

# ‘I am not Spending on my Appearance’! Examining Self-Evaluated Low-Level Consumers of Clothing and Beauty Care in Finland, 1999–2009

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to analyse consumers whose identity is not based on appearance-related consumption, but who want distance themselves from consumers willing to spend on physical appearance. The article examines importance of gender, age and place of residence in explaining self-evaluated low-level consumption of beauty care and clothing, and how the proportions of these consumers have changed between socio-demographic groups. The data consists of three cross-sectional consumption and lifestyle surveys collected in 1999 (N = 2 417), 2004 (N = 3 574) and 2009 (N = 1 202). The results suggest that a significant part of Finnish consumers do not consider beauty care or clothing consumption to be a part of their identity. The results indicate some temporal changes in Finnish consumers’ beauty care consumption evaluations. It seems that gender differences have been relatively stable, whereas disparities between consumers of different ages as well as urban and rural consumers have diminished.

**Keywords:** *consumption, clothing, beauty care, Finland.*

## Introduction

In contemporary consumer culture, where a youthful and beautiful body is highly valued, physical appearance has become an especially important part of the self. The body is never considered ready, instead it is seen as having to be constructed and controlled throughout life (Shilling, 2003: 1-6). The body has become a *project* (Giddens, 1991: 7, 99-102; Shilling, 2003), but it also

plays a central role in *performing self* (Goffman, 1971).

In everyday life individuals are increasingly judged on the basis of how they look rather than what they do (Gill *et al.*, 2005; Bakewell *et al.*, 2006). Economists and sociologists, for example, have long recognized the effect of physical attractiveness on career and wage development of employees (e.g. Hamermesh and Biddle, 1994; Mobius and Rosenblat,

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2006). In addition, it has been shown that people are more willing to cooperate with people whom they find physically attractive (e.g. Mulford *et al.*, 1998; Andreoni and Petrie, 2008). Using products offered by beauty care and the fashion industry provides consumers the possibility to access the benefits of being attractive. For example, the beauty care industry has grown from being a modest and moralised industry to an enormous global business. Nowadays, total worldwide beauty care consumption is approximately \$330 billion a year (Jones, 2010: 1-8). Over the past decade, we also have witnessed a rise in spending on beauty care and clothing in Finland (FCTDA, 2007; Statistics Finland, 2009; Sarpila and Räsänen, 2011).

Analysis of contemporary society raises a question concerning the importance of appearance-related consumption. A wide range of contemporary sociological theories have emphasized the importance of consumption in identity-formation (e.g. Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2007; Featherstone, 2007). Consumption is considered to form an essential part of the self through lifestyle choices in postmodern/late modern society, where identity is also bound with the body. In other words, the inextricable intertwining of the body and the self is considered as a feature of *consumer society* (e.g. Featherstone 1991; Jagger 2000).

Considering this, we could expect an increasing amount of consumers to construct their identity through goods

and services related to the body. On the other hand, there are certainly also consumers who want to separate themselves from those consumers willing to spend money on enhancing their physical appearance; consumers, who want to stress that their identity is not based on appearance-related consumption. Who are these consumers and how has their representation in society changed? Finland offers an interesting starting point to this type of analysis, since Finns have traditionally valued modesty instead of the parading of oneself (Ruohonen, 2001: 130–131; Utrio, 2001: 72). Finns, for example, spend less money on beauty care than consumers in many other European countries (FCTDA, 2007).

In this article Finnish consumers' appearance-related consumption is studied from an attitudinal point of view, including clothing consumption and beauty care consumption. The former is considered to represent necessary consumption and the latter luxury consumption. The data are derived from three nationally representative surveys conducted in 1999, 2004 and 2009. We are especially interested in consumers who, according to their own evaluation, spend significantly less than the so-called average consumer on beauty care and clothing. Firstly, the paper asks, what is the importance of gender, age and place of residence in explaining their self-evaluated low-level consumption of beauty care and clothing? Secondly, what are the possible changes in the number of this type of consumer according to gender, age and place of residence?

## Theoretical background

### *Body, identity and sociology of consumption*

The idea behind the link between body, identity and consumption, is not a new one. For example, Thorstein Veblen (1994[1899]) stressed the importance body and consumption related to it as a materialization of social class. For Veblen, clothing consumption represented an easy way to express belonging to a certain class and differentiate oneself from other ones since clothing are constantly on view. Consumption related to appearance has been connected with social class also in a more contemporary social theory. For instance, Bourdieu (1984) sees the body as a bearer of class based taste differences. The body plays a central role in the struggle of distinction between social classes since consumption practices and choices are embodied. For example, body size and shape, but also clothing, tell their own language about one's taste and class position. According to Bourdieu, working class has adopted an 'instrumental relationship to their own bodies' whereas representatives of the middle class are generally more concerned about how the body looks.

By contrast, several sociologist of the so called post-modern or late-modern age, have criticized class-based understanding of consumption and emphasized the importance of identity construction through lifestyle (e.g. Bauman, 1988; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). According such theoretical considerations consumption choices do not signal class position but lifestyle, which can be considered as material

embodiment of one's self identity. Consumption choices are not dictated by basic social structures such as class, but a lifestyle that can be chosen freely. In the media, consumer products are represented in connection with different lifestyles; the consumer's only job is to decide what kind of story he/she wants to tell about him/herself.

Contemporary analysis of late/postmodern society have also paid attention to the role of body and identity. As Featherstone has argued (1991: 189): 'Within consumer culture individuals are asked to become role players and self-consciously monitor their own performance. Appearance, gesture and bodily demeanour become taken as expressions of self, with bodily imperfections and lack of attention carrying penalties in everyday interactions.' For consumers there seems to be no other option but to direct attention to their physical appearance. According to Bauman (2007), in consumer society consumers themselves become commodities. They are expected to have up-to-date knowledge about what is demanded in the market, for example, in respect of the shape and size of the body. Thus, in consumer society the body and its appearance must be modified over and over again according to the 'changing demand'.

The late/postmodern consumption theories have been criticized for diminishing the role of socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, education and place of residence (e.g. Warde, 1994; Wilska, 2002; Räsänen, 2003.) However, it can be claimed that consumption in general, and consumption related to appearance in particular, has different meaning in

relation to one's identity according to certain background variables.

*Gendered patterns of beauty care and clothing consumption*

In sociology, it has been stated that young girls are socialised at an early stage of their life to construct their identity through consumption and particularly through spending on their physical appearance (Russell and Tyler 2002; Cook and Kaiser 2004; Lury 2011). Several studies have shown that there are clear gender differences in appearance-related attitudes. Women are generally more concerned and dissatisfied with their physical appearance than men (e.g. Feingold and Mazzella, 1998; Grogan, 1999; Öberg and Tornstam, 1999), and concern about appearance is considered to encourage appearance-related consumption (Burton *et al.*, 1994; Wan *et al.*, 2001; Eisend and Möller, 2007). Consequently, the examination of appearance-related consumption usually starts from the assumption that spending on appearance-related products and services, such as beauty care and fashion, is very gender-specific. In other words, women have traditionally been perceived as consumers who are especially interested in their looks and who, consequently, are ready to allocate a significant part of their financial resources to enhancing them.

According to previous studies, women are more interested than men in spending time and money on appearance-related consumption. For example, single Finnish females spent over 200 Euros per year more

than single males on personal care services (such as hairdresser services and cosmetician services) in 2006. With regard to personal care products (including such articles as cosmetics, electrical appliances for personal care, shampoos, and body lotions), the difference was nearly 300 Euros (Sarpila and Räsänen, 2011). In addition, it has been shown that male consumers are less fashion conscious and enthusiastic about styles than female consumers (Mitchell and Walsch, 2004; O'Class, 2004; Twigg, 2007). According to a recent study by Berg & Teigen (2009), women are also more interested in keeping themselves informed about clothing and shoe prices and qualities than men are. Regarding appearance-related consumer products in general, Dittmar *et al.* (1995) have reported that female consumers tend to impulsively spend on products related to appearance, while male consumers tend to include instrumental and leisure goods as impulse purchases. According to Burton *et al.*'s (1994) study on gender differences in appearance-related consumption attitudes, women are more concerned about their clothing and beauty care and adopt a more positive attitude towards plastic surgery, which can be considered one of the most extreme forms of consumption related to appearance.

However, during recent decades, research interest in men and consumption and, in particular, men and appearance-related consumption has increased. It has been widely accepted that men are nowadays increasingly participating in the beauty and grooming-related areas of consumption (e.g. Edwards, 2000: 135–137; Gill

*et al.*, 2005; Jones, 2010). Men's growing interest in these consumption categories, and appearance in general, has been explained by several factors including men's lifestyle magazines and the impact of the media in general, gay liberation, the usage of sportsmen as models and an expanding service economy (Bakewell *et al.*, 2006). According to Hakim (2010), this increasing appearance-related consumption among men is explained by the requirement for so-called erotic capital, which men nowadays need to develop in order to succeed in mating markets.

Nevertheless, it can be claimed that a significant part of male consumers still adopt a sceptical or reluctant attitude towards appearance-related consumption, and gender differences can be quite stable. Recent research suggests that differences in spending on personal care are not diminishing among single males and females (Sarpila and Räsänen, 2011). Vanity and narcissism are generally considered as undesirable features, which men tend to avoid when looking after their looks (e.g. Gill *et al.*, 2005; Twigg, 2007). Thus, for example, the usage of grooming products is often justified by men with reference to practical or instrumental reasons (e.g. skin health), instead of reasons related to appearance (e.g. skin looks better, younger) (Gill *et al.*, 2005). When it comes to clothing consumption, it can be claimed that buying clothes does not require the same kind of justification, since everybody needs clothes. Thus, there necessarily are no clear differences between male and female consumers' attitudes towards clothing consumption. However, it has

been stated that spending on *fashion*, as distinct from the consumption of clothing, remains female territory (Edwards, 2000: 158; Twigg, 2007).

#### *Appearance-related consumption and age*

In addition to gender, age can also be seen as an important factor affecting appearance-related consumption and consumption attitudes. It has been stated that younger consumers are more likely to construct their identity through appearance-related consumption. Having the right clothes, style, body shape and size are important for them to be able fit in with their peers and, on the other hand, stand out from the crowd (e.g. Wilska, 2002; Frost, 2003; Twigg, 2007). Clothes, beauty care and grooming products are, almost without exception, advertised by young, trim and beautiful bodies that are further modified by computer programs like Photoshop. Younger consumers are especially prone to feeling the pressure to reproduce the bodies presented in the media (e.g. Grogan, 1999; Räsänen and Wilska, 2007). According to Wan *et al.*'s (2001) study, which was based on a large sample, younger consumers tend to have greater interest in clothing and, in general, it has been shown that younger consumers are inclined to adopt a more hedonistic and appearance-oriented consumption style than older consumers (Uusitalo, 1979: 101–103; Wilska, 2002; Räsänen, 2003: 165–167). Furthermore on the household level, younger households also spend more on personal care products than older ones (Sarpila and Räsänen, 2011).

Recently, there has been a lot of discussion about the changing role of older consumers in contemporary consumer society. As Jones *et al.* (2008) have pointed out, those cohorts now entering the later periods of their lives (including the baby-boomers) are, in many ways, in quite a different situation to the cohorts before them. The cohorts getting older now grew up in the middle of significant social and cultural changes concerning work, leisure, family life and consumption. They are able to enjoy longer retirement, a better financial standing and more opportunities for consumption than the older cohorts (Jones *et al.*, 2008: 1, 18–19). They are the representatives of the Third Age, a new social space connected to well-being, leisure and consumption (Twigg, 2007). It has been stated the new older consumers do not want to adopt consumption styles typical for older people but want to actively participate and keep up with contemporary consumer culture. Thus, age differences in consumption might be blurring, since retired people want, in many respects, to spend their money on the same things other consumers do (Gilleard and Higgs, 2005; Jones *et al.*, 2008).

In relation to appearance-related consumption, older consumers currently have more options than earlier generations. According to Twigg (2007), contemporary older people are allowed to look after their looks; they do not have to look old. On the other hand, it seems clear that they are not even supposed to. In Western consumer culture, getting old is almost regarded as if it is a disease, something that has to be fought against (e.g. Öberg and Tornstam, 1999; Gilleard

and Higgs, 2000; Sievin, 2010). As Featherstone has pointed out (1991: 178); ‘The wrinkles, sagging flesh, tendency towards middle-aged spread, hair loss, etc., which accompany ageing should be combated by energetic body maintenance on the part of the individual – with help from the cosmetic, beauty, fitness and leisure industries.’ Thus, it can be argued that not only young but also older consumers feel pressure to look young and beautiful, and that this pressure might have increased during the past 10 years. Older people might be experiencing the importance of appearance-related consumption differently to the way it was experienced a decade ago. However, before turning to the empirical analysis, I will briefly discuss the relationship between place of residence and appearance-related consumption.

#### *Cities as sites of appearance-related consumption*

Firstly, cities are places of consumerism, where a great deal of our daily consumption takes place (e.g. Paterson, 2006; Miles, 2010). According to Jayne (2006: 7), post-modern cities are, above all, cities of consumption, and are defined by it. Secondly, it can be argued that the stylistic display and presentation of the self, by means of appearance, is especially emphasized in urban spaces (Featherstone, 2007: 95). Consumers who walk on the streets and move through different consumption sites are constantly under the gaze of other citizens and surrounded by billboards with stylish, young and beautiful people in them.



According to Featherstone (2007: 75), the whole urban environment has become aestheticized with buildings, different forms of advertisements and fashionable individuals; with their clothes, make-up, hairstyles and so on, forming an aestheticized urban landscape.

It seems clear that the consumption expenditure patterns of people who live in urban areas differ from those consumers living in rural areas. In general, consumption expenditure is significantly higher in cities than in rural areas, and differences have not changed significantly during the past few decades. In addition, the consumption structure varies according to place of residence. In rural areas, everyday consumption expenditure (dwelling and energy, food and transport) consumes a larger portion of total consumption expenditure than it does in urban areas. Thus a smaller proportion is directed towards other more mundane consumption (Honkkila and Okkonen, 2009). When it comes to appearance-related consumption, it has been shown that Finnish consumers living in urban areas clearly spend more on appearance-related and hedonistic consumer goods and services (Räsänen, 2003) and twice as much as those living in rural areas on clothing and footwear (Honkkila and Okkonen, 2009). These dissimilarities in consumption patterns can be considered as reflecting differences in, for example, income level (Honkkila, 2009) and the supply of consumer goods and services. It is clear that the possibilities for spending on clothing, beauty care products and especially beauty care services are significantly better in cities and densely populated

areas than in sparsely populated areas.

On the other hand, a more intensive use of ICT (e.g. Räsänen, 2008; Statistics Finland, 2010) may partly decrease the significance of geographical distances. For example, the dramatic increase in e-commerce gives those consumers not living in the vicinity of the city centre or shopping centres access to a wider range of consumer products, including appearance-related products. Finland is ranked in the top six countries for online shopping in the European Union (Eurostat, 2009), and the popularity of buying on the Internet has risen considerably in Finland during the past decade (Statistics Finland, 2009). According to Statistics Finland (2010), clothes and footwear are among the most popular products on which online consumers spend their money. Also, beauty care products are often bought on the Internet.

Moreover, as far as the impact of place of residence in consumption patterns is concerned, it has to be noted that Finland urbanised relatively late (in 1960s and 1970s) compared to many other European countries. Consequently, urban culture in Finland is a rather new phenomenon. Cities are also, generally speaking, quite small and only in Helsinki does the number of inhabitants exceed half a million (Lehtonen and Mäenpää, 1997: 139–140). Thus, differences in appearance-related consumption attitudes between consumers living in urban/densely populated areas and those in rural areas may not have been that substantial in the first place. Rural consumers may experience the importance of appearance-related consumption in quite a similar way to that of urban consumers.

### Research questions, data and methods

In this study appearance-related consumption is analysed from the point of view of self-evaluated low-level consumers of beauty care and clothing. These consumers, according to their own evaluation, spend significantly less money on the consumption categories in question than the so-called 'average consumer'. Thus, the following two research questions were formulated:

1. What is the importance of gender, age and place of residence when explaining self-evaluated low-level consumption of beauty care and clothing?

2. How has the proportion of low-level consumers of beauty care and clothing changed between 1999 and 2009 according to gender, age and place of residence?

The data employed in this study consists of three cross-sectional consumption and lifestyle survey data collected in 1999, 2004 and 2009. The surveys were conducted by University of Turku. The data were collected via postal questionnaires and the samples were selected from Central Register of Population database by random sampling. In 1999, 2 417 respondents completed the survey (response rate 60 %). In 2004 the number of respondents was 3 574 (response rate 60 %) and in 2009 1 202 (response rate 49 %). The data represent the Finnish speaking 18-74 years old population in Finland (Sarpila *et al.*, 2010).

The evaluations of one's own beauty care consumption and clothing consumption are used as dependent measures. The respondents were asked to evaluate, how much do they

spend on different consumption categories compared to the so called 'average consumer' using a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = spend significantly less, 5 = spend significantly more). This kind of phrasing of questions reflects a respondent's actual consumption expenditure, but above all, gives information about his/her consumer identity; how respondents see themselves as consumers and the kind of picture they want give of themselves as consumers (Räsänen, 2000; Myllyniemi, 2005: 32–33). It can be claimed that changes in the share of low-level consumers of beauty care and clothing not only indicate changes in consumer identities, but also changes in conceptions of what is acceptable consumption. In other words, consumers' attitudes are always more or less affected by what is appropriate and expected (e.g. Wilska, 2002; Haanpää, 2007). Furthermore, according to Wilska (2002), it is often typical for Finns to underestimate their consumption.

In the analysis, those respondents who thought that they spend significantly less on beauty care than the imaginary average consumer are considered low-level consumers of beauty care/clothing (= 1) and are compared to the other respondents (=0). The dichotomisations are justified, since a significant part of Finnish consumers consider their spending on the examined items to be clearly below average and the variables were not normally distributed.

Independent variables include gender, age and place of residence. Income is also included in the analysis, since it probably affects consumption evaluations. To keep one's appearance



up to date requires money, since fashion changes constantly and new appearance-related products and services are constantly placed on the market (Grogan, 1999: 141).

Age is categorised into four groups: 18-30, 31-45, 46-60, and 61-74 year olds. These groups can be considered as reflecting an approximate classification of the distinguishable phases in the lives of adults. Place of residence is variable and contains two categories: urban/densely populated and rural. The categorisation is based on the respondents' subjective evaluation of their residential area. Income is measured as a household's total net income and information based on the respondents' self-assessment. To make incomes of different sized households comparable, the income variable is calculated by using the OECD equivalent scale, where the first adult in the household receives a weight of 1.0, the next adults receive a weight of 0.7, and each child under 17 year of age receives a weight of 0.5 (Statistics Finland, 2011).

The empirical part of this article begins with a descriptive analysis. In addition, the data is analysed by using logistic regression analysis. Logistic regression is a method of analysis that can be used when the dependent variable is a categorical variable with two categories. The purpose of regression analysis is to predict group membership, which, in this case, is the likelihood of being a low-level consumer of beauty care or clothing. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of odds ratios,  $\exp \beta$ .  $\exp \beta$  is the indicator of the change in odds resulting from a one unit increase or decrease in the independent variable

(Tabachnik and Fidell, 2001: 517–581). The model fit is indicated by chi square statistics ( $\chi^2$ ) and p-values. In addition, the pseudo-coefficients of determination (Nagelkerke pseudo  $R^2$ ) of each model are reported.

## Results

### *Descriptive analysis*

First, in Table 1 we present the shares of low-level consumers in different consumption categories. If we consider that clothing consumption is, at least to some extent, necessary consumption along with food and housing, we can see that the share of self-evaluated low-level consumers is significantly higher in clothing (24 %) than in other consumption categories traditionally considered as need-based. With regards to beauty care consumption, table shows that the share of low-level consumers is bigger than in any other consumption category except for alcohol. In both categories the proportion is 40 %.

Table 2 displays the proportion of those respondents who consider that they spent significantly less on 1) beauty care and 2) clothing in 1999, 2004 and 2009 in comparison to the so called average consumer. The table gives the proportions according to gender, age and place of residence.

As Table 2 shows, the shares of low-level beauty care consumers or clothing consumers among all Finnish consumers have not changed during the last ten years. Approximately two out of five 18-74 years old consumers in Finland evaluate their spending on beauty care to be clearly below

**Table 1:** *Proportion of self-evaluated low-level consumers in different consumption categories in 2009*

Food, eating	7 %
Housing	7 %
Health	14 %
Clothing	23 %
Communications	16 %
Household decoration	35 %
Traffic	21 %
Home entertainment electronics	27 %
Leisure travel	25 %
Alcohol	40 %
Entertainment, social life	24 %
Exercising	16 %
Culture	30 %
Beauty care	40 %

N = 1 202

**Table 2:** *Proportion of self-evaluated low-level consumers of beauty care and clothing according to gender, age and place of residence in 1999, 2004 and 2009*

	Beauty care			Clothing		
	1999 N = 2340	2004 N = 3514	2009 N = 1202	1999 N = 2340	2004 N = 3514	2009 N = 1202
<b>All</b>	39 %	41 %	41 %	24 %	22 %	24 %
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	54 %	59 %	54 %	24 %	22 %	25 %
Female	29 %	29 %	27 %	23 %	22 %	21 %
<b>Age</b>						
61-74 years	59 %	59 %	51 %	31 %	29 %	26 %
46-60 years	44 %	42 %	43 %	26 %	24 %	25 %
31-45 years	35 %	36 %	32 %	24 %	18 %	19 %
18-30 years	26 %	28 %	34 %	15 %	13 %	22 %
<b>Place of residence</b>						
Rural	54 %	48 %	46 %	30 %	26 %	25 %
Urban/ densely populated	35 %	39 %	39 %	22 %	20 %	22 %

the average. However, with regard to changes according to gender, age and place of residence the shares of low-level consumers of beauty care seem to fluctuate more within the period examined. Over 50 per cent of Finnish male consumers report that their spending on beauty care is clearly below the average, whereas the proportion of these kinds of consumers among Finnish female consumers is clearly smaller, from 27 to 29 per cent. In 2004 the share of low-level beauty care consumers among Finnish men was slightly bigger than in 1999 and 2009. However, the data suggests no dramatic changes in Finnish male and female consumers' evaluations concerning beauty care.

There are evident differences in beauty care consumption evaluations between consumers of different ages: the older the age group, the bigger the proportion of low-level beauty care consumers. Nevertheless, it seems that the share of consumers who consider that they spend significantly less than average on beauty care has changed in some of the age groups. In 1999 and 2004, 59 per cent of the 61-74 years old Finnish consumers evaluated their spending on beauty care to be clearly below the average, whereas in 2009 the share of this kind of consumer was 51 per cent. In contrast, among the youngest age groups the share of low-level beauty care consumers seems to have increased. In 1999 every fourth, but in 2009 every third 18-30 year-old consumer can be considered a low-level consumer of beauty care on the basis on their self-evaluated consumption.

Regarding differences between consumers living in rural areas and consumers living in urban/densely

populated areas, it appears that the proportion of low-level beauty care consumers is clearly smaller among urban consumers than among those consumers who live outside urban/densely populated areas. However, differences between the two places of residence categories were significantly smaller in 2009 (urban 39 %, rural 46 %) compared to 1999 (urban 35 %, rural 54 %).

As far as clothing consumption is concerned, the share of low-level consumers is clearly smaller than the share of low-level beauty care consumers. Nevertheless, approximately every fourth 18-74 years old consumer in Finland believes they spend significantly less on clothing than the average consumer.

With regard to gender and clothing, there are no clear differences between female and male consumers. This applies to all the years of research. On the contrary, age seems to make a difference. Especially in 1999 and 2004 the proportion of low-level consumers of clothing was higher among the oldest group rather than among the youngest age group. However, in 2009, there seems to be no clear differences between the age groups. As Table 2 shows, the trend is somewhat similar in the case of the differences between consumers living in rural areas and consumers living in urban/densely populated areas. In essence, the difference between two places of residence seems to have diminished from 1999 to 2009. Nevertheless, the change in the share of low-level clothing consumers has not been as clear as the change in the proportion of low-level consumers of beauty care.

*Explanatory analysis*

To study the effects of gender, age and place of residence in more detail, the data were analysed by using logistic regression analysis. In Table 3, logistic regression models are employed by utilising combined data sets from

1999, 2004 and 2009 (N=7056). The analysis consists of two parts. Firstly, the table presents the unadjusted main effects of each independent variable. Secondly, the effects of other independent variables are tested by entering all variables into the same logistic regression model.

**Table 3:** Low-level consumption of beauty care and clothing by independent variables, logistic regression models

Main effects	N	Beauty care		Clothing	
		Unadjusted effects, exp $\beta$	Adjusted effects, exp $\beta$	Unadjusted effects, exp $\beta$	Adjusted effects, exp $\beta$
<b>Gender, <math>\chi^2</math></b>		546.4***	507.4***	1.0 (ns)	2.9 (ns)
Male	3134	3.2***	3.6***		
Female	4233	1	1		
<b>Age, <math>\chi^2</math></b>		290.2***	230.5***	91.6***	77.8***
61-74 years	1592	3.4***	3.6***	2.3***	2.2***
46-60 years	1827	1.9***	2.3***	1.8***	2.1***
31-45 years	2298	1.3***	1.5***	1.4***	1.5***
18-30 years	1572	1	1	1	1
<b>Place of residence, <math>\chi^2</math></b>		79.9***	14.7***	29.5***	1.6 (ns)
Rural	5524	1.7***	1.3***	1.4***	
Urban/densely populated	1713	1	1	1	
<b>Income, <math>\chi^2</math></b>		144.1***	224.0***	225.7***	224.7***
I	1635	2.3***	3.5***	3.7***	4.4***
II	1584	1.8***	2.2***	2.3***	2.4***
III	1676	1.4***	1.7***	1.7***	1.7***
IV	1597	1	1	1	1
$\chi^2$			936.7***		305.6***
df			8		8
Pseudo $R^2$			0.20		0.08

Significance levels: † p<0.10; \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001, ns = not significant.

The unadjusted main effects indicate that gender, age, place of residence and income all show a statistically significant association with the self-evaluated low-level consumption of beauty care. The effect of gender seems to be the strongest effect and the effect of place of residence the weakest. The unadjusted effects show that male consumers are clearly more likely than female consumers to consider their spending on beauty care to be clearly below the average. Analyses also confirm that there are significant differences in the odds of being a low-level consumer of beauty care between the different age groups as well as different places of residence. In addition, household income, which is used as a control variable here, is a strong predictor of low-level beauty care consumption: the lower the income, the higher the odds of a person being a low-level beauty care consumer.

When all variables are added to the same model, all the effects remain significant. However, the differences in self-evaluated beauty care consumption between consumers living in urban/densely populated areas and consumers living in rural areas seem to be especially smaller when gender, age and income are included in the same model. This is probably due the fact that, on average, people living in rural areas are older and have a smaller income compared to those living in urban/densely populated areas (e.g. Honkkila, 2009). Here, it can be stated that gender and age show an especially clear association with a self-evaluated low-level consumption of beauty care. There are also some differences between different places

of residence. However, differences are not so evident when we cater for the impact of gender, age and income.

With regard to the clothing variable the results are somewhat different. Gender has no impact on the likelihood of being a low-level consumer of beauty care. However, age, place of residence and income are significantly associated with self-evaluated low-level clothing consumption. The 18-30 years old respondents are least likely to consider themselves as spending significantly less than average on clothing. The relationship between place of residence and self-evaluated clothing consumption is similar to that of beauty care consumption; consumers living in rural areas are more likely to be low-level clothing consumers than those consumers living in urban/densely populated areas. Nevertheless, after taking into account the impact of gender, age and income, there is no significant association between place of residence and the clothing variable. Thus, only age and income show a statistically significant association with the self-evaluated consumption of beauty care. In summary, the four independent variables seem to be more strongly connected with low-level beauty care consumption than with low-level clothing consumption.

The significance of the changes in the low-level consumption of beauty care and clothing is analysed in Table 4, which presents the two way interactions between gender and year of research, age and year of research as well as place of residence and year of research. It shows that differences in self-evaluated beauty care consumption between male and female consumers have been quite stable

during the last ten years. However, regarding age, it seems that there have been some slight changes in beauty care consumption evaluations within the different age groups. Moreover, the interaction analysis indicates that the differences between consumers living

in urban/densely populated areas and consumers living in rural areas have changed during the last decade. However, for clothing consumption there seem to be no significant change between 1999 and 2009.

**Table 4:** Two-way interactions, logistic regression models with chi square coefficients ( $\chi^2$ )

	Beauty care	Clothing
Gender*year, $\chi^2$	2.9 (ns)	1.4 (ns)
Age*year, $\chi^2$	11.5†	10.2 (ns)
Place of residence*year, $\chi^2$	11.7**	0.6 (ns)

Significance levels: †  $p < 0.10$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , ns = not significant.

Although the shares of low-level beauty care consumers seem to have changed to some extent, it cannot be said whether or not this reflects some kind of cohort effect. In order to be able to evaluate the possible cohort effects, a pseudo-cohort analysis (see e.g. Jones *et al.*, 2008: 72–75) was conducted by examining the possible fluctuations in low-level beauty care consumers among the oldest age group (cohorts born in 1935–39, 1940–44, 1945–49) and younger ones (cohorts born in 1977–81, 1972–1976). However, the analysis (not shown here) shows no clear cohort effect, though attitudes seem to change according to time and age.

## Conclusions

During the past few decades there has been a lot of discussion concerning the importance of body and appearance in the present consumer society. On the

basis of contemporary sociological perspectives, we could expect an increasing amount of people to construct their identity through appearance-related consumption and the share of consumer willing to stand apart from these type of consumers to decrease. However, these considerations do not pay much attention to the role of socio-demographic factors and assume that the changes have been similar in every population group. In this article, appearance-related consumption was studied by analysing the self-evaluated low-level consumption of beauty care and clothing according to four key socio-demographic variables. The data utilised in this study consisted of three nationally representative postal surveys conducted in Finland in 1999, 2004 and 2009.

Contrary to the late/postmodern interpretations of consumption, body and identity, not all consumers, even in such an affluent consumer society as Finland, want to construct their



identity through appearance-related consumption. Or at least they do not think they do. Instead, a considerable share of consumers are either willing or ought to due to financial reasons, to emphasize that certain consumption categories are not a significant part of who they are. The proportions of the self-evaluated low-level consumers are substantial, especially with regards to clothing consumption as a form of partly need-based consumption and beauty care consumption more generally. The shares of low-level consumers in both consumption categories have been quite stable over the past ten years.

Nevertheless, as the findings of this study show, the proportion of the so-called low-level consumers of beauty care and clothing varies significantly according to socio-demographic background. This is especially true in the case of beauty care consumption; gender and age are strongly associated with the self-evaluated low-level consumption of beauty care. In addition, there are differences between different places of residence and income quartiles. As expected, men are clearly more likely than women to consider their spending on beauty care to be significantly below the average. This is in line with the results concerning consumption expenditure differences between male and female consumers (Sarpila and Räsänen, 2011). It could be claimed that men, and especially Finnish men, do not easily adopt beauty care as part of their consumer identity. Being a low- or even non-consumer of beauty care, or at least presenting that image, is probably the easiest option for male consumers (Gill *et al.*, 2005; Twigg, 2007). Based on the results, gender

differences have not diminished either over the last ten years. This contradicts the theories (e.g. Edwards, 2000: 135–137; Gill *et al.*, 2005) which claim male consumers' appearance-related consumption habits would have become more similar to those of female consumers, and appearance-related consumption a more natural part of the male consumers' identity. Regarding clothing consumption, gender was not associated with the self-evaluated low-level consumption of clothing.

The likelihood of being a low-level consumer of beauty care or clothing is considerably higher among older rather than younger consumers. Therefore, the results regarding age lend support to the arguments put forth in several previous studies, in which body, appearance and consumption related to it are particularly important to the identity of younger consumers (e.g. Wilska, 2002; Frost, 2003; Räsänen and Wilska, 2007).

However, the significance of age seems to be changing. The results regarding beauty care consumption support the previously presented arguments concerning older age and consumption (Jones *et al.*, 2008). It is possible that those consumers currently entering the older cohort groups have adopted a more approving attitude towards beauty care than previous consumers in those cohorts did. In addition, they may also feel the pressure to look after their looks in a society where youthful and beautiful appearance is highly valued. On the other hand, the findings also indicate that the share of self-evaluated low-level consumers among the youngest age group has increased during the last ten years. There certainly are

young consumers to whom physical appearance is important but who are not interested in spending money on it. However, they might be ready to use a considerable amount of time in looking for personal clothing from flea market or preparing their purposely made messy hairstyle before leaving the house. The number of these types of young consumers might be increasing, for example, as a counter-reaction to anxieties caused by public discussion about the importance of physical appearance and consumption related to it. However, it must be noted that the changes over time are relatively small.

The findings also indicate the differences between consumers living in urban/densely populated areas and consumers living in rural areas are not that clear, at least in Finland where cities are relatively small and city culture is young. When it comes to beauty care, it was found that differences between rural and urban consumers have clearly diminished during the last decade. We may assume that media and

information technology decreases the importance of geographical distances, as information about the latest beauty care products is accessible to all and the products themselves are more easily available due to online stores.

The examining of the self-evaluated consumption of beauty care and consumption offers one perspective on changes concerning appearance-related consumption. Furthermore, this study relied on quantitative survey data from one country. It seems clear that more nationally representative research, as well as internationally comparative research on appearance-related consumption attitudes and consumption practices, is needed.

Qualitative approach could provide more detailed information about appearance-related consumption as a part of consumers' identity. In addition, more multi-faceted measures of appearance-related consumption and more comprehensive comparisons should be encouraged.

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