because they may be challenged, certain positions may require women to wear makeup. In such instances, it would be reasonable for employers to compensate women for the time and monetary investment spent on the grooming requirements. Nevertheless, women should proceed using a pragmatic approach using these findings in whichever way they see best fit.

Limitations and future research

The present study has limitations that may be addressed by future research. First, although applicants were naïve to their own cosmetic condition, the observers with whom they entered stores were able to see applicants' experimental conditions and may have been influenced by this knowledge. However, applicants and observers provided the same pattern of results, indicating that the observers' awareness of the confederate applicants' condition did not greatly influence their perceptions of the interaction. Second, naïve coders had only auditory information with which to interpret the interactions and thus lacked the visual information that confederate applicants and observers received. Although naïve coders agreed with applicants and observers, their results were not significant at traditional levels. The lack of visual information likely impacted the significance of results as they were unable to detect facial expressions or body language cues that indicate interpersonal discrimination (e.g. store personnel standing farther away from the applicant; Hebl *et al.*, 2002). To remedy these issues in the future, researchers may wish to use concealable video technology that can capture visual information for later coding. Alternatively, due to recent shifts to online or remote work due to

the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, online interactions may be beneficial for studying perceptions of gender expression in the field.

Third, men confederates may have behaved differently than usual regardless of their makeup condition due to psychological questioning of whether their makeup was real or a placebo – and associated concerns over gender-role violations. Specifically, although women do commonly wear makeup or do not wear makeup, it is less common for men to wear makeup – and far less common for stereotypically masculine men to enter social interactions not knowing whether they are wearing makeup or not. Women and men confederates may have had unique experiences even in placebo conditions that influenced results. However, the men who were selected to volunteer as confederates had to agree to perform the confederate role in this study – and thus were men who felt comfortable enough potentially wearing makeup to follow through. Indeed, multiple men confederates cited having sisters and wearing makeup frequently growing up. Furthermore, all of our confederates received extensive training to standardize the interactions they had with store personnel so as to isolate the effects of gender and cosmetic usage.

In conclusion, the current study demonstrates evidence of interpersonal discrimination in employment settings on the basis of gender and visual gender expression through the use of makeup. When interacting with a prospective applicant for the first time, retail store personnel may evaluate that applicant not just on their suitability for the role, but also on their gender and visual gender expression and treat them based on non-job-related characteristics. We hope to encourage more research on visual gender expression at work, as even subtle differences can result in pernicious outcomes.

Note

1. This was deemed acceptable without providing informed consent or debriefing because (1) employee participants were in public locations engaging in typical job behavior, (2) audio recording in a public location where one party was aware of the recording was legally permissible in the state of Oregon – where the research took place – and (3) identifying information about the store personnel was not recorded, so all participants remained anonymous. Finally, the risks and benefits to the participants and to psychological science were weighed to determine the best course of action. Specifically, if store personnel were made aware of the purpose of the study through informed consent, then they would not behave as they normally would. The most concerning risk to participants included a breach of privacy. However, the present study was proposed to benefit psychological science and the community by providing evidence of modern sexism in workplaces and hence strategies to reduce it.

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