

From the August 2, 2002 print edition  
Guest Comment

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## **Eyeing my career in a world without mascara**

Lucy Chabot Reed

I don't wear makeup.

Big deal, right? I always thought so. I'm productive and efficient, and I'm good at what I do. Spending an extra 15 minutes each morning to make my eyes look bigger or put a little life in my lips never seemed all that important.

Guys don't have to do it - or anything else even remotely like it - so I have resisted it on principle more than anything.

To me, makeup always seemed too sexy for the workplace. It's meant to accentuate a woman's eyes and lips to make them more sensual and alluring. At work, I never wanted to attract that kind of attention.

I've asked people over the years if they thought I was hurting my career by not wearing makeup. Usually bosses (and usually men) invariably told me no. "Of course not," they'd always say. "Don't be silly."

Then, recently, I posed the question to a girlfriend in public relations. Her bluntness startled me.

"Do you think I'm hurting my career by not wearing makeup?"

"Yes," she said.

I was speechless, so I changed the subject, but her honesty never left me. I called her the other day to ask her to elaborate. After couching her comments with her affection for me and her belief that she thought I was

adorable, she told me that, without makeup, I do not present a professional picture.

Ouch.

In her world of public relations, where professionals are called on to represent companies to clients and the media, image is everything. Even something as simple as leaving off the lipstick means you are too rushed to bother, that it's too much trouble, she said.

"No, it's not too much trouble, and if you don't bother with lipstick, it makes people wonder what other details you can't be bothered with."

She recounted stories of qualified, talented women she's known who she would never refer to clients or for business because of their appearance - long, unstyled hair (like mine), more-casual-than-professional clothes (like mine), no makeup.

It got me thinking.

I searched the Internet for other opinions, looking for other renegade professionals who didn't ink up each morning. There weren't any. What I found instead were interview tips and how to compete in the boardroom, each one including advice on how to be groomed.

Without fail, they advised keeping makeup use to a minimum. A Wall Street Journal article about how much appearance rated when headhunters call on women - about 85 percent, one recruiter said - urged "discreet makeup."

But none of the tipsters suggested not wearing makeup at all. It's an unheard-of alternative.

"Don't step out of the house without makeup," one site admonished.

I found a column on BlueSuitMom.com by Sherry Maysonave, an author and the founder and president of Empowerment Enterprises, a communications image firm. She said that women who wear makeup earn 20 to 30 percent higher incomes. That's according to the Hamermesh-Biddle study that says attractive people make more money than unattractive people.

Not that I want to get into a debate about what constitutes attractive, but I've been fighting this makeup convention my whole life. And after

stories on the struggle women have gone through to be paid fairly, I'm beginning to wonder if I'm just giving the bad guys more ammunition.

Or, as former Texas Gov. Ann Richards says, "Ginger had to do everything Fred did, except backward and in high heels."

The corporate playing field for women isn't equal. Welcome to our world. I'm a grown-up now. People judge me on my appearance, and in this society, makeup is part of that image.

Maysonave wrote that women who wear no makeup or too much makeup communicate low self-esteem. Well, that's not me. I went to the store that night and bought a new mascara, powder and lipstick.

I came into the office the next morning to compliments on my appearance, despite donning an outfit I'd worn a dozen times before. Within an hour, I'd received a phone call from the Small Business Administration telling me I had won the Small Business Journalist of the Year award for the South Florida district and the state.

Coincidence?

Now I'm waiting for my 30 percent raise.

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