

**THE COLONIALITY OF COSMETICS:
RESISTANCES TO COLONIAL DETERMINATIONS OF GENDER**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

The Coloniality of Cosmetics: Resistances to Colonial Determinations of Gender

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Colonized individuals are often subjected to gender systems that follow what critic and philosopher María Lugones describes as a dichotomous hierarchy of “the human” versus the “non-human” in colonial and post-colonial settings. I use this oppositional structure and a colonial lens to focus on how an altering of the body, either through cosmetics, tattoos, or fashion could be read as a practice that reflects elements of colonialism. I explore the differences between how makeup affects categorial oppositions such as white women versus women of color, white men versus men of color, white transgender individuals versus transgender individuals of color, and so on. Other components of my thesis will analyze how makeup and fashion play into different dynamics of oppression to both reinforce colonialism in the makeup industry and compare how people are “playing” with their own makeup as a means of resistance to the makeup industry and stereotypes. My thesis, “The Coloniality of Cosmetics: Resistances to Colonial Determinations of Gender”, places emphasis on the works of Lugones that focus on decolonial feminism, including *The Coloniality of Gender* and *Towards a*

Decolonial Feminism. It also focuses on the effects of social media on the cosmetic industry, and how it has shaped constructions of gender across racial differences.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my family and instructors who have supported me throughout the research process. As this was completed during my final year as a Texas A&M undergraduate student, it was certainly the most challenging and would not have been as successful without their guidance and support.

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INTRODUCTION

People have been conditioned to believe that fashion and its components are gendered; if the gender of the individual does not match the gender of the fashion statement they wish to partake in, they will experience social oppression. Upon studying the philosophy of author María Lugones, I began to wonder how the colonial constructions of gender became as powerful as they have for influencing much of what we do today. Particularly, I became interested in the unwritten rules of physical appearance where specified articles of clothing and cosmetics have become gendered in such a way that it is socially forbidden to dress in a way that does not correspond to one's biological sex. When I think of gender, however, I see it as something that has the ability to change.

Gender does not have to follow the guidelines of an exclusive or, where someone can only choose "this or that, but not both." I found that this is somewhat the type of philosophy that María Lugones is getting at in her works. It should not be forbidden for a person to want to express themselves differently than how others think they should, yet in a social dynamic this seems to be the case. Using María Lugones's concept of decolonial feminism, I will expand on the colonial constructions of gender and analyze how makeup and cosmetics, clothing, and other body alterations constitute as resistances to it. To begin, I will discuss the dichotomous hierarchy of colonial modernity. Next, I will break down the characteristics of gender as it was affected by colonialism. Finally, I will explain how resistance can break the cycle of the colonality of gender.

1. WHAT IS RESISTANCE?

1.1 An Introduction to Resistance

In the Fall 2010 edition of *Hypatia*, María Lugones introduced the concept of “resistance” in her chapter “Toward a Decolonial Feminism”. To further understand what she means by resistance, there are some questions that will need to be addressed. Namely: “What problems are Lugones trying to deal with?” and “Why is resistance a difficult concept that she thinks she needs to help us understand?” For Lugones, the concept of resistance means to develop a sense of community that is not determined by an oppressive structure. Her focus is not to compare resistance to a backlash against an oppressor; the point of resistance for Lugones has nothing to do with doing something just because someone else said it was not allowed. Rather, it has everything to do with self-expression in a way that is not defined by an oppressive system. To be resistant is to be open-minded to what brings you happiness in the presence of a close-minded system.

To begin her section on the coloniality of gender, Lugones discusses the dichotomous hierarchy that takes place in colonial modernity. Some examples of the types of dichotomous hierarchies mentioned are between a. *humans and non-humans* and b. *white men and white women*. It is important to understand the eurocentrism present in these dichotomies discussed by Lugones to better grasp how the hierarchy is constructed. For her, eurocentrism involves a particular kind of gender social organization in addition to a racial organization. These gender and racial organizations are founded on the differentiation between the human (“colonizers”) and non-human (“colonized”). Lugones in particular notes that the colonized, who are regarded as non-human, do not have a gender. As Lugones explains, “the colonized became subjects in

colonial situations in the first modernity, in the tensions created by the brutal imposition of the modern, colonial, gender system.”¹

With the rise of colonization came the creation of categories. At this moment, specific groups of people were not seen as human but rather as barbaric creatures with sexual appendages. What Maria Lugones writes about in her “Toward a Decolonial Feminism” is the fact that there are at least two different modalities of oppression and of resistance. The difference between the human and non-human is still operative, but it is not an obvious social difference. As non-human, people who are African American, Hispanic, etc. are always in a level of indeterminacy in which their humanity could always be taken away from them. For example, in American society, often when a white person sees a black person, the white individual is immediately suspicious of the black individual and thus dissociates them from their human worth. Suddenly, the life of the black person is seen as just as disposable as it would have been in the colonial era.

By bringing forth the difference between the human and non-human as socially efficacious, Lugones is trying to show the complexity of an organization of power that underlies even our contemporary social existence. For example, when a white female walks into a gas station full of males of color, she has her hand on her purse or pepper spray the whole time. It is not a fact that the males will actually do something to harm her, but rather just a colonially made-up belief on what black men are like. These are the “beliefs” that Lugones wants us to acknowledge. When a white woman goes into a gas station full of men late at night, there are set beliefs on what would happen to her depending on what race the men are assumed to have.

¹ Lugones, Maria. "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." In *Hypatia*. Vol. 25, 743: Wiley, 2010.

For example, if the men inside the gas station are poor, but white, the woman might be cautious or worried. But, for her, those white men would not be seen as dangerous or barbaric because they are white. The only reason she would be cautious is because they might approach her for money. The difference here is that her fears are not constructed in the essence of who they are (a threat) as marked by a racial difference. Even if the woman gets hurt in this interaction with a white man, she will not begin to see all white men as dangerous. There is a social relation between white women and white men that does not cross the line between the human and non-human. These interactions are never seen as the same as with a white woman and a black man because white men are still deemed human. When you see someone who is fundamentally lacking in humanity, then it does not matter if the man of color is wearing fancy clothes at the gas station or driving a Tesla outside. There still remains something about the weight of their skin color and about who they are that is not arbitrary or contingent, and it has been made out to trigger a fear and concern in others. Lugones is saying we may not perceive ourselves to be making these distinctions, though, and that we need to become more aware of these assumptions we are making.

Another example of these distinctions based on the difference between the human and non-human can be seen within the relationship between a group of white males and a Latina woman. There is usually an expectation that there is something exotic about the Latina woman, where they are more sexual, energetic, and vibrant. With the expectation of an increased sexuality comes an expectation that they have a “sexual charge” in spite of who they are. This is a kind of objectification and dehumanization that is not experienced by white bodies. There is still an element of sexualization experienced by white bodies, but in a different way. Because the

body is white, it is as if that body is associated with some kind of “integrity” or some kind of “value” that bodies of color “do not have”.

In other words, when a black or Latina body is sexualized on television or social media, it is very different from when a white body is sexualized. When watching the television show *The Bachelor* or *The Bachelorette*, it is never questioned when the participant is white. However, only recently did the show have its first black Bachelor. Additionally, shows like *Saturday Night Live* have, on many instances, written skits on how the colored contestants are always the first to be eliminated. This only fuels the ability for people to feel that they can do whatever they want with these bodies because they are still seen as not quite attaining human status.

In accordance with this modern system, white, bourgeoisie European men are seen as the epitome of what it means to be human; they are “civilized.” Thus, a dichotomous hierarchy is brought into existence where anyone who is not a white European bourgeois male is seen as “less than” in comparison to them. White women are also submitted to this, but they are still recognized as human. Lugones explains that “turning the colonized into human beings was not a colonial goal.”² Colonizers did not want enslaved Africans and Indigenous Americans to become human; they wanted to use their differences as a means of oppression. White women, however, are complicated in this scenario. They are considered to be human – which means that there is a gender differentiation between white males and white females. Still, there is a power dynamic, or marginalization, that exists. This interaction only happens between human beings that are treating others as human beings. When talking about colonized males and females, though, they are not considered to be human beings. So, the dynamic of oppression that they experience is of

² Lugones, Maria. "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." In *Hypatia*. Vol. 25, 744: Wiley, 2010.

a different kind. For example, certain things that would seem to be important for a white woman to establish a more balanced power relationship with a white man do not necessarily make sense for a black woman; their starting point is completely different (not regarded as being human to begin with) – they are not even gendered. It is important to get into the complexity of it to see the particular positionality that white women are in. It is not just white bourgeoisie men vs everyone else, but rather there are levels to those resisting and those oppressing.

As a part of the oppression faced by colonized individuals, they became subjected to the brutal forces of a colonial gender system that followed from the dichotomous hierarchy. Enslaved Africans and Indigenous people were deemed animalistic and thus non-gendered. Their actions were labeled “promiscuous, grotesquely sexual, and sinful.”³ Lugones’s contribution is not to say they were dehumanized; it is to say that you cannot confuse the oppression that white women were suffering to be the same kind of oppression that black women were suffering. Once these two kinds of oppressions are laid out, one can then have a better and more fine-tuned capacity to analyze both how oppression works and also how resistance to those oppressions may become present.

When discussing resistance, it is in reference to “the tension between subjectification (the forming/informing of the subject) and active subjectivity.”⁴ Resistance for the colonized is not all about convincing the oppressor that you are not what they say you are, but rather developing a sense of community that is not determined by an oppressive structure. It is only with this understanding that one can begin to have a conversation about resistance. When Lugones uses

³ Lugones, Maria. "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." In *Hypatia*. Vol. 25, 743: Wiley, 2010.

⁴ Lugones, Maria. "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." In *Hypatia*. Vol. 25, 746: Wiley, 2010.

the term resistance, she is not interested in a white, bourgeoisie woman showing resistance towards the power of white, bourgeoisie men.

The type of resistance she is interested in is one where those resisting are beginning with a non-human status. Because they are fundamentally understood as inferior and non-human, it is not the goal of those resisting to try and create a “balance” between those seen as human and those seen as non-human.

A defining difference between those resisting and the oppressor is that they begin on a completely different level of societal positioning because of colonialism. There is an illusion that people who are deemed non-human can be accepted or recognized or welcomed into the human circles of recognition. However, what Lugones wants readers to understand is that to be accepted into the “human” category as a person of color is to experience constant reminders that there are differences which ultimately stems back to having a non-human status. One might compare this instance to the “Karen phenomenon”. When someone is labeled as a “Karen”, they are being seen as someone who emphasizes the fact that there is a difference between whites and non-whites. This phenomenon has been most prominent around the fear of a white woman and how white women become protectors of this social hierarchy. Resistance, then, must be very specific to this situation of the non-human, where they can neither be integrated nor socialized into the “human-circle”. Thus, resistance is not about enabling the recognition of the non-human as human; this, for Lugones, would be considered contradictory.

What I will continue to focus on in the following chapters is how the altering of the body, either through cosmetics, tattoos, or fashion, could be read through the lenses that I have explained above. There is a difference between what the cosmetic and fashion industry is doing for white women versus a woman of color, white men versus men of color, white transgender

individuals versus transgender individuals of color, and so on. I will also analyze how makeup and fashion play into the logic of different dynamics of oppression. I will answer the question of how the makeup industry reinforces the system while also comparing how people are “playing” with their own makeup as a means of resistance to the makeup industry and stereotypes as well. Along with race, gender plays an important role in the way society perceives the use of makeup. This is especially the case when Lugones explains that colonized women do not have gender. In order to understand how makeup can play with gender as well as race, it is important to understand the genderless history of colonized individuals.

2. HOW CAN ONE BE RESISTANT TO COLONIALISM?

2.1 The Famous Forms of Resistance

As previously explained, María Lugones discusses the dichotomous hierarchy that takes place in colonial modernity. Namely, the hierarchy that was more concentrated on was that of the “humans” and “non-humans”. To better grasp how the hierarchy is constructed, it is important to understand the eurocentrism present in these dichotomies discussed by Lugones. For her, eurocentrism involves a particular kind of social-gender organization in addition to a racial organization. These gender and racial organizations are founded on the differentiation between the human (colonizers) and non-human (colonized). Lugones notes in particular that those who were colonized, viewed as being non-human, do not have gender. Women of color, in particular, have to balance themselves as outsiders to the dominant way of life. Historically, anyone within the category of being a white male among the bourgeois class was considered to be a part of the dominant culture. For those that are not considered to be a part of this culture, there is a double consciousness going on. Colonially, women were viewed as having less power than men. Therefore women of color have two different oppressive systems weighing down on them. First, because their race is seen as “less than” the white bourgeois class and second because they are female.

Those who were colonized are forced to switch between two different attitudes: one at home with their communities and families and one among the "dominant" way of life when not at home. An example of this type of switching back and forth between attitudes would be when a woman of color goes to work at a job with a demographic that is predominantly white and then goes home to her family and community of color. This is exactly the type of attitude shifting that

Lugones calls "'world'-traveling." World-traveling is a skill born out of necessity from the "white world" being historically hostile towards other non-white communities. Ultimately, women should practice what Lugones refers to as a playful "world" - traveling with a loving perception that counteracts hostile environments. Hostile environments include those that are built around arrogant perceptions that stem from both "dominant" ways of life. Within these hostile environments, there are people who utilize arrogant perception to reinforce their unwillingness to accept differences in other people and ultimately obscure differences as being bad.

2.2 The What's and How's of World-Travelling

World traveling is a form of resistance; it does not oppose oppression but finds ways to exist between different forms of oppression. The idea of traveling itself is finding the in-between spaces of "being". This means that people exist in specific in-betweens and borders in a way that does not freeze them in an oppositional stance. They are not specifically drawn to one way of life or another, but shift between the two (or more) as a way of being multiplicitous. They are also not defined by the system of oppression itself because they are choosing to exist outside of it. This middle ground that these individuals choose to reside in is exactly what resistance is looking to achieve. When Lugones refers to "'world'-traveling," she is interested in a shift of perception that takes place when interacting with another human being. By worlds, Lugones is referring to a social group. A social group could be anything as small as your family unit to as large as society as a whole. These other "worlds" are not just looking at differences of cultures by geographic location, but from race and class as well.

A person experiences "traveling" when they are able to occupy a position in multiple worlds. For most people who are not considered to be of the white middle-class category, they

will most definitely be required to travel to the white, middle-class world. As previously mentioned, an example of this type of world traveling would be for one's job. If a person who is considered to be in the minority category holds a position in a white-dominated workplace, then they are expected to exert the same characteristics expressed by their white counterparts. If they are not able to exert these characteristics or change their persona to be more like their white counterparts, then they will be seen as "foreign" or perhaps uneducated.

When traveling to the world that another person inhabits, both your perception and your own sense of self are shifting. What is known for you to be comfortable (i.e. your language, personal relationships, shared histories) is all put on the line as being uncomfortable for the people inhabiting the world you are traveling to. When you travel, there is a sort of double identity or self image that is taking place. On the one hand, you yourself are made up of characteristics from your own personal world and culture. On the other hand, in order to fully travel to another world, you will also have to accept the differences of that other world. This is not to say that you have to completely change who you are or what you know, but rather being open-minded to the fact that other worlds exist and it is okay to explore these other worlds.

2.3 Perception: Arrogant vs. Loving

Oppressive, close-minded systems are made up of what Lugones refers to as "arrogant perception." For one to have an arrogant perception of someone or something is to fail to identify with, relate to, or love someone on account of differences. Arrogant Perception takes place when the perceiver doesn't identify with the person being perceived. The perceiver does not think the perceived matters; the perceiver does not think she has anything in common with the perceived. What Maria Lugones discusses in her "Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception" is that Arrogant Perception is when one fails to identify with, relate to, or love someone on

account of differences. An example that she uses to describe this scenario is the situation of a “White/Anglo women’s failure to love women across racial and cultural boundaries in the U.S.”⁵ Arrogant perception is made to uphold patriarchy, but not only white men are arrogant perceivers.

Loving Perception is when the perceiver identifies with the perceived. This involves trying to understand the perceived, without keeping yourself at the center. The key to developing a loving perception of someone is to take yourself and your assumptions, beliefs, and background out of the picture. In this way, one will be able to identify with the perceived and recognize their unique subjectivity. This is what Lugones talks about when she considers her mother as a person and not just as her mother. Lugones is traveling to her mother’s “world” to identify with her.⁶ “We can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes”.⁷

When visiting an art gallery or reviewing an artwork, it is common for those perceiving the artwork to wonder what key point or message the artist was trying to convey. Art galleries all over the world showcase different art pieces such as paintings, sculptures, self portraits, architectural renditions, etc. It is up to the eye of the beholder to decide what the artist is trying to say and the emotion that he/she/they are trying to establish. Having an open mind is key to this

⁵ Lugones, Maria. "Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception." *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (Summer, 1987): 5.

⁶ Lugones, Maria. "Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception." *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (Summer, 1987): 8.

⁷ Lugones, Maria. "Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception." *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (Summer, 1987): 17.

example. People have the freedom to obtain whatever message they want from a work of art. When it comes to defining beauty, however, by what rubric is a person defining?

Author T. E. Jessop explains in their article titled “The Definition of Beauty”, “The practical consequence of defining beauty as just what we agree with the supposed aesthetic attitude is that every aesthetic response would be right, or rather neither right nor wrong, but merely natural. Even the most discerning piece of art-criticism would be no more than a personal confession, to be read, if read at all, only in order to know what the critic feels about his object, not whether he has detected in this some aspect or relation which I may have overlooked. I must accept his judgment as final for himself and irrelevant to me. On this view the aesthetic judgment disappears, becomes a synonym for a judgment of introspection, being reducible without any loss of meaning to “I feel in such and such a way towards this object.”⁸

The perception of beauty that has been highlighted by Jessop can be related to Lugones’s idea of loving perception. In taking the example of an art gallery, when interacting with another human being we should view them as the artwork being highlighted in the art gallery that is our community, workplace, school, or world as a whole. With this notion, people should utilize a similar means of perception of others without colonial, superficial, or arrogant lenses. In order to identify with a work of art, we do not necessarily need to agree with the “aesthetic” that the artist has created.

In looking at ourselves and others as the blank canvas, we have the ability to decide how our canvas will be filled. Just as we individually have the freedom to fill our canvas with whatever type of medium we choose (makeup, tattoos, clothing, piercings) so should others as

⁸ Jessop, T. E. “The Definition of Beauty.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 33 (1932): 6. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4544220>.

well. In recognizing that the way I dress or do my makeup is my decision, I have found some beauty in what I am trying to portray. What stops us from recognizing the beauty in what others are trying to portray when it does not fit our aesthetic are the previously mentioned colonial determinations of gender?

2.4 Playfulness From Within

When Lugones discusses her concept of “playfulness”, she is not discussing the type of playfulness that one would use in playing a game. In her eyes, playfulness is a non-competitive, creative activity that allows individuals to be creative within the worlds that they occupy and travel to. It is a step in the right direction to be able to have a loving perception of others and to have a desire to travel to their world, whether it be to better understand one’s culture, lifestyle, or preferences. However, what she wants people to focus on is creating a community where everyone is actively participating to construct new worlds to inhabit. According to Lugones, to be playful is to have an “Openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction and to construction or reconstruction of the ‘worlds’ we inhabit playfully.”⁹ Playfulness is best described as a non-competitive “trickster” attitude. However, to behave playfully is not related to any type of game. Rather, it is a creative activity where everyone is actively playing and constructing together. People are active participants.

Playfulness is an important concept to world-traveling because it allows us to “construct” and “create” within these different worlds. The point of playful world-traveling is that it allows us to live outside of the ever-present harmful hierarchies and structures within society. The concept of playfulness goes hand-in-hand with world traveling because it gives us the guidelines

⁹ Lugones, Maria. "Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception." *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (Summer, 1987): 17.

to have an accepting demeanor. If we were to travel to another world but retain the same arrogant perception observed in colonially influenced structures, it defeats the purpose of living a “multiplicitous” lifestyle. In other words, without utilizing a playful and loving perception of other worlds, then we are simply reinforcing the structures that we are trying to resist.

In regards to possible discomfort from world-traveling, Lugones inquires “maybe what’s happening here is that there is an attribute that I do have but there are certain worlds in which I am not at ease and it is because I’m not at ease in those worlds that I don’t have that attribute in those worlds”¹⁰ What Lugones is expressing is that there are worlds in which she is not comfortable and thus is unable to portray certain attributes that she has in other worlds. Playfulness allows us to find comfort in places that we find no similarities to who we are in our own worlds. It could be the case that I am the most comfortable in my world and because I am traveling to an unfamiliar place, someone else’s world, I do not experience the same type of comfort. The purpose of world-traveling is to let us experience other worlds. It is normal for us to feel out of place when traveling to someone else’s world and vice versa. Therefore, when introducing an unfamiliar person into our world, we can put an ease to any possible discomfort by encouraging playfulness.

¹⁰ Lugones, Maria. "Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception." *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (Summer, 1987): 9.

3. PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

3.1 The Harry Styles Ideology

In taking the experience of those who were colonized seriously, we see that they did not have a gender because they were not seen as human, so gender itself is a colonial imposition. This leads us to the possibility of seeing bodily expression beyond its colonial impositions. It turns out the gender categories are not as universal as we think; they themselves leave a lot of room to play with; to play with the indeterminate and play with the ways in which they do not reflect the ways of life.

The dichotomous category of gender is made up to begin with, and there are a lot of people with which this type of gender does not apply. For example, Harry Styles was the first man on the cover of *Vogue* in over 100 years, and he did it in a dress. Harry Styles is not saying "I embody this which is not the dominant thing to do". He is just playing with the constructions of gender that inform cosmetics. He is no longer just wearing women's clothes, he is playing with the idea that there exists a label for women's clothing versus men's clothing.

At the start of his career, Harry Styles had a completely different image where he was seen as a clean-cut, heart-breaking member of the band *One Direction*. As his recognition in the music and film industries have evolved, however, so too has the image he has created for himself.¹¹ According to Styles, "To not wear (something) because it's females' clothing, you shut out a whole world of great clothes," he said. "And I think what's exciting about right now is

¹¹ Bichu, Apoorvaa Mandar. "Harry Styles's Unique Persona: Defying Hegemonic Masculinity." Creighton University (2021): 1

you can wear what you like. It doesn't have to be X or Y. Those lines are becoming more and more blurred."¹²

The new image that Harry Styles has pioneered for himself has led to challenging the perspective of what masculinity should look like, and has done so through his persona and image. The definition of persona as used by Apoorvaa Mandar Bichu is "the ethos, roles, identity, authority and image a rhetor constructs and performs (or that others construct for a rhetor to perform) during a rhetorical act."¹³ Additionally, he defines image as "a verbal and visual representation, emphasizing particular qualities and characteristics, that create a perception of the rhetor in the viewer's mind."¹⁴ For Apoorvaa Mandar Bichu, one's image utilizes the more broad rhetoric of the persona in order to function.

What author Apoorvaa Mandar Bichu states is that in constructing and performing a perceivable persona, an image is created that places emphasis on certain qualities. These qualities are ones that ultimately want to be perceived by an audience, by the "perceiver". As Harry Styles highlights these qualities through music and fashion, one could do the same with makeup.

Taking these definitions of image and persona and relating them to colonially perceived masculinity, there are certain characteristics that a man must portray in order to be perceived as

¹² Moniuszko, Sara M. "Harry Styles Responds to Criticism Over 'Vogue' Cover Ballgown: 'Bring Back Manly Men'." . Accessed August, 2021.
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/celebrities/2020/12/02/harry-styles-talks-vogue-cover-dress-criticism-racial-justice/3794226001/>.

¹³ Bichu, Apoorvaa Mandar. "Harry Styles's Unique Persona: Defying Hegemonic Masculinity." Creighton University (2021): 64–65

¹⁴ Bichu, Apoorvaa Mandar. "Harry Styles's Unique Persona: Defying Hegemonic Masculinity." Creighton University (2021): 65

masculine. There is a term called “hegemonic masculinity” that Apoorvaa Mandar Bichu describes as “a set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), and the interplay between men’s identity, men’s ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy.”¹⁵ This definition serves an important purpose of highlighting the unequal differences that men are expected to have over women.

Hegemonic masculinity has served as an excuse to categorize men and women as being “unequal” in order to keep those in power at the top of the hierarchy. An example to consider is women and men in the workplace and the unequal pay gap. Women in America make \$0.82 for every dollar a man makes, and supposedly the gap is even wider for many women of color.¹⁶ There is a notion that men are the breadwinners of the family, and therefore have an obligation to make more than women. This notion, however, is biased towards a myth that no longer exists. Women are breaking through the glass ceiling of their contributions to a family being less than than of their male counterparts. Additionally, the notion completely ignores the possibility of a household with no male role model or with the primary breadwinner not identifying as male. In these cases, it is up to the female figure alone to be the “breadwinner” of the family. If she is making less than she could just because she was born female or identifies as female, there is clearly something wrong with the structure of the workplace.

¹⁵ Bichu, Apoorvaa Mandar. “Harry Styles's Unique Persona: Defying Hegemonic Masculinity.” Creighton University (2021): 65

¹⁶ Jones, Janelle. “5 Facts about the State of the Gender Pay Gap | U.S. Department of Labor Blog.” (2021)

The connection between the unequal pay gap and not wearing clothing because it is “gendered” is that both circumstances are examples of oppressive structures that stem from categorizations that are imposed by colonialism. In the case of the unequal pay gap, women making less than men is a concrete example of withholding the “lesser than” status originating from colonialism. In order to create resistance within the workplace, it is necessary to learn from the resistance that is taking place within another world where rejection is present on account of gender - the cosmetic and fashion industry. As Styles mentioned, the defining lines of what is considered to be masculine and feminine are becoming blurred. If that is the case, what is stopping other oppressive structures (such as the workplace) from redefining the lines in which gender is prominent?

3.2 Normalizing Normal Bodies

The notion of “normalizing normal bodies” has been surfacing around social media. There has been a perception that people have had to look a certain way in order to be beautiful or look good. Social media has especially reinforced this thought leading to eating disorders or mental illnesses like depressive behaviors. The concept of body image is a construction of one’s thoughts, emotions, and conduct that they associate with their physical appearance.¹⁷ Statistically, as of 2014, 91% of women are discontent with their bodies. As a result, they turn to dieting in order to achieve what they perceive to be the “ideal” body shape.¹⁸ Where did the idea of an ideal body come from? On the one hand, wanting your body to be in shape and taking actions to live a healthy lifestyle have long-term benefits on one’s quality of life. With that being

¹⁷ Cohen, Rachel Rebecca. “Social Media and Body Image in Young Women: Examining the Positive and Negative Role of Appearance-Focused Activities.” Open Publications of UTS Scholars (2020): 2

¹⁸ Goldman, Rachel Ph.D.. “A Complete Look at Mental Health and Obesity: Before, During and After Treatment.” YWM 2019 National Convention (August, 2019): 11

said, however, one should not obsess over trying to look like someone they have seen on social media.

The “ideal body type” that is portrayed in social media takes roots in advertisements for cosmetics, personal care products, and clothing. According to Nicole Gorman, a masters student of Concordia University, “Cosmetics and personal care products were branded by creating an ideal woman with unattainable beauty standards in order to generate insecurities in consumers. The brand was then positioned as the means through which consumers could minimize their insecurities with regard to body image.”¹⁹

Victoria’s Secret introduced their first transgender model, Valentina Sampaio, in 2019. The brand, which has received criticism for being sexist and out of touch, is trying to be more open-minded for the community. Attorney Mette H. Kurth explained “If you can’t modernize, if you can’t escape your roots from where you started, you are going to struggle to stay relevant... And that is their struggle right now. Their core identity is based on what now feels outdated by women.”²⁰ Their goal is to have inclusivity and representation for everyone. GLAAD, a non-governmental organization promoting equality for and protesting profanity against the LGBTQ+ community, explained that the decision to hire Valentina Sampaio was made in response to an increased visibility of transgender people in cosmetic, personal care, and clothing campaigns. There have been other models who have chosen to part ways with the brand because of their unrealistic expectations for women’s bodies. Model Karlie Kloss decided that the boy image Victoria’s Secret wanted their models to portray and the body image that Kloss felt was truly

¹⁹ Gorman, Nicole. “Cultural bridging: an extension of cultural branding in the lingerie market by Savage X Fenty.” Concordia University (2020): 1–49

²⁰ Hauser, Christine. “Victoria’s Secret Casts First Openly Transgender Woman as a Model.” *New York Times* (August, 2019)

reflective of her were completely unaligned and was not the message she wanted “to send to young women around the world about what it means to be beautiful.”²¹ Someone who has completely redefined the modeling industry to give people of all ages and genders is singer and songwriter Rihanna. With her Savage x Fenty clothing line, Rihanna has created the type of message that people like model Karlie Kloss want to convey to others.

If you look on Rihanna’s Savage X Fenty website, you will see a showcase of models of all different sizes, body alterations, and representations. For someone who is looking to shop online without being able to try the outfit on beforehand, this is a great way for someone to get a better idea of what size they might need in the item. But, there is a deeper meaning behind having these models be a part of the clothing line. For years, the fashion industry has been centered around harsh guidelines in order to be considered for a spot as a runway model. The typical image that comes to mind when thinking of what a fashion model looks like is someone who is female, skinny, tall, and white.²² This is problematic because it conditions people to believe what they should look like even if the chances of looking like that “ideal image” are impossible. There has been an assumption within the fashion industry that models who have thinner bodies, even if they were photoshopped to look that way, will be perceived as more attractive and thus sexualized. The problem with the lack of diversity that has existed in this industry is that only one type of body is being sexualized, leading to all other body types to feel unworthy of the same attention.

²¹ Hauser, Christine. “Victoria’s Secret Casts First Openly Transgender Woman as a Model.” *New York Times* (August, 2019)

²² Kennedy, Chloe. “From Angels to #Real Women: Comparing the Diversity of Models in Two Lingerie Brands.” *Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*. Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring, 2020): 15

CONCLUSION

In believing that fashion and its components are gendered, people are shutting themselves out to a whole other world of self-expression. Historically, it has been the case that oppressive action will be taken against a person if the gender of the individual does not match the gender of the fashion statement they wish to partake in. After studying the philosophy of philosopher María Lugones, I became interested in the power that colonial constructions of gender possess over influencing much of what we do today. Particularly, I have expressed how the unwritten rules of physical appearance that have stemmed from colonial determinations of gender have been exemplified within the fashion and cosmetic industries. Particular articles of clothing and cosmetics have become gendered in such a way that it is socially forbidden to dress in a way that does not correspond to one's biological sex. However, just because this understanding of gender has remained consistent to this day does not mean that it cannot change.

Gender does not have to follow the guidelines of an exclusive or, where someone can only choose "this or that, but not both." This has been especially showcased in the lifestyles of musicians Harry Styles for his challenging of the "masculine image" as well as Rihanna for her challenging of what it takes to be a model with her Savage X Fenty clothing line. These musicians have redefined the understanding of the cosmetic and fashion industries through a playful interaction between an oppressive structure and gender. It should not be forbidden for a person to want to express themselves differently than how others think they should, yet in a social dynamic this continues to be the case. I have shown that the playfulness exercised by Styles and Rihanna constitute as the types of resistances that María Lugones focuses on in her

philosophy, and are imposing an inevitable change to the colonial roots of the cosmetic and fashion industries.

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