

Beauty beyond admiration: the intersection of female stardom chasing, cosmetic practices, and self-pleasing

Jiawen Li

Goldsmiths, University of London, United Kingdom

nicole09restart@gmail.com

Abstract. Digital media platforms add a further level of complexity to the issue of celebrity agency. While platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Weibo ostensibly democratize exposure, they are structured by commercial algorithms, sponsorship demands, and numbers of audience that determine what kinds of celebrity content flourish has steadily recast celebrities from singular icons into instruments of collective ideology and culture. As early as 1991, Wernick's concept of promotional culture argued that cultural production was becoming ever more captive to promotional imperatives, fusing political, commercial, and symbolic interests into one seamless enterprise. This paper investigates the intersections of these three phenomena—female stardom chasing, cosmetic practices, and self-pleasing—seeking to clarify how they collectively shape women's understanding and enactment of beauty. Drawing on qualitative analysis of 50 in-depth interviews with women aged 18-35 who engage in both stardom chasing and regular cosmetic use, the study finds that stardom chasing operates as a framework for beauty cognition rather than uncritical mimicry, while cosmetic practices function as a means of self-expression and emotional fulfillment.

Keywords: stardom chasing, cosmetic practices, self-pleasing, beauty discourse, female agency

1. Introduction

Existing research on female stardom chasing has largely characterized it as a form of idol worship driven by social conformity, while studies of cosmetic practices have frequently emphasized their role in catering to societal or male expectations. Such perspectives, however, fail to account for women's active negotiation of beauty standards and the potential connections between these behaviors and self-pleasing. This gap limits comprehension of the complexity underlying women's engagement with beauty.

Rojek [1] characterizes such processes as cultural incorporation, where the celebrity no longer controls the meaning of their own image. Marshall [2] further notes that in digital economies, celebrity becomes a node in a larger symbolic system, linking state interests, market logic, and cultural production. At the same time, Marshall [2] argues that proliferation of digital media has amplified presentational labour for celebrities so that carefully crafted avatars of themselves can traverse a number of ideological topographies. Through this, celebrity presence is not only a by-product of publicity but also a kind of soft diplomacy that shapes public conceptualizations of class, race, gender, and national identity. As a kind of symbolic promotional vehicle, celebrities are not simple receptacles but central agents in a mediated setup where meaning, affect, and cultural authority are continually negotiated.

This paper examines the intersections of female stardom chasing, cosmetic practices, and self-pleasing, addressing three specific research questions: (1) How do women's perceptions of female celebrities influence their cosmetic choices? (2) To what degree do cosmetic practices inspired by stardom chasing serve self-pleasing rather than external validation? (3) What mechanisms drive the integration of stardom chasing and cosmetic practices into processes of self-pleasing? Employing qualitative research methods, this study analyzes in-depth interview data from 50 participants to explore the dynamic relationships among these three phenomena. By highlighting women's agency in constructing beauty meanings, the research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of contemporary female beauty behaviors, challenging the binary of "passive conformity versus active resistance" and offering insights for studies of gender, consumption, and cultural identity.

2. Literature review

2.1. Stardom chasing and beauty cognition

Scholarship on stardom chasing has primarily focused on psychological motivations, such as desires for emotional connection with celebrities or group belonging. Less attention has been paid to how female fans selectively incorporate celebrity images into their own beauty ideals.

2.2. Cosmetic practices and motivational shifts

Research on cosmetics has traditionally emphasized their role in social signaling, framing makeup as a tool for meeting aesthetic norms [1]. Recent work, however, suggests a turn toward "self-oriented makeup," with women reporting use of cosmetics to enhance mood or confidence—though links to stardom chasing remain underexplored [2].

2.3. Self-pleasing beauty behaviors

Within feminist studies, self-pleasing emphasizes women's bodily autonomy [3]. Its manifestation in the context of stardom chasing and cosmetic practices—specifically, how external references (e.g., celebrities) interact with internal needs—has not been systematically examined, leaving a critical research gap.

2.4. Promotional culture

Davis [4] imagines celebrities as mediated intermediaries between political institutions, media systems, and publics. Superseding their reality as simple figures of popular entertainment, celebrities operate within a field of symbolic power where they have a determinative influence on discourse and public opinion. In the contemporary landscape of promotional culture, celebrities occupy a central role not only as familiar figures in media and marketing but also as carefully constructed symbols that mediate the flow of commodities, ideologies, and cultural values [5]. Stars have long occupied a privileged status in promotional rhetorics, but their symbolic participation in convergent cultural, commercial, and political structures has been theorized in diverse ways. Rather than conceptualizing celebrity as a by-product of isolated talent or charisma, scholarship has more recently moved towards a view of fame as a symbolic and institutional construct shaped by late capitalism's promotional rationalities [5].

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Fifty female participants aged 18-35 were recruited via purposive sampling, with the inclusion criteria: (1) following at least one female celebrity for six months or longer; (2) engaging in cosmetic practices at least three times weekly; (3) ability to articulate motivations for both behaviors.

3.2. Data collection

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, addressing: (1) reasons for following specific celebrities; (2) cosmetic habits and their connections to celebrity images; and (3) emotional and psychological experiences during cosmetic practices. Interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and were transcribed verbatim [6].

3.3. Data analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns in transcripts. Coding was performed using NVivo 12, with initial codes (e.g., "celebrity as beauty reference," and "makeup for self-satisfaction") grouped into overarching themes related to interactions between stardom chasing, cosmetics, and self-pleasing [7].

4. Results

4.1. Selective incorporation of celebrity influence

Participants reported that female celebrities influenced their cosmetic choices through selective adoption rather than wholesale imitation. For example, 72% noted focusing on specific traits (e.g., a celebrity's eye makeup style) that aligned with their own features, rather than replicating entire looks.

4.2. Cosmetics as self-pleasing practices

Over 80% of participants described cosmetic routines as forms of "self-care" rather than tools for impressing others. Sixty-five percent, for instance, reported increased confidence and emotional relaxation after applying makeup, with such feelings heightened when the makeup was inspired by a favored celebrity [8].

4.3. Synthesizing external and internal influences

Participants described a dual process: absorbing beauty cues from celebrities (external) and adapting these cues through cosmetics to meet personal emotional and aesthetic needs (internal). This synthesis strengthened their sense of agency in defining beauty [9].

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical contributions

This study challenges the long-standing conventional view that frames stardom chasing and cosmetic practices as inherently passive behaviors—ones driven solely by blind adherence to societal beauty standards or celebrity influence. Instead, it illuminates their underrecognized role in facilitating self-pleasing, positioning these actions as purposeful expressions of individual desire rather than mere compliance.

In doing so, this research significantly promotes the understanding of female agency within beauty studies. Traditional scholarship in the field has often highlighted women's subordination to external pressures, such as media-portrayed ideals or patriarchal norms, casting them as recipients of predefined beauty discourses. By contrast, this study demonstrates that women actively engage with and negotiate external influences (e.g., celebrity images, trending beauty standards) as dynamic, malleable resources—ones they reinterpret, select from, or even resist to align with their own internal goals, such as enhancing self-confidence, expressing personal identity, or fostering emotional well-being [4].

For instance, when women follow celebrities or adopt cosmetic practices, they are not simply mimicking external templates; rather, they curate these influences to fit their unique sense of self. A celebrity's makeup style might serve as inspiration, but women adapt it to suit their own facial features, lifestyle, or mood—transforming an external cue into a tool for self-satisfaction. This active negotiation reveals a form of agency that is both strategic and context-dependent, expanding the theoretical boundaries of how female agency is conceptualized in beauty studies.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a more nuanced and empowering framework: it moves beyond dichotomies of "passive compliance vs. outright resistance" to highlight the complex, iterative ways women construct their own beauty experiences. By centering self-pleasing as a core motivation, it reorients scholarly discourse to recognize women as active architects of their beauty practices, rather than passive subjects shaped by external forces alone.

5.2. Practical implications

The findings of this research carry valuable practical implications, particularly for stakeholders in the beauty industry. Rather than relying predominantly on trend-driven promotion—such as highlighting "must-have" products based on celebrity endorsements or fleeting social media fads—brands and marketers could pivot to emphasize narratives centered on self-pleasing.

This shift aligns with the evolving needs of modern female consumers, who increasingly prioritize authenticity and personal fulfillment in their beauty choices. For example, campaigns that frame cosmetics as tools for self-expression (e.g., "Enhance the features you love") or link stardom chasing to individual inspiration (e.g., "Find joy in styles that reflect your personality") would resonate more deeply than those that merely dictate what is "on-trend."

By integrating self-pleasing into their messaging, beauty industries can foster stronger emotional connections with consumers, positioning their products not as obligations to meet external standards, but as enablers of personal satisfaction. This

approach not only enhances brand relevance in a market where consumer values are shifting toward self-empowerment but also supports a more positive beauty culture—one that celebrates individual agency over uniformity.

6. Conclusion

This research delves into the complex intersections of female stardom chasing, cosmetic practices, and self-pleasing, revealing that these behaviors are deeply interconnected in shaping women's lived beauty experiences. Stardom chasing, far from being a superficial or passive pursuit, provides a flexible framework for beauty cognition: it offers a diverse array of references (celebrity styles, public personas, or lifestyle cues) that women can adapt, filter, or reimagine to form their own understanding of what "beauty" means to them.

Meanwhile, cosmetic practices act as a critical bridge between these external cues and internal self-pleasing needs. They transform abstract beauty ideals (inspired by celebrities or trends) into tangible, personalized actions—whether through makeup, skincare, or grooming—that directly serve individual desires, such as feeling more confident, comfortable, or authentic in one's body.

The integration of these two dynamics—that is, stardom chasing as a cognitive framework and cosmetic practices as a practical mediator—reflects a larger phenomenon: women's active construction of subjectively defined beauty discourses. This process moves beyond the narrow lens of passive adherence to external standards, highlighting instead a landscape where women negotiate, create, and redefine beauty on their own terms.

In essence, this research underscores that beauty, for modern women, is not a static set of rules to follow but a dynamic, self-authored experience—one where stardom and cosmetics become tools, not masters, in the pursuit of self-pleasing.

Future research can build on these findings along several distinct lines. First, it would be easier to examine how superstar seeking, cosmetic procedures, and self-pleasing alter across various life stages and sociocultural contexts if sample sizes were increased to cover a wider range of age groups (such as teenagers, middle-aged, and older women) and cultural backgrounds. Second, integrating validated psychometric scales to quantify self-pleasing motives would furnish empirical data that both corroborates the present qualitative insights and deepens our grasp of their nuances and intensity.

Third, longitudinal studies would be valuable in tracking how these dynamics evolve over time, particularly amid rapid changes in media environments (e.g., the rise of new social platforms) and shifting social norms (e.g., growing movements for body positivity). Such research would further deepen our understanding of the fluidity of female beauty experiences and the enduring role of self-pleasing in shaping them [5].

Furthermore, understanding celebrities as symbolic promotional tools requires a further analysis of how meaning, identity, and legitimacy are constructed inside converging media-politics-commerce systems. Future research needs to extend this paradigm by investigating how algorithmic recommendation, platform curation, and data-driven branding alter celebrity visibility. One of the imperative trajectories is investigating the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-created or digital influencers, programmed identities that trouble classical suppositions of agency, authenticity, and symbolic labour. The other is investigating ways state-sponsored digital celebrities transmute the entertainment-soft power boundary, calling into question the instrumentalization of culture in surveillance capitalism. As media infrastructures become increasingly complex, understanding celebrity in this symbolic fashion yields important insight into the fluid intersection of technology, ideology, and cultural authority.

References

- [1] Rojek, C. (2001). *Celebrity*. Reaktion Books.
- [2] Marshall, P. D. (2010). The promotion and presentation of the self: celebrity as marker of presentational media. *Celebrity Studies*, 1(1), 35-48.
- [3] Petrovová, I., & Eibl, O. (2019). Celebrities in Czech politics in 1996–2013. *European Journal of Communication*, 34(1), 3-19.
- [4] Davis, A. (2013). *Promotional cultures: The rise and spread of advertising, public relations, marketing and branding*. Polity Press.
- [5] Hackley, C., & Hackley, A. R. (2015). Marketing and the cultural production of celebrity in the era of media convergence. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(5/6), 461-477.
- [6] Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.
- [7] Wolf, N. (1991). *The beauty myth: How images of beauty are used against women*. Chatto & Windus.
- [8] Entwistle, J. (2000). *The fashioned body: Fashion, dress and modern social theory*. Polity Press.
- [9] Bordo, S. (1993). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body*. University of California Press.