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# Julia Coquard on Creativity and Authenticity in the Beauty Business

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*Knowledge@Wharton High School's Emmie Stratakis sat down recently with Penn junior Julia Coquard to discuss her teen years as a well-known beauty blogger and makeup artist in Sweden through her blog Makeup Is Art, which she ran from 2010 to 2016. After getting her makeup done (check it out!), Emmie explores the success of Julia's YouTube blog (it all started with a facemask reveal) and why she believes that beauty bloggers shouldn't be afraid to "show and share their flaws."*

**Knowledge@Wharton High School:** Hey, everyone, welcome back. I've just spent the last couple of minutes getting my makeup done by one of Penn's most renowned makeup artists. A lot of you are going to be surprised to find out that the beauty industry was valued at \$532 billion in the United States in 2017. It turns out it takes a lot of effort and countless products and services to keep us looking and smelling our best. It's an industry that's also relatively resistant to economic downturn, remaining stable during the economic recession of 2008. In today's economy, the beauty industry is booming. Today we're here with Julia Coquard, a junior at the University of Pennsylvania who became the second biggest beauty influencer in Sweden at the age of 14. Since then, she has gone on to host her own TV show and to work for MAC [Cosmetics] full-time. Julia, thank you so much for joining us today.

**Julia Coquard:** Thank you for having me.

**KWHS:** Can you tell us a little bit about how you discovered and began doing makeup?

**Coquard:** I think for me it was really interesting, because I was never a girly-girl. I was never into all the stuff that girls my age were into. But I was always huge in painting and drawing. I spent a lot of time just being creative when I was younger. Both my parents are musicians. I grew up in a very creative household, and I think makeup just kind of became a natural extension from that. I was just kind of fascinated by the idea of painting — but painting on a face, rather than painting on paper. And I think makeup, from a very early age for me was never about looking pretty or about making yourself look like a different person. It was always just kind of a way for me to play with colors and play with textures and do it on a canvas that was living. And I thought that was really fascinating at a very young age, I think.

**KWHS:** How did your blog gain momentum?

**Coquard:** I actually just started doing my own makeup and was going home from school, just putting on my makeup, washing it off, doing it again — doing it again all the time, just practicing and becoming better. And eventually I was like, "I want to just have a platform where I can upload photos for my own sake," because I want to be able to keep the photos and look at them. So I never really intended for the blog to become a thing.

I honestly don't really know how it works, like how it spreads. But I started uploading these photos. I was uploading a couple of YouTube videos, but this was pre-social media time. This was in like 2008 to 2010. So Instagram, Twitter, all

that wasn't really a thing. But I uploaded a couple of YouTube videos, and one of them was just like literally me peeling off a facemask, and I look horrible. It got like 400,000 views, and it was a really weird thing to me. I don't really know how that happened, but I got a lot of followers.

**KWHS:** I've watched that!

**Coquard:** Everyone watched that, which is not the best, but it's fun. So I think from there I just got a lot of followers who came to my blog, but this was also kind of during the era of blogging. Everyone was reading blogs, and everyone was super into the blogging space. And I think through a lot of Google searches and a lot of references from other people in the beauty industry, I started gaining traction. But, yes — that wasn't really my original plan.

**KWHS:** How did MAC discover you, and what did you do for them?

**Coquard:** I was a super-loyal customer to my regional MAC counter, which is one of my favorite makeup brands — super colorful and super inclusive.

I was there, shopping, talking to the staff, and one of the ladies who worked there approached me about potentially applying for a job. And they knew kind of who I was. They knew a little bit about my platform, about the blog and what I was doing — even though I was 16 and had absolutely no professional training within the makeup industry.

But yes, I was asked to come back for an interview. I did and somehow was able to gain a full-time employment position at MAC, which was really fun. So I started out working retail. I was selling makeup and doing makeup on customers, and then quite quickly became a product specialist. So I was like a super-nerd. I knew all the names of the all the lipsticks and all the eye shadows, and all the ingredients, and all the foundations. And I was super-nerdy about the entire product line. So I think from there, it was kind of natural that I became the product specialist from my counter. So I was in charge with just like educating all of the other staff members on the newest launches, on how to use different products that they maybe weren't as used to using, and how to tell which products were the right fit for which customers, and stuff like that.

So I did that for a couple of years, and then I went on to become a trainer. So I was a trainer for Southern Sweden and Copenhagen region, which essentially meant that I was just traveling to different counters and training the MAC staff to essentially keep being creative and thinking of new ways to use products and new ways to wear makeup and apply makeup — and also, all in all, just give better customer service.

As part of being on the training team, you also get to do all the events. So I did all the Fashion Week stuff and all the editorial stuff, and those types of things, too, with MAC — which is really exciting.

**KWHS:** How do you respond to people who say we tend to focus too much on outside beauty, and that the proliferation of beauty blogs and images set unrealistic expectations for young women?

**Coquard:** I think this is a really interesting question, because for me personally, the beauty community — especially with social media — was never about looking pretty. It was always just about kind of finding a way for a creative output. I think that's a lot what we're seeing now, in just social media in general — especially Instagram.

You see so many beauty accounts who show the way they apply their makeup, starting from scratch. And they're very comfortable putting their faces out there without any makeup at all.

And a lot of times, it's not about looking beautiful, which is kind of like what I was talking about before. But it's about kind of playing with different colors and doing weird shapes, and just kind of playing with shadows and lights and

seeing how it affects the way your faces look. And yes, so I think the beauty community has kind of two sides to it. I think it's a lot about being creative, but of course — and there's also this side to it — that it's about being beautiful and looking perfect.

I think with social media in general, you're going to have that within any section. You're not going to have that exclusive to the beauty community. You're going to have that within the fashion industry. You're going to have that within the lifestyle influencers and health influencers. I think in general, social media is just a way for people to kind of put their best face forward, and I think the beauty community is a part of that. But I think there's also this whole other section to the beauty community that is much more about being your individual self and kind of letting you express yourself using makeup as a way to do that.

**KWHS:** That's amazing. So what do you see as the hottest trends right now in the beauty business?

**Coquard:** It's really interesting talking about social media and the role of social media and trends, because I think the No. 1 trend right now is anti-beauty. I think especially within fashion, you're seeing a lot of really stripped-back looks. It's not very polished. It's all about going back to raw skin — making everything look authentic. You see a lot of chunky mascara and like smudged lipstick and eye shadow that's applied in a very messy way, for example. And I think that's kind of a backlash to this whole Instagram perfection idea that's been going on for a while. So I think that's a huge trend, just like raw and natural. Glossy skin has been a thing for forever. But just in general, a more pulled-back look, that it's less perfect.

**KWHS:** And what has this industry taught you?

**Coquard:** This industry has taught me a lot. I think mainly it has taught me the value of listening. I think as a makeup artist, the No. 1 thing that you need to be good at is paying attention to people — knowing what they're looking for, knowing what they want, so that when you apply their makeup, you can make them feel like their best version of themselves without feeling like they're looking at a stranger when they look in the mirror — because I think a lot of people get their makeup done and then feel like they don't look like themselves, and they're super-uncomfortable with the way they look. So I think it has really taught me to be a good listener. It has also taught me the importance of always being creative and thinking outside of the box.

I think the beauty industry is pretty saturated right now. A lot has been done, and it's really difficult to come up with new ideas that people haven't done in the past. And I think just having been in the industry for a while, it has definitely taught me the value of just staying creative and doing things that no one else has done before.

**KWHS:** Julia, what would you say to the person sitting in their bedroom dreaming of being the next biggest beauty influencer?

**Coquard:** I would say, first of all, be aware of the time commitment. I think people underestimate the amount of hard work that goes into being an influencer or running any type of beauty platform. Definitely know that it's what you want to do, and be prepared to commit to it a hundred percent in order to be successful.

Secondly, I would say just be authentic. I think it's really important that you're honest with your followers and that you're honest with your platform — that you don't sacrifice your opinion for paid sponsorships or partnerships with brands. And I think also just being authentic with your audience about some of the things that you struggle with — and not being afraid to show and share your flaws and your insecurities. I think that's really important, and that's a change that we're seeing more and more in the influencer space overall.

**KWHS:** Amazing, Julia. Thank you so much for joining us today.

**Coquard:** Thank you so much.