



foreword

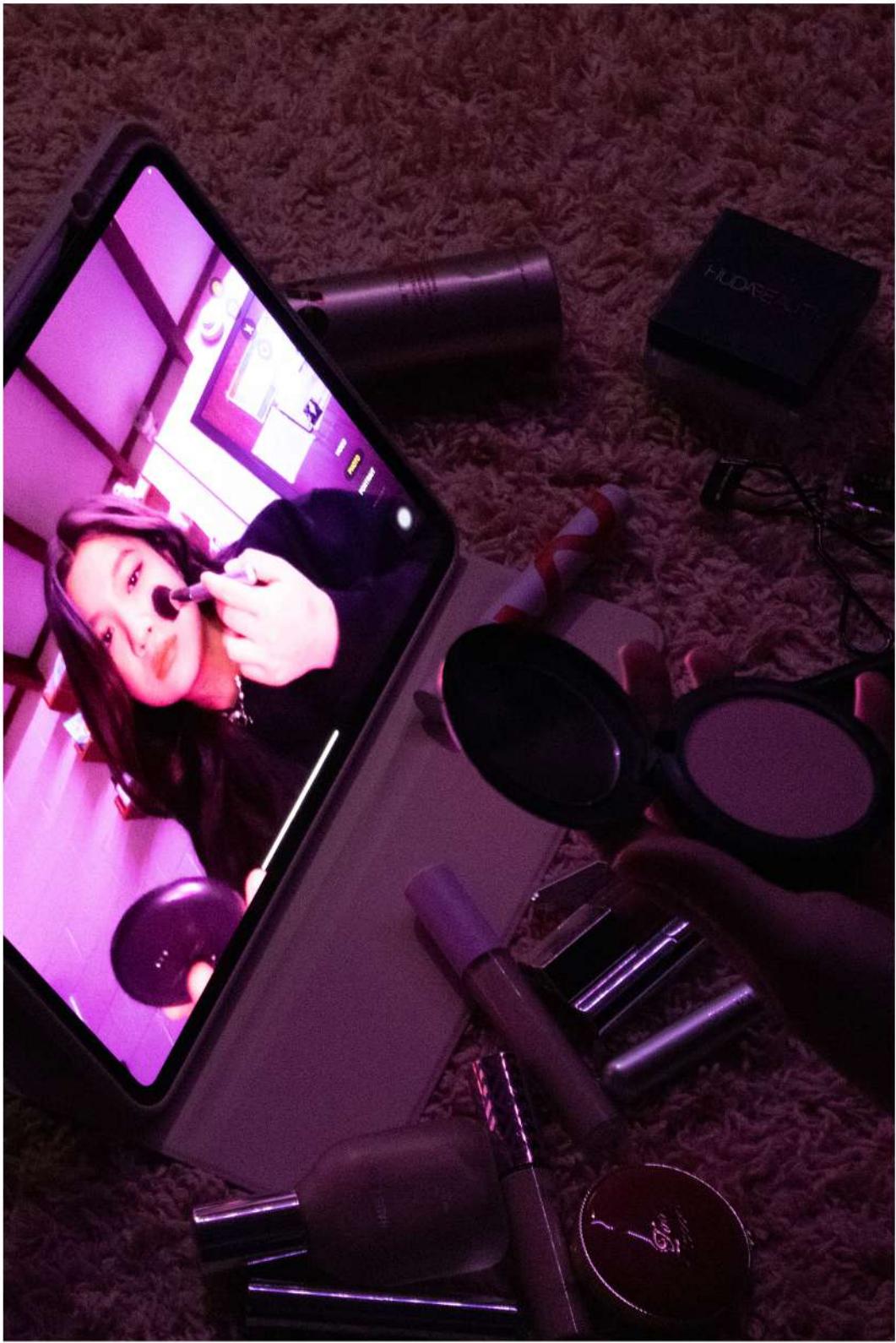
trace is a visual and narrative exploration of the relationships women—especially women of color—have with makeup as a tool for identity, culture, and care. set entirely in college dorms and centered around mirrors, the series captures young women in moments of quiet routine and honest reflection.

these are not glamorized or highly curated beauty portraits. they are documentary-style glimpses into how women see themselves and shape themselves, every day. each subject was photographed in her own space, surrounded by the clutter and comfort of student life—products half-used, towels slung on doors, phones playing music. the mirror becomes the central site of transformation.

each shoot was accompanied by a recorded conversation, pieces of which appear throughout this book. together, the images and words aim to show makeup not as mask, but as medium:
for storytelling, memory, and becoming.

this project comes from a personal place. i've loved makeup for as long as i can remember. starting with stealing bits from my mom's stash and teaching myself through online tutorials. what began as play turned into ritual, reflection, and expression.

creating *trace*, for me, was a way to extend that personal history into something collective—to explore how other women relate to the same act in entirely different ways.



me, Zoey La, self-portrait of myself doing my makeup.

the models
faces, routines, reflections

Dani Reynoso







Q: So, who first introduced you to makeup?

A: My mom. She never did it a lot, but I always admired her when she did do it.

Q: How do you feel with makeup on, and how about without it?

A: Sometimes I just do the bare minimum—like tinted moisturizer. Without it, if I don't do at least a bare minimum, I always feel crusty. Even if I'm fresh out the shower, I feel unprepared if I don't have, like, mascara, brushed eyebrows, whatever. With it on, I feel very confident—like I'm ready for the day.

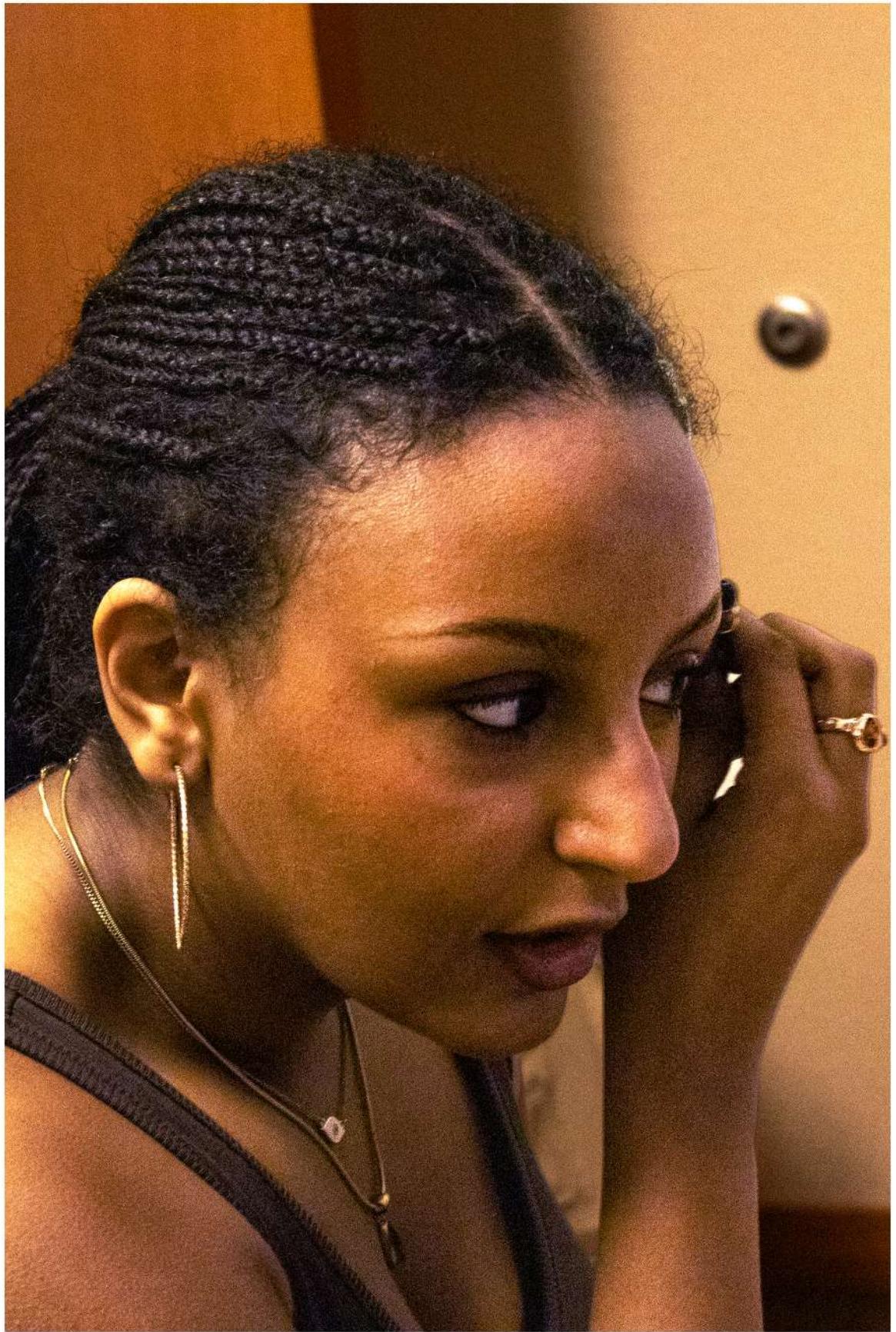
Q: Has your race or cultural background shaped how you use makeup?

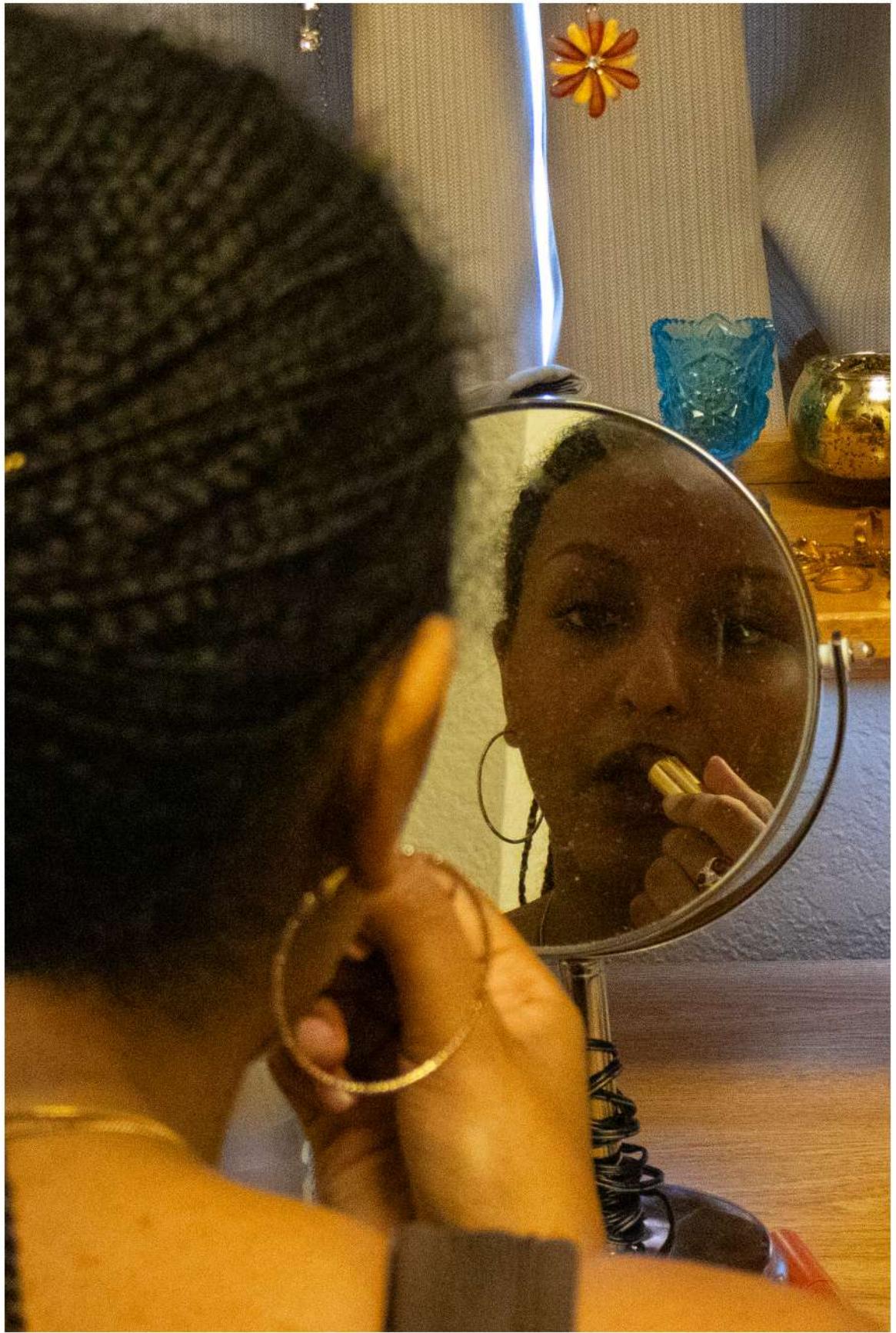
A: Yeah. My parents and grandparents had really rigid views—like, makeup and nail polish were for women only, and “women” meant grown, maybe even promiscuous. So growing up, I always felt like it wasn't something I was supposed to do. Now that I'm older, I feel like I can do it freely.

Q: Do you have anything else you want to tell me about makeup?

A: I like it. It makes me feel very cute.

Waadaa Daka







Q: What's your earliest memory of makeup?

A: I feel like it was probably me in elementary school, hanging out with friends. I wasn't allowed to have makeup, so it was kind of a secret thing. They'd bring their funky-ass eyeshadows and I'd just use all of it. It didn't make much sense, but it was fun.

Q: What's your favorite part of getting ready?

A: Anything with the eyes. I feel like I get to be the most creative there. It feels more like drawing. I like to do art, but with how busy I am at Carleton, I don't have time for it. So doing makeup is like building a little bit of art into my daily routine.

Q: Has your cultural background shaped how you use makeup?

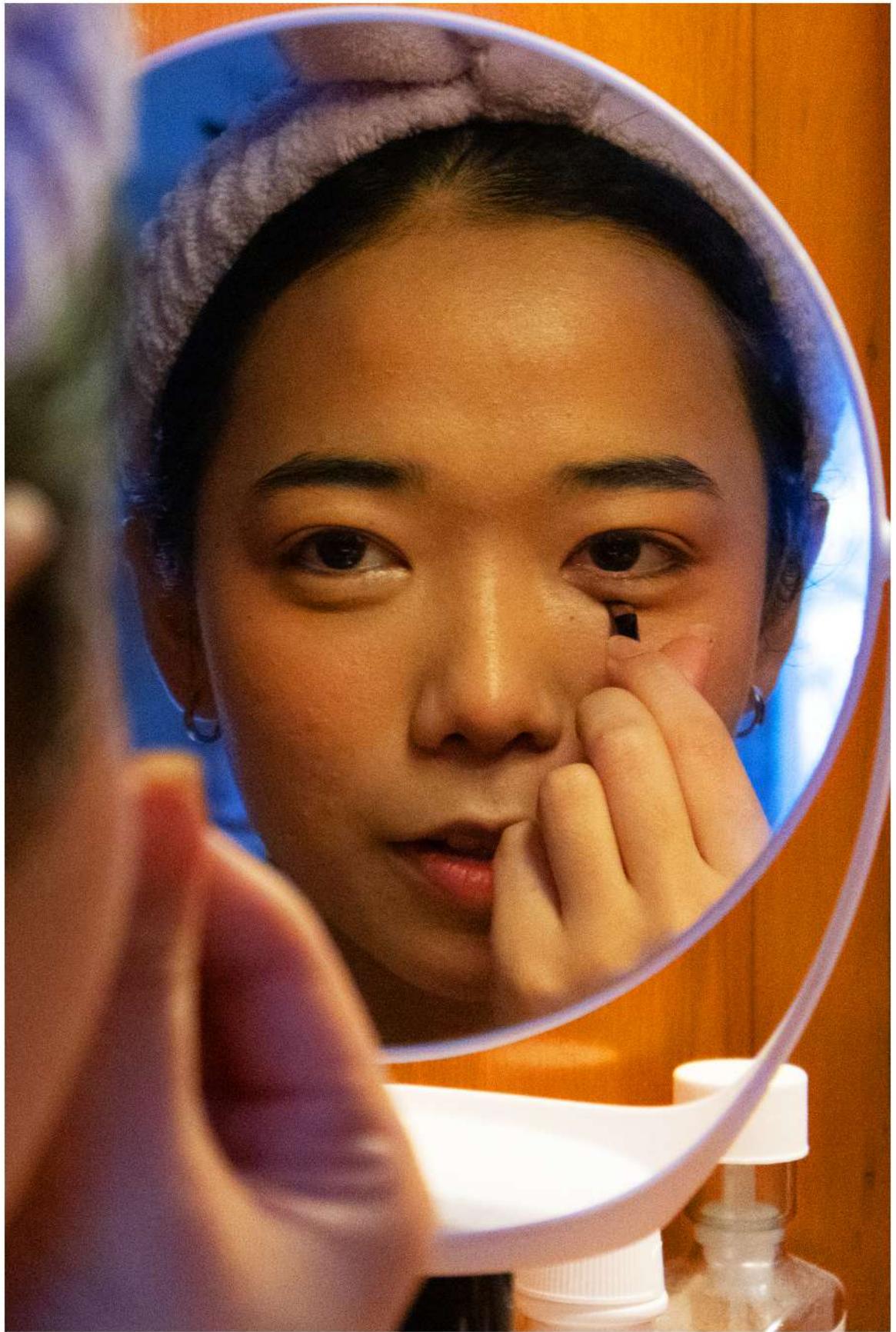
A: I think it has, in ways I didn't notice at first. In Ethiopian culture, there's a specific style—heavy eyeliner and darker lips. I didn't do that at first, but as I got older, I started leaning into it more. When I want to do a bigger or bolder look, I often find myself doing makeup that resembles that style—and I have more fun with it that way.

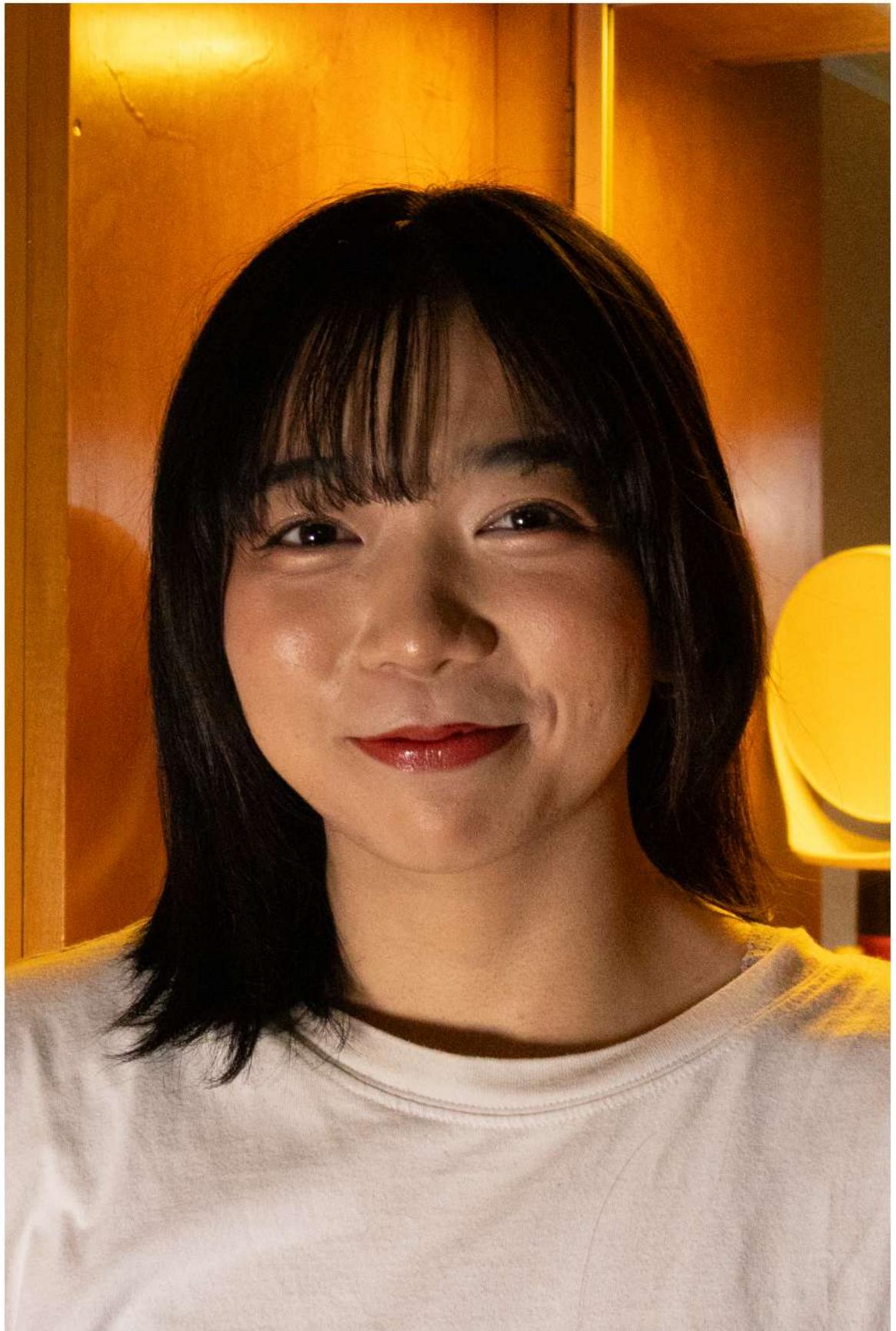
Q: What has makeup taught you about yourself?

A: It's shown me some insecurities, for sure. But it's also reminded me that I still enjoy being creative, even if I don't have time to draw or paint. Makeup became a new way to access that part of myself.

Kamalani Aipa







Q: What's your earliest memory of makeup?

A: I have such a vivid memory. I was probably in elementary school and got into my mom's makeup bag. I made my eyes look like a raccoon—she used dark purple and black eyeshadow. I thought I looked so good. I looked terrifying.

Q: How do you feel with makeup on versus off?

A: Honestly? When I don't wear it, I feel kind of unprepared. I wore a mask today just 'cause I didn't feel "ready."

In Japan, everyone looks so good all the time. That made me more conscious. It definitely changed how I think about myself.

Q: When you wear makeup, do you feel like you're changing yourself or enhancing?

A: I think it's more about enhancing. But sometimes I see a picture and I'm like, "Damn, that's not me." Still, I feel more confident with it on.

Q: What has makeup taught you about yourself?

A: That I'm a little insecure. But also that it's fun now. It used to be stressful 'cause I didn't know what I was doing. Now it's a confidence booster. Like, before a big thing, I'll do my makeup and feel more ready.

Karla Cruz Sanchez







Q: When did you start wearing makeup yourself?

A: Junior or senior year of high school. My little sister started experimenting with makeup around that time, and it became this bonding thing between us. She'd go buy makeup, and I'd buy the same things in my shade. That made it really fun.

Q: What's your favorite part of getting ready?

A: The step-by-step process. It feels like building something—like my face is a canvas. I love watching everything come together.

Q: What role does makeup play in your identity?

A: It's mostly about sisterhood. Makeup is a bonding activity for us. It was a way to teach and be patient with each other. We all wanted to help each other look good without being harsh about it.

Q: Do you enjoy doing makeup?

A: Honestly? I don't really enjoy it for myself. I enjoy it as a way to connect with my sisters. I like that it's artistic—but I mostly do it to build a look, not to go out with it. I don't like the attention it draws. I'm not comfortable with that yet.

Lizzet Solache Salgado







Q: What's your favorite part of getting ready?

A: Just listening to music while I get ready.

Q: How do you feel with makeup on versus without it?

A: Without makeup, I feel tired and exposed. Like, I look very tired, which makes me feel not put together. With it on, I feel more energized—like, if I got up to put makeup on, I probably slept enough.

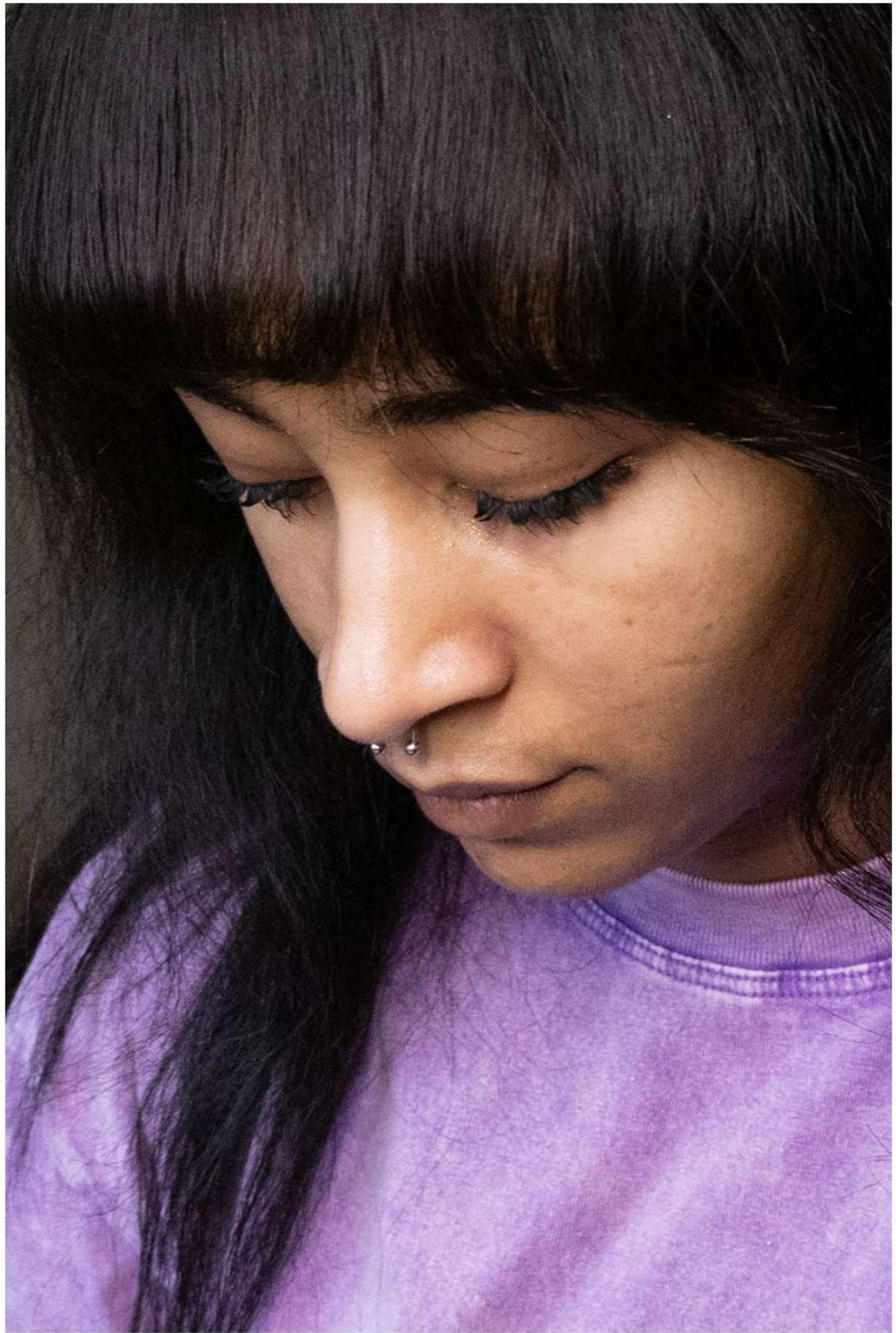
Q: What role does makeup play in your identity?

A: I think it gives a little extra confidence. And that's something I've been lacking, so it helps boost me a bit.

Q: What has makeup taught you about yourself?

A: I'm kind of scared to try new things. I didn't wear makeup as a kid, so it felt like I was doing my middle school makeup phase in college. But I've grown from that. It's been a slow progression.

Grace Bacon







Q: How did you first get into makeup?

A: I liked emo. I was really into the music and culture—and a big part of that was the makeup. Like, the alternative style. That's when I started doing eyeliner and stuff. And then that made me try other things too.

Q: When did you start actually wearing makeup?

A: I would try when I was a preteen, but my mom wouldn't let me wear it out. So I didn't really start until I was a teenager. Even then, I was busy with school, so I didn't get into it much. But during the pandemic, I had nothing but time—that's when I really started doing it for real.

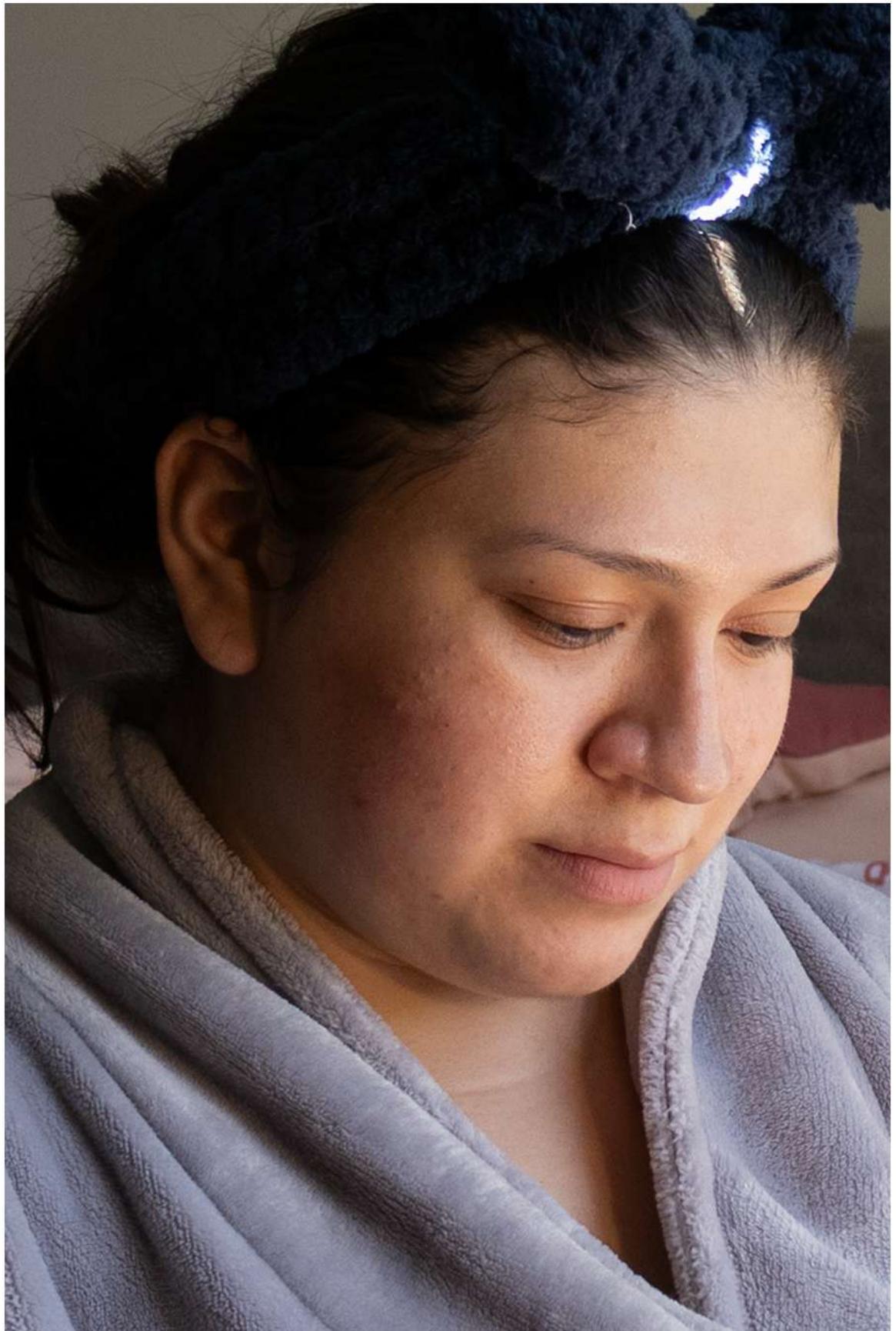
Q: Do you feel like makeup changes you, or reveals something?

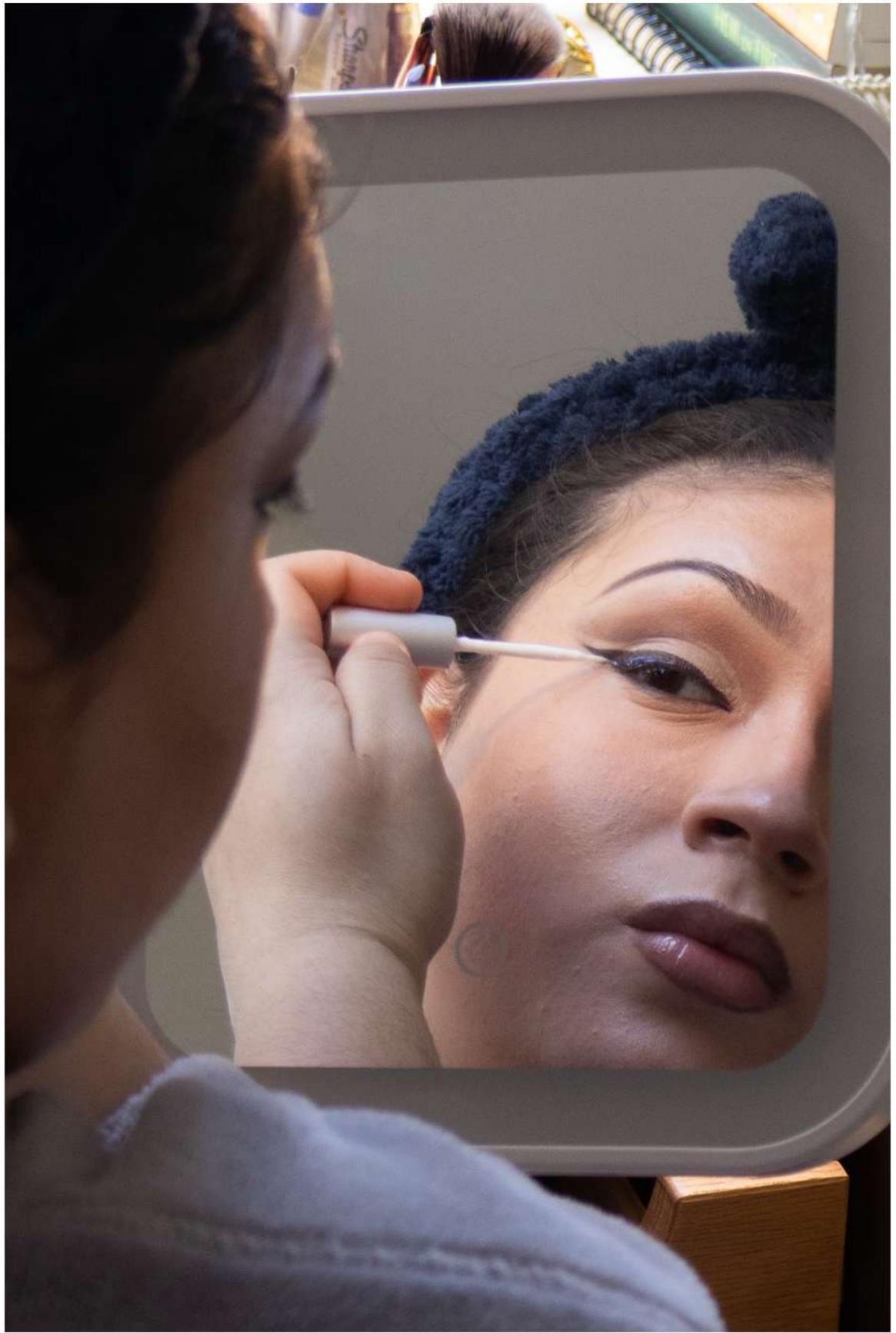
A: I think I'm just showing off—it doesn't change my face that much. It's just a form of self-expression. Especially eyeshadow—that's where I feel the most creative. People don't take makeup seriously because women do it, but I think it's a real form of creativity.

Q: What has makeup taught you about yourself?

A: It's helped me appreciate my face more. Just spending time looking at yourself while getting ready—it creates a closer relationship with yourself. It's not always about learning something new, but appreciating what's already there.

Karina Morales-Pineda







Q: Who first introduced you to makeup? How did you start doing it?

A: I have an older sister who went through a huge makeup phase in middle school—like, 2016 full-glam YouTube era. She'd beg me to let her do my makeup. I was maybe twelve or thirteen, and she'd go all out. I started doing my eyebrows really thick, blocky even, because that's what was in. But now I just love doing my makeup—it feels like mine now.

Q: What's your favorite part of getting ready?

A: Listening to music and taking time for myself. If I'm going out to a party, sometimes getting ready is my favorite part of the night. All the girls are in the room, maybe we're drinking, the playlist is good. It's just such a vibe.

Q: Do you wear makeup differently depending on who you're around?

A: When I got to Carleton, I realized people don't really do full glam. I used to wear lashes and everything to class, but I toned it down. Back home though? People wear full faces just to go to Target, and I love that. This year I started wearing lashes again—now I can't do my makeup without them.

Q: What role does makeup play in your identity?

A: When I'm not feeling good—like mentally—I'll still do my makeup. It helps me feel like myself. I feel really cute and girly, which I love. And when I have a good lip combo? That's so Chicana, like chola vibes. Makeup makes me feel more me.

Acknowledgements

Models

Dani Reynoso
Waadaa Daka
Kamalani Aipa
Karla Cruz Sanchez
Lizzet Solache Salgado
Grace Bacon
Karina Morales-Pineda

Mentor

Xavier Tavera Castro

Assistant

David Toledo

