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BEAUTY FOR SALE

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF APPEARANCE-RELATED
CONSUMPTION IN FINLAND

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ABSTRACT

This study examines appearance-related consumption in Finland. The theoretical portion discusses appearance-related consumption, on one hand from a consumer culture perspective, as both a possibility and responsibility for everyone; and on the other hand, from the point of view of behaviour and attitudes associated with socio-demographic and lifestyle-related factors. The empirical part of the study concentrates on the following aspects: 1) Finns' appearance-related consumption patterns, attitudes towards appearance-related consumption and attending to one's looks through consumption, as well as general changes in consumption patterns and attitudes; 2) gender differences in attitudes and consumption patterns, and their possible changes over time, and; 3) other differences among population groups in attitudes and consumption patterns, and their possible changes over time. The following dissertation utilises data from seven different nationally representative surveys. Data include Finnish Household Budget surveys from 1998 (N=4 359), 2001 (N=5 495) and 2006 (N=4 007), as well as, The Everyday Life and Well-being Survey (N=908) collected in 2011, and Finland 1999 (N=2 417), Finland 2004 (N=3 574) and Finland 2009 (N=1 202) surveys. The study indicates that Finns' relationship to appearance-related consumption is, generally, somewhat inconsistent. In Finland, a significant share of a household's total spending, around the EU average, is allocated to products and services related to appearance. In addition, at an attitudinal level, physical appearance is important to most Finnish consumers. However, in many respects, these attitudes reflect a certain reservation towards appearance-related consumption practices. The number of those consumers who see themselves as truly dedicated to attending to their looks through consumption is quite small, whereas the amount of those willing to take a reserved or even negative attitude towards appearance-related consumption is clearly higher. Attitudes towards attending to one's looks and the importance of appearance-related consumption had not changed during the past decade. Study shows that at present, appearance-related consumption is a form of consumption that is particularly important to women, younger consumers, people with middle or higher income, and those with normal weight. Gender is in the key role when explaining appearance-related consumption and contrary to common belief, gender differences seem to have stayed quite stable. The results also indicate that, to some extent, differences between younger and older age groups might be diminishing.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Clothing, footwear, handbags, jewellery, watches, scarves, hats, belts, make-up products, creams, lotions, shampoos, hairsprays, hair gels, hairdryers, curlers, brushes, hair pins, nail files, shaving equipment...the list of items that can be used to attend to physical appearance is never ending. In addition, consumers are offered services from hairdressing to plastic surgery to modify their looks. Even a single detail of the body can be taken care of in numerous ways: eyelashes, for example, can be made more visible with mascara, coloured with more permanent colour, curled in different ways, extended with a serum, replaced with fake lashes, etc. It has been estimated that on a global level, the total investment in appearance exceeds \$200 billion a year (Rhode, 2010: 2). According to the latest Finnish household budget survey, approximately 7 per cent of total household consumption was devoted to clothing, footwear, jewellery, watches and personal care.

Obviously, consumers do not only invest money, but also a lot of time on their appearance. On average, Finnish women spend 40 minutes, while Finnish men spend 25 minutes a day washing and dressing themselves (Statistics Finland, 2009b). People also wander around department stores, shopping centres and boutiques, and surf the Internet to find the "right" kind of clothing and "right" kinds of grooming products, which they think they are lacking. Many people also spend hours exercising. Although all the sweating and huffing and puffing are evidently good for one's health, it also helps one to stay physically fit and looking attractive. And how much time is devoted to just *thinking* about how we look or what we could do to look better? At the time of writing this, a Google search, for example, for "How to get a beautiful body" returned nearly 700 billion hits in 0.31 seconds.

As we know, we selves are not the only ones paying attention to our looks. Other peoples do that as well. When an unknown person walks into the room, other people easily start to sum up what they can see: gender, age, hints about social status and so on. Physical appearance is always present; it can never be escaped. Thus, in the presence of other people there is always a possibility of being judged based on looks. This makes physical appearance a further source of inequality and social stratification.

Several studies have shown that the way one looks is associated with what one can achieve, both in private and working life (e.g. Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Moebius & Rosenblat, 2006; Andreoni & Petrie, 2008; Härkönen et al., 2011; Jæger, 2011). It has even been proposed that physical appearance should be treated as an asset (cf. Bourdieu, 1984). Hakim, writing about *erotic capital*, argues that attractive-

ness plays an extremely crucial role in everyday life. "Attractive people draw others to them, as friends, lovers, colleagues, clients, fans, followers, voters, supporters and sponsors" (Hakim, 2011: 2). Thus, erotic capital can produce the same advantages as having money, an education and knowing the "right" people (Hakim, 2010; 2011).

Appearance-related consumption can be seen as offering one way of enhancing physical appearance and gaining the benefits that this enhancement brings about (e.g. Holliday & Cairnie, 2007; Jones, 2010; Hakim 2010; 2011). This is obviously something that people are encouraged to do in consumer culture: to constantly evaluate, modify, and control their physical appearance. Several sociologists have emphasised that in consumer culture, the whole body and the self are inextricably intertwined (e.g. Featherstone, 1982; Jagger, 2000; Bauman, 2007). Following this, it can be claimed that consumers are not only encouraged, but also expected to consume all possible appearance-related goods and services, show constant interest in the new ones, and, in doing so, express who they are. As Featherstone (2007: xxi) argues:

"The body is presented as the central vehicle to the consumer culture good life: the source of pleasurable sensations which must be looked after (maintained, repaired and improved). Yet, the body is also understood in terms of its image as the visible indicator of the self, hence the attention given to 'the look' (presentation, grooming, style)."

However, it seems reasonable to argue that not all people experience consumer culture in the same way, although the idea of consumer culture is that people are all consumers with the same rights and responsibilities. Moreover, despite the evidence to the contrary, there are no gender, age or class based disparities according to the idea of the consumer culture (Bauman, 2007: 55–56). From an empirical perspective, however, the situation is quite different.

This dissertation takes a sociological perspective on consumption. Although economic sociology and the sociology of consumption have been viewed as different fields of sociology and developed independently (Swedberg, 2003: 249), this dissertation, nevertheless, concerns both of them. In economic sociology, economic behaviour is considered to be socially embedded; social relations and, social institutions in particular, are regarded as crucial in understanding economic action (e.g. Swedberg, 2003; Smelser & Swedberg, 2005; Hass, 2007). People are assumed to conduct economic actions according to certain scripts that are connected with social roles (Dobbin, 2004; Hass, 2007). As the role of culture, self-expression, identity construction and the reproduction of the social structure in consumption are recognised (aspects of consumption often dealt in sociology of consumption (cf. Zelizer, 2005)), this dissertation also emphasises the meaning of social relations and institutions in understanding consumption.

This study examines appearance-related consumption in Finland from different aspects. The empirical portion of the study concentrates on the following aspects: 1)

Finns' appearance-related consumption patterns, attitudes towards appearance-related consumption and attending to one's looks through consumption, and general changes in consumption patterns and attitudes; 2) gender differences in attitudes and consumption patterns, and possible changes in these differences and; 3) other differences among population groups in attitudes and consumption patterns, and possible changes in these differences. Two of the four articles presented in this dissertation concentrate on looking at these phenomena from the perspective of personal consumption, whilst the other two look at household consumption and purchases made for a partner/spouse. The precise research questions are presented and discussed in chapter 3. The methodological approach taken in this dissertation is quantitative.

The study concentrates on consumption that can be considered to represent typical and even traditional forms of appearance-related consumption through which people look after their appearance: clothing and footwear, personal care products and services, jewellery and watches. Thus, the main focus lies on the kind of products and services that are purchased on a more or less regular basis and can be studied from different perspectives, and using population level data: as consumption expenditure, at the attitudinal level and in relation to buying frequency. In addition, the modes of consumption covered in the dissertation can be considered to embody consumption through which people construct themselves and present themselves to the world on a daily basis, although motives and the meaning of consumption may certainly vary. Compared to actual body modification practices (i.e. fitness training, body building, tattooing, piercing, plastic surgery) through which the physical appearance and body form are being modified more permanently (Featherstone, 1999), the modes of consumption covered in this dissertation can be considered more decorative and related to grooming of the body and physical appearance. Plastic surgery is discussed briefly, but as noted above, attention is primarily focused on more mundane forms of appearance-related consumption. These practices also offer an easy way to change and transform oneself, which is central in contemporary consumer culture (Featherstone, 2010).

Four research articles and an introductory section comprise this dissertation. The following introduction contains six chapters. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical background of the study. The first section of the chapter looks at different perspectives through which appearance-related consumption and its importance may be viewed. Firstly, the chapter discusses the role of body and identity in relation to consumer culture. Secondly, it considers the meaning of media and visual culture in explaining people's interest in physical appearance and spending on physical appearance. Thirdly, the chapter reviews appearance-related consumption in relation to possible benefits that this type of behaviour may have. Finally, the chapter discusses the phenomenon from a Finnish perspective. The second section of this chapter focuses on socio-demographic differences. This section discusses the meaning of

gender and other relevant background variables in examining consumption related to appearance. Chapter 3 presents the research questions addressed in this dissertation and chapter 4, the data. Chapter 5 summarises the main findings of the four research articles, whilst the final chapter is dedicated to discussion and conclusions.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Academic and public interest in physical appearance, and the body more generally, has increased rapidly over the last few decades. However, it should be pointed out that the phenomenon is obviously not new: people through the ages have attended to their looks. For example, in ancient Egyptian, Roman and Greek cultures, and somewhat later in Arabic lands, Europe, and China, people used cosmetics and other products to make themselves look more attractive (Turner, 2008; Jones, 2010). Along with the civilising process, people became more aware of their bodies and body consciousness thus increased (Elias, 2000[1939]).

In sociology, appearance-related consumption is not a new phenomenon either; some of the classics in (economic) sociology have dealt with this type of consumption. Weber (1978[1922]), for example, connected consumption with status groups. According to the theory, different consumer goods represent different 'styles of life', which are linked to status groups. Thus, modes of dress, for example, can be used to express one's social standing (Weber, 1978[1922]: 305–307, 926–937). For Simmel (2005[1895]), social distinctions were related to fashion. Although Simmel talked about fashion in general, many of his examples referred to clothing fashion. Simmel saw that by means of clothing it is possible to identify with a particular class and at the same time distinguish oneself from the lower classes (Simmel, 2005[1895]: 100–111). Whereas Weber and Simmel only slightly touched upon appearance-related consumption, Veblen (1994[1899]) dedicated a whole chapter to dress in his classic satire *The theory of the leisure class*. Further, Veblen saw clothing consumption as an easy way to express one's wealth and status, because clothing is constantly on view. Expensive clothes and clothing not suitable for working represent the ideal of *conspicuous consumption*. Through conspicuous consumption (i.e. wasteful, luxurious consumption) people can attain social honour (Veblen, 1994[1899]).

In late- or postmodern sociology, the role of appearance-related consumption is considered somewhat different. Attending to one's body and its exterior is nowadays seen as more of a form individual expression and the construction of identity, than something directly related to social class. At a general level, the consumer culture, and the media play a significant part in the fact that they privilege good looks and therefore can be seen as driving forces for consumption related to appearance. We may ask, however, if consumer culture and appearance-related consumption are similar for all?

2.1 Appearance-related consumption in consumer culture

2.1.1 *Consumption, body and identity*

Consumption is one of our basic daily activities. In a consumer society, it is impossible to spend a day without consuming something. Traditionally, consumption has been defined in relation to production, as action that follows after production and exchange. In the sociological understanding of consumption, consumption *per se* is considered meaningful, although it is clear that there is no consumption without production and exchange. Simply put, consumption means using things up: for example, wearing a piece of clothing, putting on lipstick, reading a fashion magazine, eating a chocolate bar, etc. People use commodities to meet their needs, wants and desires, and they usually purchase these items and make them their property. In addition to using, consumption also refers to the verb “to destroy” (e.g. Edwards, 2000: 10–11; Bauman, 2005: 23). Destroying makes sense, particularly in relation to food consumption: the chocolate bar literally ceases to exist after eating it. Nonetheless, things can also be destroyed at a mental level or be discarded (Wilk, 2004: 14–19; Bauman, 2005: 23). For example, we may still have a pullover we bought a couple years ago hidden in our closet, but we do not use it to meet our needs or desires. Physically the pullover still exists, but as a consumer good, it does not serve us anymore. In a wider sense, however, consumption does not only refer to using and destroying, for instance, shopping for consumer goods (and even shopping around) can also be considered to form a part of the continuum of the consumption process (Falk & Campbell, 1997; Wilk, 2004; Lury, 2011: 43–45). Going even further, not only acquisition but also desiring to acquire commodities may be seen as consumption (e.g. Campbell, 1987; Campbell, 2004).

Although it is easier to define consumption in relation to goods, consumption is also equally about services. In the sociological understanding of consumption, consumption of commodities is considered to be used to serve different personal and social purposes. By means of consumption, people simultaneously express belonging to certain groups, as they distinguish themselves from others. Consumption, and lifestyle choices more generally speaking, are seen not only as telling a story about who one is to other people, but it also reinforces one’s understanding about the self or even helps the person to become the kind of person he or she wants to be (e.g. Campbell, 2004; Sassatelli, 2012).

And what defines *consumer culture* then? In 1970’s Jean Baudrillard, a French social theorist, already argued that the U.S. had become a *consumer culture* (Baudrillard, 1998[1970]). After that declaration, *consumer culture*, *consumer society* and *consumerism* has been dealt with by several sociologists. All terms can be considered to refer to the

same phenomenon: consumption playing an increasingly important role in everyday life, specifically in relation to production (e.g. Ritzer & Slater, 2001; Sassatelli, 2007; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Naturally, there are differences between the theorists in relation to what they have seen as central features of consumer culture. Lately it has also been argued that consumer culture or society should actually been seen as a *prosumer society*, where production and consumption intertwine with each other and are equally important (for more details, see Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

Consumer culture can be seen as a means of defining individuals, as well as the society as a whole. In several writings, consumer culture is considered as a feature of late- or postmodern society (e.g. Ritzer & Slater, 2001; Bauman, 2005; Featherstone, 2007; Sassatelli, 2007). Consumption in and of itself is certainly not merely a part of late- or postmodern society, but in this era, however, consumption is considered to play a special role in society and people's everyday life. At a societal level, one of the features connected with consumer culture is the spreading of consumption past its traditional boundaries. This means that in consumer culture, for example state-provided services, such as education and healthcare, become market-based, and services more generally, even feelings, are commodified (e.g. Edwards, 2000; Ritzer & Slater, 2001; Lury, 2011). Consumer culture is also saturated with commercial signs (e.g. Ritzer & Slater, 2001; Featherstone, 2007; Lury, 2011). Advertising images, logos, brand names, commercial slogans, etc. are everywhere. Furthermore, consumer culture is connected with attraction, amusement, or entertainment offered in numerous sites of consumption including, for example, shopping centres, restaurants and theme parks (e.g. Ritzer, 2001; Bryman, 2004; Sassatelli, 2007; Lury, 2011). Although consumption is not solely about spending money, participation in consumer culture, nonetheless, requires financial resources. Thus, in consumer culture: debt, credit cards, and consumer credit play a significant role in enabling continuous spending (Ritzer, 2001; Bryman, 2004; Sassatelli, 2007; Lury, 2011).

At an individual level, people in consumer culture are regarded as first and foremost consumers, not, for example, as workers or citizens (e.g. Ritzer & Slater, 2001; Bauman, 2005). This means that individuals are often more interested in their rights as consumers than as citizens. Consumers hold the power to choose. Thus, such central values as freedom are enacted through consumption in consumer culture (Ritzer & Slater, 2001; Bryman, 2004; Bauman, 2005; Gabriel & Lang, 2006).

The central role of consumption in everyday life also means that individual's self-identity and lifestyle are seen as strongly intertwined with consumption (e.g. Edwards, 2000; Bauman, 2005; Featherstone, 2007; Lury, 2011). This also relates to consumer culture characterisations of people spending increasingly more money and time consuming. Leisure time is also considered commercialised in consumer culture (e.g. Edwards, 2000; Sassatelli, 2007; Lury 2011).

Perhaps one of the most agreed upon of the above mentioned features of consumer culture is the one related to lifestyle and identity construction through consumption. For example Featherstone (2007: 84) argues:

“Rather than unreflexively adopting a lifestyle, through tradition of habit, the new heroes of consumer culture make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle. - - The preoccupation with customizing lifestyle and a stylistic self-consciousness are not just to be found among the young and the affluent; consumer culture publicity suggests that we all have room for self-improvement and self-expression whatever our age or class origin.”

In contemporary understandings of consumption, consumption is typically seen to have the above mentioned characteristics. Consumers are encouraged to express their lifestyle and identity with the help of consumer goods and services. Identity and lifestyle choices are not considered fixed, but something that can be seen as continuous processes. Individuality and freedom of choice, and not basic social structures, are considered to mark these processes (see e.g. Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Bauman, 1988; 2005).

The same kinds of considerations have been used in discussing the role of the body more generally and physical appearance as an outer layer of the body, in being and becoming the self. According to Giddens (1991: 7, 55–56), concentrating on one's body and physical appearance is a part of lifestyle construction. In the same way as constructing lifestyle is considered a continuous process, the body is never considered to be ready or complete. It has been argued that the body has become a project, something that has to be constructed and controlled throughout life (Giddens, 1991: 7, 99–102; Shilling, 2012).

This constant evaluating, constructing and controlling are what people are expected and encouraged to do in a consumer culture. The message is that we are our bodies: all appearance-related commodities are there for us so that we can be and become ourselves. In the consumer culture, how the body looks becomes even more important than how the body works or even how healthy the body is. Inner causes are considered subordinate to outer ones (Sassatelli 2010; 2012; Turner, 2008; cf. Featherstone, 2010). And it is not only products and services directly related to appearance that are used to look good. In addition to the fact that, in consumer culture, dressing has come a long way from simply sheltering the body, such forms of consumption such as eating and exercising also serve the cause of being attractive.

According to Bauman (2007), consumer culture makes consumers themselves commodities. Consumers are expected to buy products that will make them desirable and wanted. They are also supposed to have up-to-date knowledge about what is demanded from them in the market, for example, in respect of the shape and size of their body. Thus, in consumer society the body and its appearance must be modified

over and over again in order to maintain one's "demand". Bauman implies that even most plastic surgery operations represent consumer choices through which people can modify their looks over and over again (Bauman, 2007).

Understanding appearance-related consumption in relation to the consumer culture can be summarised as follows. In consumer culture, both body and consumption are associated with the self. The general idea is that individuals consume on the basis of who they are, think they are, or want to become, but on the other hand consumption also defines individuals and tells them who they are. In the same way, it can be claimed that the body is a crucial part of identity, affecting the conception of the self. However, the body is not only given and unmanageable but, according to consumerist ideals, it can be modified to correspond to the inner self. Furthermore, as consumption and body both play a crucial role in identity work in consumer culture; it seems natural that appearance-related consumption has a special meaning in people's everyday life. Eventually, appearance-related consumption per se, is also connected with identity formation. All in all, it seems clear that consumer culture offers favourable circumstances for appearance-related consumption to flourish.

2.1.2 *The role of media and visual culture in appearance-related consumption*

The power of consumer culture as a fuel for consumption related to appearance has been explained, particularly with regards to the visual and performative character of consumer culture (e.g. Featherstone, 1982; Turner, 2008; Shilling, 2012). The idea of performing is that the so-called body work is done first and foremost because of other people, *the audience*. The idea of performing self is much the same as the concept presented by Goffman (1971). However, consumer culture emphasises "on-stage performances" in relation to "back-stage performances". For example, Crossley (2006: 52–53) has pointed out that many places of consumption in contemporary consumer culture, such as shopping centres, holiday destinations, nightclubs, fitness clubs, connect with displaying the body and, thus, a greater consciousness about the body and physical appearance. And there are not just the bodies of consumers which are on display. It may be considered that the bodies of consumers, the bodies of those serving the customers, and bodies advertising or presenting commodities all together form the "bodily landscape" in a given consumption situation.

It is now generally accepted that appearance ideals are mediated through advertising and media. In consumer culture imagery, certain elements are often present: bodies that are young, fit and beautiful (e.g. Featherstone, 1982; Featherstone, 2010; Slevin, 2010; Shilling, 2012: 216). This type of imagery is present, for example, on the Internet, TV, magazines and billboards.

When talking about visual culture and the body, advertising is one of the first issues that comes to mind. It has been estimated that consumers are exposed to hundreds, even thousands, of advertisements on a daily basis and that almost a tenth would include a direct message about beauty (Griffin & Berry, 2003). As Sassatelli (2012: 638) notes, “Advertising images are the prime culprit – they encourage us to pursue whatever ideal appearance might be the order of the day and make us feel inadequate while searching for a superficial, fleeting satisfaction”. Advertising is often associated with unrealistic beauty ideals; pictures that make us feel bad about ourselves and dissatisfied with our bodies (see e.g. Dittmar, 2008; Grogan, 2008; Featherstone, 2010). “Photoshopping” has become a normal part of making advertising images, which means that the original image is modified into something that does not exist in the real world. The cosmetic industry has been specifically accused of producing misleading marketing.

In addition to advertising, the rise of the celebrity culture has been associated with the growing interest in the body and consumption related to appearance (Crossley, 2006; Featherstone, 2010; Rhode, 2010; Elliot, 2011). For example, TV-series, films, glossy magazines and music videos are full of beautiful people who many know by name and whose life is broadly followed. Further, for some people, the bodies and physical appearances of the celebrities become a “benchmark” (Elliot, 2011). The dresses and hairstyles the celebrities wear, accessories they carry, the diets and exercise programs they use, the plastic surgery operations they go through, and their weight gains and losses are all reported in the media and eagerly followed by the general consuming public. This is especially true in the U.S.

However, in the media, consumers are also encouraged to make body-modification and invest in their appearance through various kinds of makeover programs (e.g. McGee, 2005; Featherstone, 2010; Sender, 2012). In these programs, ordinary people are styled and given advice about dressing, and in the most extreme cases, the modification is literally *extreme*, including heavy training programs and several plastic surgery operations. The before-and-after images, which are the main contents of these types of programs, represent one of the themes central to consumer culture: transformation, which is marketed as an opportunity open to everyone (Featherstone, 2010: 197).

Moreover, considerations about visual culture and how it affects consumption related to the body and appearance also extend to the Internet. People do not just hide behind nicknames anymore, but increasingly display themselves with their own pictures connected with their real names. Social media can be seen, for its own part, to increase body consciousness, even narcissism. Fashion and beauty blogs are one example: pictures about the blogger herself/himself in a form of “the outfit of the day”, for instance, – as well as the admiring comments from the readers – often form a central part of the content of these types of blogs.

While it would be naive to deny the impact of media and visual culture on consumers' body consciousness, it would be oversimplistic to consider consumers only as victims of the body-centered consumer culture. For example, Giddens (1991) has emphasised the active role of consumers in their body projects, and considers body controlling and constructing necessary in relation to identity, although it may seem narcissistic behaviour. It has also been argued that in an insecure world, concentrating on one's body may offer the feeling of being in control of something at least (Giddens, 1991: 105–107; Shilling, 2012: 9), not to mention that someone can actually gain pleasure from appearance-related consumption (Crossley, 2006: 56; Shilling, 2012: 2). On the other hand, it has to be noted that consumer culture is not the same for all or experienced in a same way: there certainly are also consumers who really are not that interested in investing in their appearance, regardless of how much they are tempted.

2.1.3 Does it pay to spend on appearance?

But does it really matter if someone pays attention to physical appearance and someone does not? According to analyses of consumer culture, lack of interest in one's looks has a negative effect because, in a consumer culture, people are expected to attend to their physical appearance (e.g. Featherstone, 1982; Sassatelli, 2012: 638). Indeed, several studies have shown that "looks" have both social and economic consequences.

Social psychological research has shown that physical attractiveness is often considered as a sign of other desirable traits, such as having good social skills, being intelligent, mentally healthy and likeable. This is called the "what is beautiful is good" stereotype (Dion et al., 1972; Feingold, 1992; Langlois et al., 2000). Physical attractiveness can be considered as a status characteristic as it is socially valued (Feingold, 1992). In social interaction, it is not important whether or not those physically attractive individuals actually possess the kinds of positive traits related to attractiveness. What is important is that attractive people, both children and adults, are treated differently than unattractive people (Langlois et al., 2000). Evolutionary psychology argues that attractiveness is preferred as, at least originally, it has served as criteria for mate selection (e.g. Rhodes, 2006).

In economics and social sciences, a wide range of research has dealt with the association between physical appearance and work life success. It has been shown that looks, and particularly body mass index as part of physical appearance, have an impact on success in the labour market, and particularly on women's career and wage development (e.g. Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Harper, 2000; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva et al., 2004; Härkönen, 2008; Jæger, 2011). It has been suggested that body mass plays a crucial role in the evaluated attractiveness of women, but not that much in

the evaluated attractiveness of men (Swami & Tovee, 2005a; Swami & Tovee, 2005b). In addition to labour market benefits, physical appearance has been found to be important in social life more generally. For example, people tend to prefer cooperating with people whom they find physically attractive (e.g. Andreoni & Petrie, 2008; Mulford et al., 1998). According to general arguments, better looking individuals might be, for instance, more confident than less attractive people who, therefore, face penalties in everyday interactions (Mobius & Rosenblat, 2006; Rhode, 2010; Hamermesh, 2011).

The idea that physical attractiveness as a form of capital or part of some sort of capital has been introduced by several scholars. Physical attractiveness has, for example, been connected with "body capital" (Bourdieu, 1984: 206; Holliday & Cairnie, 2007), "aesthetic capital" (Anderson et al., 2010), "beauty capital" (Pfann et al., 2000; Price, 2008) and "human capital" (see e.g. Rosar et al., 2008). According to Hakim (2010; 2011), attractiveness is only one feature of the so called erotic capital, which the author considers as significant asset and having it as important in the everyday life and life course of an individual as Bourdieu's (1984) economic, cultural and social capital. Hakim argues that erotic capital is a combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social and sexual attractiveness.

What is interesting here in relation to appearance-related consumption is the assumption that erotic capital is not just something that someone automatically has or does not have, but can be developed and actively presented and performed (Hakim 2010; 2011). According to Hakim (2011), the right kind of clothing, make-up, perfumes, jewellery or even plastic surgery may help consumers increase their erotic power. Through consumption, the benefits of being attractive are more available for those not counting on being attractive by nature. The idea is that other forms of capital can be transformed to erotic capital and vice versa. It has to be noted that Bourdieu (1984: 206) also mentioned "body capital", which middle class women have especially learned to utilise as they know the "value of beauty and the value of the effort to be beautiful". Bourdieu's body capital is directly related to social class and the body operates as a bearer of class-based taste differences (Bourdieu, 1984).

When studying appearance-related consumption, the question is, can we really become beautiful and does it pay to spend on appearance? Studies in economics have shown that this is, at least, not necessarily the case. Spending on clothing, beauty care or even plastic surgery may improve one's looks but the financial effects of the improvements may not be that considerable (Hamermesh et al., 2002; Hamermesh, 2011; Lee & Ryu, 2012; see also Shilling, 2012). From a sociological perspective, however, appearance-related consumption in the form of "erotic capital", "body capital", "aesthetic capital", or, for example "body capital" may serve several purposes in social life. These purposes are enacted, particularly, through consumption, because in consumer society, consumption essentially permeates all aspects of social life.

2.1.4 *A Finnish perspective on appearance-related consumption*

Although the character of appearance-related consumption can be discussed at a general level in relation to consumer culture, it is clear that there is no uniform consumer culture. For example, Finnish consumer culture has its own peculiarities, which should be taken into consideration when talking about consumption related to appearance. Although it can be argued that even the Finnish consumer culture is not the same for all Finnish consumers, there are certain features in Finland that can be thought of as important to the understanding of appearance-related consumption in a Finnish context.

Compared to the more established consumer societies, such as the UK and U.S. the history of Finnish consumer culture is somewhat shorter. It was not until the post-war period in the 1950s that Finnish consumer society began to flourish; prior to the 1950s and early 1960s, Finland was considered an agriculture-based society, which urbanised in the 1960s and 1970s (Lehtonen & Mäenpää, 1997: 139–140; Heinonen, 2000; Heinonen & Pantzar, 2002). Frugality, caution and rationality have been the virtues traditionally cherished by Finnish consumers (e.g. Heinonen, 1998; Wilska, 2002; Autio, 2006), although from the 1960s onwards, attitudes stressing the significance of saving money and self-sufficiency started to give way to more hedonistic consumer attitudes (Heinonen, 1998; Heinonen & Pantzar, 2002). According to empirical studies, modest attitudes towards consumption are still typical, particularly among the representatives of the older generations (e.g. Wilska, 2002; Räsänen, 2003). More generally, a consumer culture always, at least to some extent, reflects the history of that particular consumer culture (e.g. Keller, 2011).

Along with urbanization, structural change and expanding modern consumer culture, attending to one's looks through consumption also became more important and democratised. For example, beauty care products, which had been strongly related to middle class and urban lifestyles and considered unnecessary, and even destructive in agriculture-based society, became one of the symbols of modern womanhood (Oittinen, 1999). Although beauty care products were advertised in wartime magazines and as early as a couple decades before that, advertising of these types of products increased in 1950s (Frigård, 2002; Enehjelm, 2004), undoubtedly as well as, the supply of appearance-related commodities increased dramatically. Finns also spent increasingly more money on clothing, and self-making became less common (Statistics Finland, 2007).

Although a wider range of appearance-related products became available and in advertisements Finns, especially women, were encouraged to use these products, it is probable that the general attitudes towards looking after one's looks through consumption may not have changed as quickly. Particularly in the countryside, people were not that used to using personal care products, and paying overly much attention to one's looks was not appreciated (Oittinen, 1999; Frigård, 2002). As the old

Finnish dictum “Only ugly people parade with clothes” indicates, modesty and natural beauty was valued in Finnish folklore.

It can be argued that the idea of a woman who looks her best right after a sauna is, to some extent, still alive. For example, the finalists of the Miss Finland beauty pageant are presented every year in tabloids as “sauna-fresh” and wearing no make-up. In addition, the beauty care industry has for its own part, supported the idea of natural beauty. For example, the background of the well-known Finnish cosmetic brand *Lumene* lies in nurturing natural beauty and utilising “arctic ingredients” in their products (Lumene, 2012).

For men, the Finnish culture has been even less permissive: according to another Finnish dictum “nothing is as ugly as a beautiful man”. In Finnish folklore, men were not expected or supposed to attend to their physical appearance, unless they wanted to get easily labelled as unreliable dandies (Hänninen, 1996). It has been stated that certain kinds of “inconspicuous masculinity” could still form a crucial part of being a Finnish, particularly, working class, man (Hänninen, 1996; Ruohonen, 2001).

In addition to the history of Finnish consumer culture, the history of Finland from the perspective of gender equality should also be taken into account. Finland is known as the third country to give women the right to vote. In gender equality comparisons, Finland is ranked at the top among the other Nordic countries (e.g. Plantenga et al., 2009; Hausmann et al., 2011). In Finland, the female labour force participation rates are among the highest, and gender wage gaps, among the lowest in the world. Moreover, women have excellent possibilities to achieve leadership positions in work life (Hausmann et al., 2011). High gender equality provides an interesting point of view, not simply in relation to gender differences in appearance-related consumption, but also in relation to examining appearance-related consumption more generally. The role of gender in this type of consumption is discussed more detail in chapter 2.2.1.

At the general level, the consumption of clothing and personal care out of total consumption expenditure in Finland is, however, close to the EU average. Finns allocate approximately 4–5 per cent of total consumption to clothing and footwear and 2 per cent to personal care. These shares have not changed dramatically over the last ten years (Eurostat, 2012). Figure 1 presents the more accurate distribution of appearance-related consumption expenditure in Finnish households according to the latest Finnish household budget survey data. In 2006, Finnish households spent, on average, 1,840 Euros on “direct” appearance-related products and services, which is around 6 per cent of total consumption. The figure shows that over half of this type of appearance-related spending is allocated to clothing, 20 per cent to personal care products, 13 per cent to personal care services and 10 per cent to footwear. Spending on jewellery and watches, as well as spending on bags and purses, account for the smallest part of this type of appearance-related consumption.

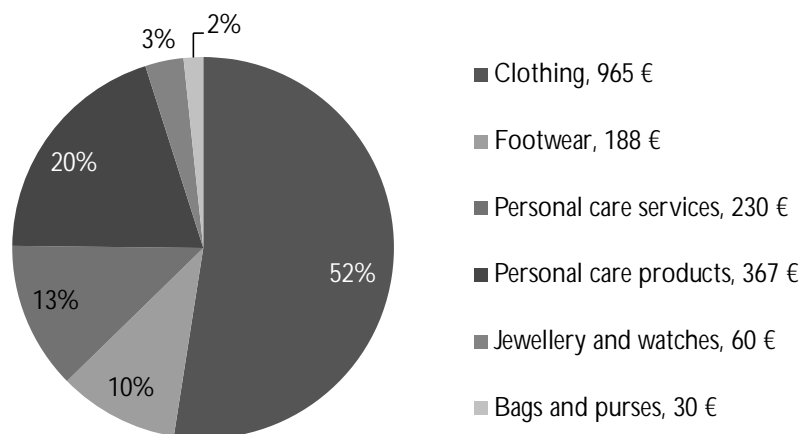


Figure 1 Distribution of appearance-related consumption according to different categories

Based on survey data collected in 2011 (data will be presented in section 3.2.), buying frequencies in different appearance-related consumption categories are in line with how much money Finns spend on different products and services. Clothing and hair care products are purchased most frequently; followed by skin care products and hairdressing services. Footwear, make-up and perfumes/fragrances are, in general, purchased less often. The items Finns spend money on the least frequently are jewellery and watches, as well as cosmetician services.

It can be argued that Finland, particularly as a consumer culture compared to more established consumer cultures such as UK and U.S., offers an interesting case for analysing appearance-related consumption. However, the peculiarity of Finnish consumer culture and culture more generally has to be taken into account when examining consumption related to appearance in Finland.

2.2 Appearance-related consumption for all?

2.2.1 *The role of gender in appearance-related consumption*

The prevailing ideology of consumer culture does not sufficiently recognise gender differences in consumption. The pleasures of consumer culture are presented as open to everyone. Historically, however, consumption and appearance-related consumption in particular, has been, and in many ways still is, considered gendered in sociology.

From a household perspective, women have traditionally been the ones who have had the main responsibility for daily consumption practices (e.g. Firat & Dholakia, 1998; Lury, 2011; Asquer, 2012). It has been argued that girls are socialised at an early age to look after the needs of other family members (Wilska, 2010; cf. Thompson, 1996). This does not only apply to groceries but also appearance-related commodities: for example, it is not totally uncommon for women, at least partly, to take care of clothing shopping for their spouses (Campbell, 1997; Dholakia, 1999; Raijas & Wilska, 2008; Shaw, 2010).

Appearance-related consumption has long had a strong feminine association, although men also have, through the ages, taken part in these types of areas of consumption (e.g. Edwards, 2000; Shaw, 2010). It can be claimed that young girls grow up to be consumers, particularly, by spending on “girlie” commodities often related to appearance (Russell & Tyler, 2002; Autio, 2006; Wilska, 2006). For many feminist scholars, such as Wolf (1991) and Bordo (1993), women’s body modification and appearance-related consumption appears as a consequence of narrow femininity and the unrealistic body ideals women are expected to meet, whereas some others have emphasised the active agency of women in creating their looks (Davis, 2003), or have even encouraged women to spend on appearance in order to get what they want in life (Hakim, 2010; 2011).

Although women are generally considered to be more interested in, and also more pressured to attend to their looks, it has been widely accepted that men are now increasingly participating in the beauty and grooming-related areas of consumption (e.g. Edwards, 2000: 135–137; Davis, 2002; Frost, 2003; Gill et al., 2005; Atkinson, 2008; 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, an expanding service economy, and the increasing supply of grooming products from cosmetic firms (Edwards, 2000; Bakewell et al., 2006; cf. Nixon, 1996). Hakim (2010) argues that men can no longer trust in their earning power and are increasingly forced to develop their erotic capital in order to succeed in mating markets. According to the consumerist ideal, this is what men can do and should do.

However, empirical studies have shown that there are obvious differences between female and male consumers in their attitudes. It has been found that compared to men, women are more concerned about their looks (Feingold & Mazzella, 1998; Öberg & Tornstam, 1999; Grogan, 2008), show more interest in beauty care and clothing (Burton et al., 1994; Wilska, 2002; Twigg, 2007; Berg & Teigen, 2009), as well as fashion and styles (e.g. Mitchell & Walsch, 2004; O’Class, 2004), and tend to impulsively spend more on products related to appearance (Dittmar et al., 1995; Coley & Burgess, 2003). It has been argued that taking care of one’s looks still goes against the dominant norms of masculinity (Davis, 2002; Gill et al., 2005; cf. Twigg, 2007). The situation for male consumers is paradoxical as, in consumer culture, they

are encouraged to spend on their appearance, but at the same time they are not supposed to pay too much attention to their looks. For example, avoidance of femininity, but also fear of being labelled as vain or narcissistic can affect the way men take care of their looks or the attitudes they have towards looking after it (e.g. Gill et al., 2005; Twigg, 2007). Men, who consume, for example, grooming products and services often feel the need to justify the use of these kinds of products and services with reference to practical reasons as they may feel that their masculinity is being questioned in buying situations (Gill et al., 2005; Barber, 2008; Tuncay & Otnes, 2008).

2.2.2 *Attending after one's looks at different ages*

In addition to gender, age can also be considered important in relation to appearance-related consumption and consumption attitudes.

Attending to one's looks can be seen as a somewhat age-related behaviour. Appearance-related consumption is often considered to play a special role in the identity construction of younger consumers, in particular. 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. Ruohonen, 2001; Wilska, 2002; Frost, 2003; Twigg, 2007). In addition, younger (especially female) consumers are usually considered to feel more pressure to reproduce the bodies presented in the media (e.g. Räsänen & Wilska, 2007; Grogan, 2008). Empirical studies have shown that younger consumers tend to adopt a more hedonistic and appearance-oriented consumption style than older consumers (Uusitalo, 1979: 101–103; Wan et al., 2001; Wilska, 2002; Räsänen, 2003: 165–167). In later life, how the body actually works can become more important than how the body looks. Thus, the interest in consumption related to appearance can vary during one's life course. Additionally, generational differences in consumption attitudes can explain differences in appearance-related consumption between age groups. For example, it has been suggested that it is more natural for the female representatives of the so called "Generation Y" (consumers born around the 1980s) to buy goods considered male related-products such as cars and home electronics, and for male representatives to purchase appearance-related products (e.g. Bakewell et al., 2003; Bakewell et al., 2006). It must be noted, however, that studies concerning "Generation Y" consumption attitudes are often based on cross-sectional data, which means that in reality, we cannot directly interpret differences between age groups in cross-sectional data as generational effects (see e.g. Sarpila, 2012). Empirically, it is always difficult to determine whether something is due to period, cohort, or generational effects.

According to consumerist ideals, however, biological and chronological age are considered somewhat irrelevant. Consumer culture favours people who *feel* that they

are young or want to be young. Consumers, regardless of age, are encouraged to go after the ideal body, which is first and foremost a young body (e.g. Crossley, 2006: 57; Slevin, 2010; Shilling, 2012: 38, 216). It has been argued that consumer culture treats ageing like a disease: something that has to be fought against (Öberg & Tornstam, 1999; Gilleard & Higgs, 2000; Slevin, 2010).

The increased standard of living and longer life expectancy is suggested to change the relationship between consumption and ageing. The representatives of the so called Third Age, i.e. cohorts now entering the later periods of their lives, are able to enjoy a better financial standing and more opportunities for consumption than the cohorts before them. It has been claimed that they refuse to adopt consumption styles typical for older people. Instead, these older cohorts are expected to actively participate and keep up with contemporary consumer culture (Gilleard & Higgs, 2005; Karisto, 2005; Twigg, 2007; Jones et al., 2008). However, what about the norms and expectations regulating appearance-related consumption of different aged consumers? One could claim that older consumers are not allowed to attend as much to their looks as younger consumers are. There is a risk, for example, of being judged as someone who does not accept his or her "real age", although Twigg argues (2007) that older consumers nowadays do not have to look old. And following the consumer culture ideal, they are not even supposed to. It seems, however, that once again, the more traditional norms confront the spirit of consumerism in a way that might be quite confusing to ordinary consumers.

Although gender and age can be understood as relevant in analysing appearance-related consumption, different determinants of social class have also been considered important. Next, we will discuss the role of income, education and socio-economic status.

2.2.3 Looks, consumption and social distinction

Income, education and occupations are all associated with social hierarchies. All of these factors can be considered determinants of social class, which in classical sociological understandings of consumption was seen as the key factor in the analysis of consumption.

Although in sociology consumption does not only refer to spending money as it is more widely understood, consumption still usually means expenditure. Income provides the conditions for consumption. Not all people have the same kinds of possibilities for self-expression through consumption or for attending to their looks with the help of consumption.

According to Veblen (1994[1899]), as mentioned in the beginning of theoretical section, spending on clothing was an effective way to show other people what social class one belongs to and by doing this, differentiate oneself from the crowd. Class

has also played a significant role in the more contemporary analysis of consumption. One of the best known theories is the one Bourdieu applies to appearance-related consumption and consumption more generally. In his analysis, Bourdieu uses education and occupational status as measures of social class.

To summarise, Bourdieu (1984) stresses that social classes have different tastes that are based on different amounts of economic, social and cultural capital and different habitus. Essentially, money is not, on its own, enough, therefore, one has to have knowledge about what kind of things to buy i.e. what demonstrates good taste, how to use these purchases properly, how to dress for different occasions and so on. According to Bourdieu, class taste becomes materialised in the body. Thus, the body plays a central role in the struggle for distinction between social classes. For example, body size and shape, as well as clothing, hairstyle, jewellery and other accessories, make-up, tattoos, etc. tell their own story about one's taste and class position. Bourdieu proposes that for the working class, the relationship to their own body is generally more instrumental, whereas the middle class are generally more interested in how the body looks. According to Bourdieu (1984: 206), "working class women, who are less likely to enter one of the occupations which most strictly demand conformity to the dominant norms of beauty, are less aware than all others of the 'market' value of beauty and much less inclined to invest time and effort, sacrifices and money in cultivating their bodies".

More generally, controlling the body through consumer-oriented body techniques is considered a particular a middle-class feature (Bourdieu, 1984; see also Featherstone, 2007; Smith Maguire, 2008: 112; Sassatelli, 2012). For example, with regard to male consumers, it has been stated that men with a higher income and higher occupational status do not only have better financial possibilities to look after their physical appearance, but have also adopted a more liberal attitude towards buying such consumer goods and services (e.g. Edwards, 2000; Bakewell et al., 2006; Souiden & Diagne, 2009). In Finland, for instance, a certain kind of inconspicuous masculinity and "letting the body just be" kind of attitude is argued to be present among working class men (Hänninen, 1996; Ruohonen, 2001).

From the point of view of occupational status, it seems obvious that white-collar positions, notably, require a well-groomed appearance. On the other hand, in service occupations at different levels, certain appearance standards exist, and, according to the idea of the consumer culture, the pressure to look good applies to everybody, regardless of class position.

2.2.4 The household perspective

In traditional considerations of consumption, the household has been considered the central place where consumption occurs (e.g. Firat & Dholakia, 1998; Lury,

2011; Asquer, 2012). Although several contemporary consumption theories emphasise individualism and freedom of choice (Ritzer & Slater, 2001; Bryman, 2004; Bauman, 2005; Gabriel & Lang, 2006), a significant part of private consumption takes place in households, which means that consumer choices are not just the choices of an individual. The household both enables and limits consumption; households with more than one member have certain benefits of shared consumption, but, on the other hand, it also means negotiations about the shared budget. In sociology and economics, there is a long tradition of studying household consumption decision-making processes and power relations (e.g. Gillespie, 1971; Manser & Brown, 1980; Chiappori, 1988; Blumberg & Coleman, 1989; for Finland see Raijas & Wilska, 2008; Raijas, 2011). Additionally, Veblen (1994[1899]) analysed consumption at the household level. He wrote about *vicarious consumption* and how every member of the household, including servants, for instance, were dressed to represent the social standing of the head of the household.

Although, for example, personal care consumption can be considered, as its name suggests, an extremely *personal* type of consumption, even a major part of this type of consumption takes place within households. Spending on personal care includes elements of shared consumption, for example, in the form of shared toothpastes, body lotions, shampoos, hairsprays or hairdryers. Although clothing consumption is personal in the sense that only one person in the household usually uses a certain piece of clothing, this does not clearly mean that the household would not have any meaning in this type consumption. Within households, people chose and purchase clothing for each other, and sometimes can even share the use of a same piece of clothing (typical for some sisters, mothers and daughters).

With regard to couples, it is natural that those living in the same household, fulfil each other's consumption needs, as well as purchase gifts related to appearance for each other. Studies have shown that both men and women are basically responsible for buying their own clothes, but men are clearly more likely than women to report shared responsibility (e.g. Campbell, 1997; Ganesh, 1997; Phipps & Burton, 1998; Dholakia, 1999; Raijas & Wilska, 2008). On the other hand, gift purchases related to appearance (clothing, jewellery, etc.) are typical in romantic relationships and, in a traditional sense, particularly those made by men for women (Belk & Coon, 1991; Huang & Yu, 2000; Rugimbana et al., 2003; cf. Campbell, 1997). This also concerns dating couples who can buy each other products related to appearance (e.g. Belk & Coon, 1991). It has been argued that gifts are important in the beginning of a relationship, as gifts can be used for social bonding and to give signals about the other person's intentions (Sherry, 1983; Camerer, 1988; Rugimbana et al., 2003). All in all, primarily women, whether cohabiting, married or dating, can act as the introducers of new fashions and grooming if they are, for example, used to looking after the consumption needs of others (cf. Thompson, 1996; Wilska, 2010).

2.2.5 *Appearance-related consumption for all? – Other significant factors*

The previous four chapters have discussed the consumer culture ideal about the democratic and “penetrating” character of appearance-related consumption from the perspectives of gender, age, social distinctions and household. These perspectives are considered particularly crucial. Although it is not possible to discuss appearance-related consumption from all possible angles, there are some additional factors that should be discussed in relation to appearance-related consumption.

It can be argued that the stylistic display and presentation of the self, by means of appearance, is emphasised in urban spaces (Featherstone, 2007: 95; Turner, 2008: 97; Breward, 2012). Cities are havens of consumerism, where a great deal of our daily consumption takes place (e.g. Jayne, 2006; Paterson, 2006; Miles, 2010). 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 aestheticised with buildings, different forms of advertisements and fashionable individuals; with their clothes, make-up, hairstyles and so on, forming an aestheticised urban landscape.

It is clear that the possibilities for spending on clothing, beauty care products and, particularly, services related to appearance are significantly better in cities and densely populated areas than in sparsely populated areas. In Finland, it has been shown that hedonistic consumption and spending on commodities related to appearance is greater among those living in urban areas than those living in rural areas (Räsänen, 2000; Honkkila & Okkonen, 2009). At the same time, however, Finland is ranked in the top six countries for online shopping in the European Union (Eurostat, 2009). As clothing and footwear are among the most popular products, and beauty care products are also often bought on the Internet (Statistics Finland, 2010), the significance of geographical distances may decrease, at least in relation to access to products related to appearance.

We may also consider that things such as ethnic background, sexual orientation and religiousness also affect the attitudes people adopt towards attending to one’s looks and are associated with consumer behaviour (see also Räsänen, 2003). However, this type of information is rarely available in quantitative data sets, and examining the role that they play in appearance-related consumption would require a different kind of approach.

What this dissertation covers, however, are some considerations about lifestyle and appearance-related consumption. According to Giddens (1991: 81), “A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practises which an individual embraces --”. In social sciences, some theorists have considered lifestyles to be determined by social structures (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984), whereas some others have under-

stood lifestyle as something that is freely chosen and which unites people from different backgrounds to, sometimes more stable sometimes very temporary, lifestyle groupings (e.g. Bellah et al., 1985; Maffesoli, 1996; Bauman, 1997). Nevertheless, we may consider that our lifestyle reflects our interests, opinions, attitudes and values as well as memberships in different social groups (Räsänen, 2003: 103–109). Thus, it means that not all differences in appearance-related consumption and attitudes towards it can be traced back to differences between socio-demographic groups. There are certainly also differences between the lifestyles people have adopted that can, per se, be associated with appearance-related consumption styles.

Although one's body weight cannot be considered as purely a result of lifestyle, it can, nevertheless, be seen as one reflection of it. Against the consumer culture background, the relationship between body weight and attitudes towards appearance-related consumption offers an interesting point of view. Paradoxically, at the same as the pressure to look good is considered stronger than ever in Western countries, weight problems have increased dramatically during the last couple of decades (WHO, 2008). Again there is a contradiction between the consumer culture ideal and reality. The ideal body in consumer culture is fit and slim (Featherstone, 2010; Slevin, 2010; Sassatelli, 2012; Shilling, 2012: 38), which has become even harder to achieve for a growing number of people. Paying attention to one's body mass index (BMI) can be seen as an example of the controlling nature of consumer culture. According to Smith Maguire (2008: 136, 196–204), to be able to calculate calories, control one's BMI and so on to keep fit is considered a sign of status and, in particular, a middle class lifestyle. BMI may reflect the knowledge people have about healthy food and body controlling techniques, financial possibilities to participate in these types of activities, and also differences between attitudes towards attending to one's looks (Smith Maguire, 2008; Henderson-King & Brooks, 2009). However, BMI is also a biological, not just an attitudinal measure.

In summary, appearance-related consumption can be examined and discussed from numerous perspectives. Although some factors may be considered theoretically more important, bringing different perspectives together can certainly increase the understanding of appearance-related consumption, which is done in the empirical part of the study. The next chapter introduces specific research questions, data and methods.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DATA AND METHODS

3.1 Research questions

The purpose of this study is to examine appearance-related consumption in Finland. The study concentrates on the following aspects: 1) Finns' appearance-related consumption patterns, attitudes towards appearance-related consumption and attending to one's looks through consumption, and general changes in consumption patterns and attitudes; 2) gender differences in attitudes and consumption patterns, and possible changes in these differences and; 3) other differences among population groups in attitudes and consumption patterns, and possible changes in these differences. The precise research questions are formulated as follows.

RQ1: What does Finns' appearance-related consumption look like when looking at

A) attitudes and buying frequencies?

C) actual spending?

D) changes during the last decade?

RQ2: How is gender associated with appearance-related consumption when looking at

A) personal consumption and attitudes?

B) purchases made for partner?

C) household level spending?

D) changes during the last decade?

RQ3: How are other background variables associated with appearance-related consumption when looking at

A) personal consumption and attitudes?

B) purchases made for partner?

C) household level spending?

D) changes during the last decade?

Table 1 shows how different research questions are covered in the four research articles (A1, A2, A3 and A4).

Table 1 Research questions dealt with in the four research articles

	A1	A2	A3	A4
RQ1A: Finns' general attitudes	x			x
RQ1B: Finns' general buying frequencies			x	
RQ1C: Finns' actual spending		x		
RQ1D: General changes during the last decade	x	x		x
RQ2A: Gender's role in personal consumption and attitudes	x	x	x	x
RQ2B: Gender's role in purchases made for partner			x	
RQ2C: Gender's role in household level spending		x		
RQ2D: Changes in gender differences during the last decade	x	x		x
RQ3A: The role of other background variables in personal consumption and attitudes	x			x
RQ3B: The role of other background variables in purchases made for partner			x	
RQ3C: The role of other background variables in household level spending		x		
RQ3D: Changes according other background variables during the last decade		x		x

3.2 Data

This dissertation utilises data from seven different surveys, which are all nationally representative. There are two comparable data sets, the other one of which comprises three household budget surveys, and another one three attitude studies. In addition to these two data sets, there is one individual survey data set used in the dissertation. A quantitative approach was selected to study appearance-related consumption at the population level. In this way it is possible to investigate what kind of issues are noteworthy when discussing appearance-related consumption as a societal phenomenon.

The everyday life and well-being survey was collected by researchers at the Economic Sociology unit at the University of Turku in spring 2011. The questionnaires were sent by post to a random population segment of 2 001 15 to 64-year-old Finnish-speaking Finns. The sample was drawn from the Central Register of Population. In

the cover letter the respondents were also given the information about the possibility to complete the survey online. After excluding 14 non-contacts, the final sample consisted of 1 987 Finns. A total of 908 respondents completed the questionnaire: 799 returned the questionnaire by mail and 109 filled in the online questionnaire (for a comparison of mail and Internet respondents, see Räsänen & Sarpila, 2013). The response rate was 46 per cent. Although the final data represents Finnish citizens aged 15 to 64 relatively well, the sample is still slightly biased. Men, as well as those under age 40, are slightly under-represented (1–2 % compared to population); women and those over 60-years-old are, to some extent, over-represented in the data (1–3 % compared to population). Given these slight biases, the data have been weighted to correspond to the age and gender distribution of the Finnish population aged 15 to 64 years. The age and gender distribution of 15 to 64-year-old Finns in the official population statistics has been compared to the age and gender distributions in our final data in order to calculate the weights. The data have been utilised in research Articles 1 and 3.

The three *Finnish household budget surveys* used in this dissertation were conducted by Statistics Finland in 1998, 2001 and 2006. The surveys concentrate on a household's expenditure on goods and services. The data sets are comparable over time and are nationally representative. The surveys are sample surveys of Finnish households, the consumption expenditure of which is collected by telephone interviews and consumption diaries kept by the households, and from purchase receipts and administrative registers. Table 2 shows the sample sizes, response rates and number of households in the final data in different years of research were as follows: 1998, sample 7 007, response rate 63 per cent, N=4 359; 2001, sample 8 960, response rate 63 per cent, N=5 495; 2006, sample 7 852, response rate 52 per cent, N=4 007 (for more detailed description, see Statistics Finland, 2009a). Article 2 is based on analysing Household budget surveys.

In addition, comparable attitudinal survey data from three independent samples were used. *Finland 1999*, *Finland 2004* and *Finland 2009* surveys were collected in 1999, 2004 and 2009 and conducted by the Sociology/Economic Sociology unit at University of Turku. All samples were random and drawn from the Central Register of Population. The data for 1999 and 2004 were solely collected via postal questionnaires. In 2009 the respondents were also given the opportunity to complete the survey online, however, the majority returned the questionnaire by mail. In 1999, 2 417 respondents completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 60 per cent. In 2004, the number of respondents was 3 574, with a response rate of 60 per cent and, in 2009, 1 202 respondents completed the questionnaire yielding a response rate of 49 per cent. The data represent the Finnish speaking 18-74 years old population in Finland. The data in question have been used in the Articles 1 and 4.

3.3 Measures

3.3.1 Attitudes and buying frequencies

In Article I, attitudes towards performing and developing erotic capital i.e. *attitudes towards attending to one's looks* were measured using 16 attitudinal variables from the cross-sectional *The everyday life and well-being* survey data. The variables were considered to measure different aspects of attitudes towards performing and developing erotic capital. In addition to the set of variables, evaluation of how people perceive the importance of attending to their looks in different points of time (years 1999, 2004 and 2009) were analysed. All attitudinal measures were five point, Likert-type scales with poles ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In further analysis, the attitudinal measures were treated as continuous variables.

Article IV analysed *self-evaluated low-level consumption of beauty care and clothing*, data derived from *Finland 1999*, *Finland 2004* and *Finland 2009* surveys. The variables were used in order to examine people's consumer identities in relation to two central categories of appearance-related consumption. In the questionnaire, 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 where value 1 meant "spend significantly less" and value 5 "spend significantly more." This kind of phrasing is not considered to be a direct indicator of respondent's actual consumption expenditure, but above all, is considered to give information about one's consumer identity; how respondents see themselves as consumers and what the kind of picture they want give of themselves as consumers in relation to appearance-related consumption. In the analyses, the responses were dichotomised so that consumers who reported spending significantly less (value 1) formed the group of low-level consumers and rest of the consumers formed the other group (values 2 to 5).

Buying frequencies of appearance-related products and services, examined in Article III, included seven product and two service categories from *The everyday life and well-being* survey data. The respondents evaluated how often they had bought different products or paid for different services during the past 12 months 1) for themselves 2) for their spouse/partner. The following categories were listed in the questionnaire: clothing, footwear, hair care products, skin care products, perfumes/fragrances, jewellery/watches, make-up, hairdresser services, and cosmetician services. The response alternatives included: "once a month or more often", "once every two months", "three to four times a year", "once or twice a year" and "has not bought during the last 12 months". Self-reported buying frequencies are considered as approximate measures of actual spending. Although buying frequency is not the same thing as consumption expenditure, it can be viewed as applicable to study the im-

portance of a spouse's purchases as they can be compared to how often people, in general, report buying different products and services for themselves. Finnish household budget surveys do not offer information about who pays and who uses. In addition, examining buying frequencies provides an opportunity to look at consumption categories, which would be too small to study as separate consumption expenditure categories. In the article, the distributions of buying frequency variables were presented, but in further analyses the variables were dichotomised as those who have purchased the product in question for their spouse/partner, and those had not.

3.3.2 *Actual spending*

Consumption expenditure on personal care was analysed in article II. The data covered three years from the late 1990s to early 2006 (the years 1998, 2001, and 2006). The dependent variables of interest were derived from the subcategories under "miscellaneous goods and services" in Household budget surveys. Personal care services and products were also analysed separately. The former includes such services as hairdressing and cosmetician services, and the latter various kinds of appliances, articles and products related to personal care. The category was selected as it is considered to represent everyday appearance-related consumption that concerns every consumer regardless of the motives behind the consumption.

Consumption expenditure categories on clothing and footwear were also considered to be included in the analysis. However, due to the changes in the compilation of statistics, it was not possible to reliably analyse actual changes in clothing and footwear consumption (for further information, see Statistics Finland, 2009a).

3.4 Methods

The research articles utilise both descriptive analyses and multivariate analyses. Descriptive analyses include cross-tabulations and comparing means. These methods are used to generally describe the data and different variables, whilst the association between different variables are examined using multivariate analysing techniques.

Analysis of variance can be used when the dependent variable is continuous in order to examine how the dependent variable is associated with different background variables. In other words, analysis of variance is a method that can be used to assess the extent to which the selected independent variables explain the variance in the dependent variable. Parameter estimates (β) indicate how much a group mean differs from the mean of a reference group. Statistical differences between means

are assessed with the help of standard errors (S.E.) (see Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001: 30–40). Articles 1 and 2 utilise analysis of variance as analysis techniques.

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 logistic regression analysis is to predict group membership. 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 (see Tabachnik & Fidell, 2001: 517–581). Logistic regression analysis is used in Articles 3 and 4.

In addition, one of the articles, Article 1, utilises principal component analysis (PCA). PCA can be used to summarise the data by forming a smaller set of linear combinations, i.e. components, from the original variables. Loss information is minimised as PCA aims at retaining as much variability as the original variables (see Tabachnik & Fidell, 2001). In this dissertation, PCA is used to form attitudinal dimensions.

3.5 Summary of research questions, data and methods

Table 2 summarises the general research question covered as well as data and methods used in different research articles. As the table demonstrates, all four articles deal with appearance-related consumption at a general level (research questions with the number '1' in them), gender differences (research questions with the number '2' in them) and the role of other background variables (research questions with the number '3' in them), nevertheless, the perspective varies. Three of the four articles utilise several data sets, and in all cases, the methods of analyses include both descriptive and multivariate analyses. Table 2 also summarises the dependent and independent variables used in each article. A more detailed description of the variables is given in each article, of which an overview is presented in the following chapter.

Table 2 Summary of research questions, data and methods according to the articles

	Article I: Performing and developing erotic capital in consumer culture	Article II: Personal care consumption in Finland	Article III: Appearance- related con- sumption among dating, cohabiting and married consumers	Article IV: I am not spending on my appearance!
General RQ:s covered (see Table 1)	RQ1A, RQ1D, RQ2A, RQ2D, RQ3A	RQ1C, RQ1D, RQ2A, RQ2C, RQ2D, RQ3C, RQ3D	RQ1B, RQ2A, RQ2B, RQ3B	RQ1A, RQ1D, RQ2A, RQ2D, RQ3A, RQ3D
Data	Finland 1999 (N=2 123), Finland 2004, (N=3 057), Finland 2009 (N=987), Everyday life and well-being (N=908)	Household budget surveys 1998 (N=4 359), 2001 (N=5 495), 2006 (N=4 007)	Everyday life and well-being (N=685)	Finland 1999 (N=2 417), Finland 2004, (N=3 547), Finland 2009 (N=1 202)
Methods of analyses	-descriptive -PCA -analysis of variance	-descriptive -analysis of variance	-descriptive -logistic regression	-descriptive -logistic regression
Dependent variables (measures)	16+1 different attitudes concern- ing attending to one's looks	Household expenditure on personal care products and services	Buying frequency of different products (7) and services (2) relat- ed to appearance (purchases for spouse/dating partner)	Self-evaluated consumption of beauty care and clothing
Independent variables	-Gender -Age -Sos. econ. stat. -Working status -Income ¹ -BMI -Relationship status -Buying freq. of appearance- related products	-Gender (HEH ²) -Age (HEH) -Education (HEH) -Income -Type of household	-Gender -Age -Relationship status -Income -Own buying frequency	-Gender -Age -Place of residence -Income

¹ In all articles income is measured as the OECD-equalised; ²Highest earner in the household

4 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH ARTICLES

4.1 Article I: Attitudes towards performing and developing erotic capital in consumer culture

The first article deals with appearance-related consumption from an attitudinal perspective. The article empirically studies Finnish men's and women's attitudes towards attending to their looks i.e. performing and developing erotic capital. Hakim's (2010) concept of erotic capital is discussed in a consumer culture context as the author argues that certain elements of erotic capital, in particular, beauty, sexual attractiveness and social presentation, can be performed and developed through consumption related practises. Hakim sees performing and developing erotic capital, above all, as gendered behaviour, whereas in several theories of consumer culture, attending to one's looks is considered both possibility and responsibility for everyone (e.g. Bauman, 2007; Featherstone, 2007; Sassatelli, 2012). The article asks:

1. How do men and women perceive the importance of performing and developing erotic capital?
2. How is gender associated with different attitudinal perceptions after controlling for other relevant variables?

The article utilises data from *Everyday life and well-being* postal survey (N=908), and *Finland 1999, 2004 and 2009* for background information.

The analysis of 1999, 2004 and 2009 data from Finland, suggests that Finns attitude towards attending to their looks has not changed dramatically during the last decade. In other words, Finns do not consider that they are taking more care of their looks today than they did five or ten years ago, whilst gender differences have stayed stable.

A more detailed examination about appearance-related attitudes covered 16 attitudinal variables. The results indicate that women's higher commitment to performing and developing erotic capital is to some extent true. Female consumers identity is still in the 2010's and even more intertwined with physical appearance than the identity of men, although physical appearance is an important part of the self for both genders. In addition, women have more positive attitudes towards performing and developing their erotic capital through fashion. Compared to women, men's relationship to performing and developing their erotic capital seems to be more straightforward.

However, performing and developing erotic capital is not simply a question of gender, but a question of consumption and involvement in consumption. In other words, it is not only that men and women think differently about the meaning of performing and developing erotic capital, but that people with different kinds of involvement in consumption related to appearance think about these issues differently. This seems to be the case, particularly among men. The results suggest that the role of consumerism in people's lives can play a key role in understanding how people see the meaning of performing and developing erotic capital. In addition, one's body mass index was found to associate with the attitudes, which seems natural, in a consumer culture context. The fact that most of the socio-demographic variables were not associated with attitudes towards performing and developing erotic capital can be interpreted as supporting Hakim's idea about erotic capital being important in numerous spheres of life.

4.2 Article II: Personal care consumption in Finland: trends in the early 2000s

The second article looks at trends in personal care expenditures in Finnish households from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. Spending on personal care services and products are studied separately. The data comes from *The Finnish household budget surveys* from 1998 (N=4 359), 2001 (N=5 495), and 2006 (N=4 007) provided by Statistics Finland. In general, people are spending more on beauty care and grooming, but we specifically wanted to examine this type of consumption in more detail. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Was there an increase in spending on personal care products and services in Finnish household during the period from 1998 to 2006?
2. What kinds of differences were there in the spending patterns between households?
3. How did the observed differences between households change from 1998 to 2006?

The results suggest that although household spending on both personal care products and services has generally increased, the share of these types of spending in total consumption has not changed dramatically. Examination of differences between households show that at the household level, gender is associated with personal care consumption: those households in which the highest earner is a woman, spend more on personal care services, as well as products, than households in which the highest earner is a man. There are also differences between income groups as households with higher income spend more on both products and services. There

are also some differences in spending according to age, level of education of the highest earner in the household and the type of household, but the effects remain quite limited. All in all, it seems that the impact of socio-demographic variables, however, has not weakened from 1998 to 2006. We also looked at differences between single men and women, and the results show that these differences have not diminished. In this sense, the data show no signs of personal care spending habits becoming more gender-equal.

4.3 Article III: Appearance-related consumption among dating, co-habiting and married consumers: a comparison between men and women

The third article concentrates on the role of purchases made for a spouse or dating partner in relation to the appearance-related consumption of men and women. The idea is to expand the understanding of how independently men, in particular, buy their own appearance-related goods. The article looks at the buying frequencies of clothing, footwear, jewellery/watches, make-up, skin care products, hair care products, perfumes/fragrances, hairdresser services, and cosmetician services by utilising the *Everyday life and well-being* survey in respect to those respondents who had a spouse or dating partner (N=685). To gain an understanding of the role of the spouse's or dating partner's purchases in appearance-related consumption, the article demonstrates, not only how often male and female consumers purchase their spouse or dating partner different appearance-related products and services, but also how often they buy these goods and services themselves. The article aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How often do female and male consumers buy their spouse or dating partner different kinds of appearance-related products and services?
2. How are age, type of relationship, income and the consumer's personal buying frequency related to the likelihood of buying a spouse or dating partner different kinds of appearance-related products and services a) among female consumers? b) among male consumers?

The results indicate that women play a significant role as purchasers of their spouse or dating partner's appearance-related products. This seems to be the case with regard to men's skin and hair care products in particular. These are all products that can be purchased without first trying them on, which might explain why women, who buy themselves these types of products more frequently, are more likely to also buy them for their spouse or dating partner. Younger women are also less likely than older women to buy their husband or boyfriend skin care products and hair

care products. The results suggest that it is important to recognise the importance of women as not only regular buyers, but also as the presenters of new kinds of products and services related to appearance to their spouse or dating partner.

Men who had purchased their wife or girlfriend some of the studied products or services had mainly done so once or twice a year. In relation to the buying frequencies of female consumers' own purchases, it seems, in this respect, that jewellery/watches and cosmetician services are the most significant forms of appearance-related consumption bought by men for their wife or girlfriend. Background variables are not as strongly associated with the likelihood of purchasing, as in the case of women.

4.4 Article IV: I am not spending on my appearance! Examining self-evaluated low-level consumers of clothing and beauty care in Finland, 1999–2009

The fourth article examines appearance-related consumption from the perspective of consumer identity. The focus is on those consumers who want to distance themselves from consumers willing to spend on physical appearance and whose identity is not, in this sense, based on appearance-related consumption. The article is based on the idea that, despite suggested intertwinement of the body and self and consumption in consumer culture, not all consumers are interested in appearance-related consumption. The article aims to answer the following research question by using data from the *Finland 1999* (N=2 417), *Finland 2004* (N=3 574) and *Finland 2009* (N=1 202) surveys:

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 results show that a significant portion of Finnish consumers do not consider beauty care and clothing consumption as a significant part of who they are as consumers. The shares of the self-evaluated low-level consumers are considerable, particularly with regards to clothing consumption as a form of partly need-based consumption and beauty care consumption more generally. Those who consider themselves as low-level consumers of beauty care are more likely: male, older consumers, those living in rural areas and consumers with a lower income. Older consumers and consumers with lower income are also more likely to see themselves as low-level consumers of clothing. Although the general proportions of low-level consumers of

beauty care and clothing has not changed between 1999 and 2009, the results indicate some temporal changes with regard to beauty care. Gender differences have not changed, but it seems that disparities between age groups, as well as between consumers living in urban and rural areas, have diminished to some extent.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this dissertation was to examine appearance-related consumption in Finland from different perspectives and, by doing this, contribute to the ongoing discussion about the role of consumption related to appearance in contemporary Finnish society, as well as in consumer culture more generally. The dissertation looked at appearance-related consumption in Finland both generally, from the perspective of gender and in relation to other important background variables. The included studies examined household/joint responsibility and personal consumption, attitudes and consumption expenditures, as well as changing and prevailing consumption patterns. The theoretical background lies in the sociological understanding of consumption. This final chapter discusses the results of the dissertation more generally.

5.1 Discussion

When reading newspapers or articles from the Internet, watching TV, glancing through magazines and blogs, watching people carrying glossy paper bags and so on, one cannot help wondering: is it all about looks? Beauty is sold everywhere. In the Finnish media, appearance themes appear on a regular basis. The topic is genuinely interesting as it touches everyone. Headlines on, for example, plastic surgery becoming a part of everyday life in Finland probably grab people's attention, but they do not make it more mundane in respect to the life of an ordinary consumer.

Appearance-related consumption, in general, combines elements of different types of consumption from need-based daily consumption to hedonistic self-indulgence. What unites different forms of appearance-related consumption is that they, in one way or another, affect the way one looks. This is the case, regardless of whether or not one feels it is important.

From the examined categories of appearance-related consumption, clothing consumption clearly comprises the largest part of this type of consumption. This is evident in both consumption expenditure and also in more subjective measures i.e. how people see their own clothing consumption and what kind of stance they take towards it. During the last decade, the shares of clothing and personal care consumption have neither decreased nor increased dramatically. In addition, Finns' evaluation of how well they care for their looks did not change between 1999 and 2009.

It seems that Finns' relationship to appearance-related consumption is somewhat inconsistent. For example, the share of clothing and personal care out of household's total consumption is around the EU average. Similarly, at an attitudinal level, physical appearance is an important part of the self to most Finnish consumers and they want to take good care of their appearance and look well-groomed. However, in many respects, the attitudes reflect a certain reservation towards appearance-related consumption practices and even an underestimation of its meaning in, and importance to, one's own consumption. It appears to be important to a great deal of consumers to paint a picture of themselves as more rational consumers, not as someone who splurges on their appearance. For example, it is "acceptable" to buy clothes, but only a small minority thinks or admits that they are buying clothes, even when they do not need anything. In general, it can be said that regarding the more hedonistic and less "basic-need-based" consumption we are talking about, the more people want to separate themselves from it.

More generally, although we are living in a consumer culture, not everyone experiences it in the same way. Consumer culture emphasises the importance of looks and aggressively encourages people to spend on their looks; the body, and displaying it, plays a crucial role in consumer culture (e.g. Jagger, 2000; Crossley, 2006; Bauman, 2007; Featherstone, 2007). However, there is a difference between what people are encouraged to do, and what they really think they should do or feel able to do. There are people who do not care about attending to their looks through consumption. This can be considered, for example, voluntary inconspicuousness, something that follows from financial restrictions or a result of norms or role expectations that some consumers may feel they are more or less forced to follow. Regardless of the reason, there is considerable variation in how people engage the consumer culture with respect to appearance-related consumption.

A Finnish ideal of equality may also explain Finns' reserved attitudes towards attending to one's looks through consumption. For example, the former president, Tarja Halonen, has on one hand been accused by some stylists of not having a sense of style, while on the other hand it has been argued that Halonen's "down-to-earth style", in particular, helped her become popular in the early 2000s (Financial Times, 2004). Reservedness towards appearance-related consumption is also understandable against the background of the traditional virtues of the Finnish consumer culture including, frugality, caution and rationality (e.g. Heinonen, 1998; Wilska, 2002; Autio, 2006), combined with the valuation of natural beauty and modesty in Finnish folklore. The safer solution is to hold back consumption because "showy" consumption related to appearance can easily be judged harshly. When, for example, a Finnish blogger buys an expensive leather jacket, the comment box fills with critical writings.

In addition, Finland does not have the same kind of entertainment industry or celebrity culture as, for example, the UK or U.S. Celebrity culture has been connected

with the rising interest in appearance-related consumption (Crossley, 2006; Featherstone, 2010; Rhode, 2010; Elliot, 2011). Although the global media beams pictures from red carpets in, for example, Los Angeles or London to Finland, the lives of internationally or nationally known celebrities are not followed as fervently as in other nations. The Hollywood stars, for instance, do not necessarily offer to the majority of Finns a very realistic target of identification. The before-and-after images, the central theme in consumer culture (Featherstone, 2010), are present in Finnish consumer culture as well, but in "lighter" versions: in the Finnish media a make-over participant gets new clothing and hairstyle, but not rhinoplasty.

Finland is, however, one of the leading countries in EU in the use of Internet (Statistics Finland, 2012). Following this, there is a vibrant blog culture in Finland, which includes beauty and lifestyle blogs, with beautiful pictures taken in the right light, with glamorous people in them who often feel more than happy to share their knowledge of which consumer products to use to look better. Finns, younger age groups in particular, are also active followers and users of Facebook and other forms of social media, where most people are present with their own names and faces. It is unlikely that someone would not like that digital face to look good. Thus, although famous celebrities may seem distant, there are pictures of ordinary beautiful people all around the Internet who may serve as a more realistic object of identification. The role of "people like us" as a feeder of appearance-related consumption may be larger than thought – at least among the younger age groups.

Despite the fact that many Finns tend to adopt a reserved attitude towards attending to one's looks, the attitudes also show that characteristics related to contemporary consumer culture are not completely absent either: for example, pressures to spend more on appearance and worries related to ageing and so forth, are a reality to many Finns.

In the light of the consumerist ideal, men, in particular, seem to form a challenging group. The results show that when looking at attitudes, buying frequencies and consumption expenditures; gender differences are clear. In addition, the results indicate gender differences have not diminished, at least when it concerns how men and women see themselves as appearance-related consumers and also when comparing spending on personal care between female and male consumers. In addition, the study shows that women can play a significant role as purchasers of appearance-related products for their spouse or dating partner. The fact that it is still more typical for female consumers to attend to their looks through consumption than do men, this certainly does not mean that men have no appearance-related pressures. Attending to one's looks can be done in many ways: by exercising or eating healthy, for example. These may be more comfortable ways for some men to attend to their looks. All in all, however, it could be argued that in relation to dominant norms of masculinity and traditional Finnish "inconspicuous masculinity" it is not necessarily easy for a man to admit that he is interested in attending to his looks (Hänninen,

1996; Ruohonen, 2001; Davis, 2002; Gill et al., 2005; cf. Twigg, 2007). Thus, some men probably downplay their interest in physical appearance and looking after it through consumption, although there certainly are also men who simply are not that enthusiastic about spending time or money on their looks. We may ask to what extent, for example, does advertising concerning men's grooming products, speak to ordinary Finnish men? It could be claimed that cosmetic firms have not yet succeeded in justifying the usage of grooming products to the general male public. A significant segment of the Finnish male population want to, for one reason or another, declare themselves almost completely above the practises of taking care of one's physical appearance. At the attitudinal level, the importance of attending to one's looks is, in men's case in particular, is associated with actual consumption patterns of appearance-related products and services. This means that it is not just about being a man or being a woman, but also that being an active male or female consumer plays a central role in understanding how people see the meaning of attending to one's looks.

Therefore, although appearance-related consumption appears to be first and foremost a question of gender, it is definitely not only about gender. The results show that younger households spend more on personal care, and at an attitudinal level, appearance-related consumption seems to form a more important part of their consumer identity. These characteristics concern under-30-year-old consumers in particular. At a younger age, appearance-related issues are often emphasised. In the sense of who one is and where one belongs, spending on appearance can be considered to play a more significant role than in later life (e.g. Ruohonen, 2001; Wilska, 2002; Frost, 2003; Twigg, 2007).

Although younger consumers seem to be more familiar with appearance-related consumption, age differences are not clear down the line. Middle-aged people certainly are not without appearance-related worries: getting old in a consumer society, where a youthful body is highly valued, is not easy (e.g. Crossley, 2006: 57; Slevin, 2010; Shilling, 2012: 38, 216). Consumer culture encourages people to stay young and fight against ageing (e.g. Öberg & Tornstam, 1999; Gilleard & Higgs, 2000; Slevin, 2010). This message is clearly sent to the general population, and it seems to affect the attitudes of middle-aged Finns as well. Physical appearance is as an important part of their identity as for younger consumers, while at the same time attitudes towards attending to one's looks do not vary according to age. Although middle-aged consumers may tend to diminish the meaning of appearance-related consumption to themselves, their consumption expenditure, at least on personal care, does not significantly differ from the consumption expenditure of younger age groups. In addition, the results indicate, to some extent, that differences in attitudes between younger and older people have been diminishing. Compared to situation a decade ago, older consumers seem to have adopted a slightly more approving attitude towards appearance-related consumption. At the same time, the number of

younger consumers who have a more critical stance towards appearance-related consumption has increased little by little. 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. The change in the attitudes of older consumers might reflect something ageing people are experiencing in working life or a reaction to pressures from the consumer culture. It is also possible that the Third age is really becoming an increasingly important phase of life, in the sense of consumption generally (Gilleard & Higgs, 2005; Twigg, 2007; Jones et al., 2008; Näsi et al., 2012) as well as attending to one's looks and spending on appearance. Further, many of the consumers entering later life today are financially more able to spend on appearance-related commodities and services than were the cohorts before them.

It is obvious that appearance-related consumption is not merely a question of attitudes, but also a question of what kind of possibilities one has to attend to one's looks. In a consumer culture, taking care of one's physical appearance is strongly based on using products and services subject to charge. Appearance-related consumption requires money. Thus, it seems natural that those with better finances also spend more on personal care. Furthermore, income level is not associated with how people see the importance of attending to their looks. The financially better off can always decide how much to invest in their looks, whereas for consumers with low incomes, the decision is not theirs to make. If we accept Hakim's (2010; 2011) idea of the meaning of erotic capital and how its convertible to other forms of capital – including economic, social and cultural capital – it can be argued that lacking both erotic and economic capital can be considered a serious source of anxiety, as well as a form of social stratification in contemporary consumer society. And, as the results indicate, people with different body masses may experience the importance of appearance-related consumption and pressures related to appearance-related consumption differently, the feeling of being left outside the consumer culture may be a reality to those not meeting the requirements of consumer culture body ideal.

5.2 Limitations

Although general, as well as academic interest, in appearance-related issues has steadily increased over the last few decades, population-level studies are still scarce. This dissertation aims at shedding light on this little-studied and multifaceted phenomenon. This dissertation studied appearance-related consumption from different perspectives, but it has limitations.

Although Finland offers an interesting case for studying appearance-related consumption, the studies in this dissertation concentrate on only one country. The peculiarity of the Finnish case offers a frame of interpretation for the results, but it

cannot be said, however, whether Finns are necessarily that different compared to consumers in other countries. International comparisons are therefore encouraged in the future.

Given the fact that the dissertation concentrates on certain forms of appearance-related consumption that can be directly related to appearance, products and services, which are purchased on a more or less regular basis, other types of purchases are excluded. Examples of excluded appearance-related goods and services that are not included in this study are fitness training, body building, tattooing and piercing. While the last mentioned techniques are quite rare and therefore difficult to study reliably from the perspective of consumption expenditure, ignoring such expenditures can be considered a limitation of how appearance-related consumption was operationalised in this dissertation. To approach appearance-related consumption more profoundly, population level studies of the above mentioned body modification techniques would be needed.

Additionally, due to the lack of existing population-level data, this study can offer limited information about consumption expenditure on appearance-related commodities. This is notably true with regard to personal-level spending.

With regard to changes in consumption expenditures and attitudes, the examinations are limited to approximately the past decade. Although the discussion about the significance of looks in contemporary society has increased over recent years, the most significant changes in people's attitudes and behaviour may have happened earlier. In addition, it has to be noted that the data used in the analysis are repeated in cross-sectional studies, and are not longitudinal panel data.

From a theoretical perspective, individual and household time allocation patterns, which were not covered in this dissertation, would offer an interesting perspective to study appearance-related practices. Furthermore, the study does not take a stand on how good looks as a value are related to other values and what kind of variations could be found when comparing different population groups. These are issues that future research could address.

Finally, as much of the research has concentrated on younger age groups, further research could concentrate more on older consumers, who also seem to be interested in attending to their looks and many of whom also have financial possibilities to do this as well.

5.3 Conclusions

People spend a significant part of their waking hours on display – whether they want to or not. Physical appearance is important, and a significant part of households' total spending is allocated to products and services related to appearance.

Few other forms of consumption are simultaneously as personal and public as appearance-related consumption.

Although we are talking about an important form of consumption, it does not necessarily mean that everyone would be enthusiastic about investing in their looks. Finland is a vibrant consumer society where the share of clothing and personal care consumption is around the EU average. Finns' attitudes, however, are not necessary in line with these numbers. It seems that at an attitudinal level, a great majority of Finnish consumers struggle between the traditional Finnish norms and appearance-related pressures of consumer culture. In the end, the number of those Finnish consumers who see themselves as truly dedicated to attending to their looks through consumption is quite small, whereas the amount of those willing to take a reserved or even negative attitude towards appearance-related consumption is clearly higher. General attitudes may change, but it takes time for them to change. And no matter how cosmetic firms and media would try to encourage men, in particular, to become full members of the consumer culture in the sense of appearance-related consumption, gender differences in this type of consumption appear to be considerable and stable. Instead of trying to make the masses of men enthusiastic about style and grooming, the marketers of these types of products and services could concentrate more on the ageing population, as differences between age groups seem to be more inclined to change than differences between female and male consumers.

All in all, however, this study shows that appearance-related consumption is, at present, a form of consumption that is particularly important to women, younger consumers, people with middle or higher income, and those with normal weight. Consumer culture is certainly not the same for all, nor is spending on appearance as an important part of that culture the same for all. Furthermore, the role of appearance-related consumption in contemporary society is contradictory, and not just in the sense of the complex relationship ordinary consumers have towards it, but also more generally. On one hand, consumption related to appearance can be understood as an important way of self-expression, which can also offer pleasure and social benefits, or perhaps even a feeling of having control over something. On the other hand, we are talking about issues that can be related to pressures, even obsessive behaviour and social stratification. On the whole, contradictions definitely characterise appearance-related consumption.

To conclude, it is possible to argue that appearance is an integral factor of contemporary consumer culture. People value good looks and also spend money on looking after their looks. At the same time, however, it seems that the significance of appearance-related consumption varies systematically among population groups. In this sense, sociological examination of appearance-related consumption patterns, and attitudes alike, provides a feasible measure of lifestyle disparities and social inequalities. Beauty is for sale, but is not accessible to everyone and not all are even interested in it.

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