

Multifaceted Appearance Management as Cultural Practice

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Abstract

Appearance management is a self-identification process that extends beyond mere appearance enhancement activities. In this study, we conceptualized multifaceted appearance management as a cultural practice imbued with a variety of meanings and goals. We employed mixed methods. The quantitative study was to objectify and explain a macro trend by analyzing large-scale data collected from a representative sample and revealed that multifaceted appearance management is a function of cultural capital. The qualitative study was to gain a better understanding of how individual actions and meanings that occur during appearance management create social distinction by analyzing in-depth interviews and demonstrated how the complexity and diversity of meanings reflect the self-identification process in appearance consumption. Our findings revealed that a tendency toward multifaceted appearance management is related to contextual self-presentation drawing upon cultural capital and that cultural capital is manifested by the process in which consumption becomes integrated into self-identification.

Keywords: appearance management, cultural capital, self-identification, consumption

1. Introduction

A good understanding of the sociocultural meanings of appearance-related consumption is important because consumers' efforts to maintain and enhance their physical appearance are visible in continuing increases in sales of beauty and personal care products, the emergence of new product categories (e.g., adult-acne care, micro-dermabrasion), and increasing interest in plastic surgeries and appearance-enhancing treatments (IBISWorld, 2008). The consumption of appearance-related products and services (e.g., clothing, grooming, and exercise-related services) occurs in two phases: spending and management. Spending refers to the dispersal of money to acquire products and services. *Appearance management* refers to consumers' use of these products. In other words, the term appearance management is used to describe the process consumers engage in when they use purchased products and services to maintain and control their appearance.

A number of previous studies have applied appearance management as a generic term to describe personal grooming activities (e.g., hairstyling, makeup application, or an individual's self-examination in the mirror) and body shaping and modification (e.g., diet, exercise, cosmetic surgery, and tattoos) (Rudd & Lennon, 2000). Other studies consider appearance management activities as consequences of sociopsychological attributes such as body cathexis, body satisfaction, or clothing interest (Rudd & Lennon, 2000; Yoo & Kim, 2012). These studies based their theses on the premise that individuals engage in appearance management simply to enhance their physical attractiveness. These studies failed to view appearance management from a holistic perspective: that appearance management is a self-identification process that involves more than mere appearance enhancement (Kaiser, 1997). Appearance management encompasses *thought processes* as well as activities related to appearance (Kaiser, 1997). Scholars have identified a variety of motives for and benefits of appearance-related consumption. These include hedonic, functional, instrumental, and aesthetic values (see Kaiser, 1997).

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy illustrates how appearance management engages individuals in a variety of thought processes. Goffman (1959) presented an analogy that compared the everyday presentation of self to

theatrical stage performance. In everyday life, appearance (referred to as costume in Goffman's dramaturgy) plays a role in defining contexts, performance of roles, and communication of self. An individual performs multiple roles in everyday life and develops his or her self-concept in accordance with those roles. Thus, appearance management activities may well involve a variety of goals in addition to the achievement of an attractive appearance in order to express, accomplish, and communicate self identified in various contexts. We propose that this type of consumption practice be referred to as multifaceted appearance management. Each individual engages in *multifaceted appearance management* based on the multiple roles and contexts he or she must face. In this study, we will attempt to conceptualize multifaceted appearance management as appearance-related activities and thought processes of indentifying multifaceted aspects of self. We will investigate the social and individual significance of multifaceted appearance management.

This research question warrants the use of *mixed methods* (Fries, 2009). Intellectual triangulation is employed to grasp the totality of a phenomenon. In other words, it is used to investigate how subjective individual behaviors shape and are shaped by the objective social structure. We performed a quantitative study to analyze large-scale data collected from a representative sample. We also performed a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews. The goals of the quantitative study were to objectify a macro trend that occurs during appearance management (i.e., multifaceted appearance management) and to explain this macro trend within a sociological frame. The goal of the qualitative study was to gain a better understanding of the ways in which individual actions and meanings that occur during appearance management create social distinctions.

2. Study 1: Quantitative Study

2.1 Cultural Capital and Appearance Management

Cultural capital is often employed as a status marker because it reflects social structure. Since cultural capital was first formulated, the use of the concept has proliferated in literature related to status culture (see Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Cultural capital, as distinguished from economic and social capital, is an intangible asset or symbolic resource that contains cultural value. Different types of cultural capital include language proficiency, culturally-valued tastes or skills, and education credentials (Throsby, 1999).

Bourdieu (1984) equated cultural capital with the aesthetic competency needed to understand rules and decipher meanings of genres. This skill requires training and experience to acquire mastery of matters of the genres. Holt (1997a) referred to this competency as *particularized forms* of cultural capital. Particularized forms are subject to context. *An abstracted form* of cultural capital refers to a universal quality that empowers consumers to reason, feel, discern, and appreciate any cultural objects aesthetically (Holt, 1997a). Particularized forms are measured by specific knowledge or interest (Sullivan, 2001). Abstracted forms are measured by their proxies. Educational credentials, occupational status, and/or social origins (i.e., family upbringing) are used as proxies for the acculturation of abstracted forms because cultural competence is acquired by socialization that occurs because of education, occupation, and family upbringing (Holt, 1998).

Out of the many studies conducted on everyday consumption practices, studies focused on cultural capital highlight the complexity of meanings (Holt, 1997b, 1998). Cultural capital enables an individual to connect to a variety of products and contexts and to create cultural values from mundane consumption activities. Our study proposes that individuals who possess cultural capital maintain a variety of goals from appearance management. We also propose that the cultural capital an individual possesses becomes the basis for the thought process that occurs during self-identification and self-presentation through appearance management.

We empirically tested the relationship that exists between possession of cultural capital and multifaceted appearance management. To manifest the effects of cultural capital, we also investigated appearance management as it relates to the possession of financial resources. We expected that multifaceted appearance management might not necessarily relate to economic capital. Unlike cultural capital, simple possession of economic capital does not provide the factors required for multifaceted appearance management:

H1: Individuals who possess greater cultural capital have a greater tendency toward multifaceted appearance management, while the possession of economic capital is not related to this tendency.

Sociological studies have identified patterns of cultural consumption (Bourdieu, 1984; see Peterson, 1997). In general, genres preferred by high-status individuals (e.g., classical music, poetry, or fine arts) are often referred to as *highbrow culture* (Note 1). Highbrow taste was once primarily an exclusionary aptitude for high-status culture that created social distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998). However, recent studies have noted that high-status taste has become more eclectic. *Omnivorous taste* became widely accepted as a characteristic of high-status groups (Coulangeon & Lemel, 2007; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Warde, Martens, & Olsen, 1999). The

term, omnivorous taste, refers to an individual's appreciation of the entire spectrum of cultural product genres that range from highbrow to popular culture (e.g., NASCAR races, pop concerts).

If we say that an individual has omnivorous taste, we imply that he or she is open to all cultural practices. He or she demonstrates his or her cross-disciplinary qualities by the ways that he or she consumes any object with distinction (Holt, 1997a). An individual's cultural capital is manifested by the way he or she understands and appreciates objects rather than by the genres he or she enjoys. As we can see from exhibits of popular culture at art museums, cultural texts are reinterpreted. They receive new values from critics and intellectuals. Today's cultural capital is a cross-disciplinary, intangible resource. It can enable individuals to appreciate values from a variety of cultural texts.

To confirm that multifaceted appearance management is a cultural capital-based practice, we tested the relationship that exists between multifaceted appearance management and cultural taste. We maintain that individuals who patronize highbrow culture and individuals who possess eclectic cultural tastes hold an abstracted form of cultural capital. We also maintain that both of these types of individuals are engaged in complicated thought processes when they engage in appearance management. Therefore, we propose:

H2a: Participation in highbrow cultural consumption is positively related to a tendency toward multifaceted appearance management.

H2b: Omnivorousness in cultural consumption is positively related to a tendency toward multifaceted appearance management.

2.2 Cultural Practice by Consumer Segments

The proposed relationships noted above encouraged us to inquire into the relationship that exists between multifaceted appearance management and other demographic information. Demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, or ethnicity, are social and biological constructs that serve as cultural frameworks for the formation of multiple identities (Kaiser, 1997). Caldwell and Woodside (2003) found that shifts in a consumer's identity tended to change his or her participation in cultural activities.

With respect to gender, women consume cultural activities to a greater extent than men (Collins, 1992; Kane, 2004). The gender difference can be interpreted from various perspectives: It may result from gendered socialization (Collins, 1992), or from women's struggles for superior positions in the realm (Collins, 1992; Kane, 2004). Despite the recent trend in men's increasing interest in appearance and personal care, we hypothesize:

H3a: Women have a greater tendency toward multifaceted appearance management than men do.

To examine ethnicity, we focused on the importance of visual consumption in African American culture. African Americans more frequently face structural and cultural barriers to personal or professional success. Cultural and appearance consumption may satisfy a need to manage symbolic status for individuals who are socially marginalized. It may also compensate for unequally distributed resources and opportunities. The creation of expressive lifestyles, including careful styling of appearance and theatrical gestures, serves as coping strategy used to enhance self-esteem, channel emotions, express racial pride, and entertain (Majors & Billson, 1992). Therefore, we might hypothesize that African Americans engage in multifaceted appearance management to enhance their sociocultural identity:

H3b: African Americans have a greater tendency toward multifaceted appearance management than Caucasian Americans do.

With respect to age, cultural consumption and taste have been studied as a cohort effect (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004; Peterson & Kern, 1996). These studies reported that the younger generation possesses a greater taste for popular culture or the visual arts. The studies noted the younger generation's stronger tendency toward omnivorous cultural consumption. This generational difference indicates changes in the content of field-specific cultural capital, rather than decreases in cultural capital that occur with age (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004). Fashion marketers usually concentrate on younger consumers. However, recent trends in the industry suggest that interest in appearance management exists across age groups (IBISWorld, 2008). Research shows that female consumers' interest in appearance does not usually decline with age (Nam et al., 2007). Contrary to the conventional association of interest in appearance with the young, we argue that multifaceted thoughts about appearance are founded on cultural capital, rather than on representation of age. Thus, we hypothesize:

H3c: Age does not affect the tendency toward multifaceted appearance management.

2.3 Research Method

We employed data collected from the Lifestyle Survey database by DDB, an international marketing

communication firm. The survey was sent to adult members of the Market Facts Consumer Mail Panel, an annual standing-panel quota sample that possesses similar characteristics to the U.S. adult population with respect to various demographic factors. We received usable responses from 1,440 males (48% of usable responses) and 1,581 females (52% of usable responses) out of the 5,000 surveys mailed to respondents. Thus, the response rate was 60.4%. The data set included a wide range of questions on attitudes, interests, opinions, activities, and media use. Lifestyle Survey data have been employed in many research areas (e.g., Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2004, in communication; Lastovicka, Bettencourt, Hughner, & Kuntze, 1999, in consumer behavior; Shrum, McCarty, & Lowrey, 1995, in advertising).

2.3.1 Dependent Variable

We measured multifaceted appearance management by the use of the following six survey items: “I work at trying to maintain a youthful appearance,” “The clothes I wear reflect who I am as a person,” “I want to look a little different from others,” “I enjoy getting dressed up,” “Dressing well is an important part of my life,” and “An attractive appearance is crucial for career success.” Each of these six items represents purposeful aspects of dressing practice. These include presentation of a youthful look, expression of the self, pursuit of uniqueness, the experience of enjoyment, the indication of involvement, and the instrumental purposes.

The items were assessed on a six-point Likert scale that ranged from “I definitely disagree” to “I definitely agree.” The global score was calculated based on total scores of all responses to the six questions (Cronbach’s alpha coefficient = .692). Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and Hair et al. (1998) recommended a score of .7 for the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for satisfactory reliability in general, and .6 for exploratory research.

2.3.2 Independent Variables

We chose the following factors as independent variables: cultural capital, economic capital, highbrow cultural consumption, an omnivorous pattern of cultural consumption, gender, ethnicity, and age.

We examined cultural capital in an abstracted form. Similar to previous research, we measured the level of cultural capital based on education credentials and occupational status (Caldwell & Woodside, 2003; Holt, 1998). We used education and occupation to calculate global scores by the use of a modified measurement by Holt (1998). Scores were determined according to level of education on a scale that ranged from one to five. Occupation was also scored by following Holt’s (1998) classification that ranged from one to five. The possession of cultural capital was classified by calculation of the scores of education and occupation: low (2–4), middle (5–8), and high (9–10). The three groups comprised 21.8%, 55.1%, and 23.1% of the sample, respectively.

We classified economic capital into three levels based on annual household income that was originally reported over eight ranges: 1 = under \$20,000 or \$20,000–29,999 for the low-income group (27.6%); 2 = \$30,000–39,999, \$40,000–49,999, \$50,000–59,999, or \$60,000–69,999 for the middle-income group (41.9%); and 3 = \$70,000–79,999 or \$100,000 or more for the high-income group (30.4%). We considered household median income and balanced sample sizes across the three groups when we devised this classification.

We measured highbrow cultural consumption and omnivorousness based on self-reported frequencies of participation in cultural activities during the 12-month period that preceded the survey. Responses to a seven-point scale were recoded as follows: 0 for “none in past year,” 2.5 for “1–4 times,” 6.5 for “5–8 times,” 10 for “9–11 times,” 18 for “12–24 times,” 38 for “25–51 times,” and 52 for “52+ times.” The recoding method accounted for two dimensions of cultural consumption: range and frequency (O. Sullivan & Katz-Gerro, 2007).

We measured the degree of highbrow cultural consumption by calculating the sum of recoded frequencies on three items selected from previous studies (Lizardo, 2006; Peterson, 1997): “went to an art museum,” “a classical concert,” and “a theatre performance.”

We measured omnivorousness in cultural consumption by the use of ten items: middlebrow and lowbrow activities, such as “went to a pop or rock concert,” “a country music concert,” “a movie,” “a zoo,” “a theme park,” “a fair or festival,” and “a college or professional sporting event,” in addition to the use of the three highbrow activities. We included activities at different brow levels based on previous studies (Lizardo, 2006).

For gender and ethnicity, we also relied on self-reported information. We compared Caucasian Americans and African Americans to test the effect of ethnicity: 77% of the sample was Caucasian American and 9% was African American. To measure age, we analyzed two groups: 19–42 years of age (40.7%) and 43–64 years of age (41.4%). According to Levinson (1986), the 19–42 year age range corresponds to early adulthood; the 43–64 year age range corresponds to middle adulthood. We excluded individuals aged over 64 years from the analysis because the large number of retirees in that age group could become problematic in a study that hoped to analyze

the effects of occupation.

2.4 Analyses and Results

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test Hypothesis 1. We then tested Hypotheses 3a, 3b, and 3c. Results of the ANOVA supported Hypothesis 1. The tendency toward multifaceted appearance management was higher among those who possessed more cultural capital ($F(2, 1531) = 6.815, p = .001$). *Post hoc* comparisons suggested a difference in multifaceted appearance management between the low and middle cultural capital groups ($M_{cc=low} = 23.753, M_{cc=middle} = 24.798, p = .001$) and the low and high cultural capital groups ($M_{cc=low} = 23.753, M_{cc=high} = 25.156, p = .000$). However, we discovered no difference in the tendency toward multifaceted appearance management based on the level of economic capital.

We conducted two regression analyses to test Hypotheses 2a and 2b. The effects of highbrow cultural consumption and an omnivorous pattern of cultural consumption could not be tested with a single regression analysis because of the existence of multicollinearity for the two variables. These analyses revealed that consumers engaged in multifaceted appearance management more frequently when they participated more frequently in highbrow cultural activities and when they possessed more omnivorous taste in cultural consumption ($t = 6.583, p = .000; t = 7.255, p = .000$, respectively). Thus, H2a and H2b were supported.

Supporting results were also found for H3b. However, supporting results were not found for H3a. The tendency toward multifaceted appearance management did not appear to differ between men and women. African Americans showed a greater tendency than Caucasian Americans ($F(1, 1531) = 76.557, p = .000; M_{Caucasian Americans} = 22.674, M_{African Americans} = 26.464$). However, the insignificant effect of gender should be interpreted in light of the significant interactive effect of gender and ethnicity ($F(1, 1531) = 15.235, p = .000$). Interestingly, we found a gender effect, but it appeared only among Caucasian Americans. Mean comparisons revealed differences in appearance management between men and women among Caucasian Americans ($F(1, 1531) = 76.310, p = .000; M_{men} = 21.514, M_{women} = 23.835$). However, we did not discover a gender difference among African Americans. Age did not appear to influence the tendency toward multifaceted appearance management, as proposed in H3c.

2.5 Discussion

The results showed that intriguing relationships exist between appearance management, cultural capital, and economic capital. Our empirical investigation suggests that multifaceted appearance management is not a function of economic capital. Rather, it is a function of cultural capital. It appears that holdings of cultural capital lead to high levels of goals and meanings in appearance management.

The effects of cultural capital on consumption do not operate uniformly across all segments of consumer markets. Gender, age, and ethnic differences were frequently observed in cultural engagement in previous studies (Alderson, Junisbai, & Heacock, 2007; Chan & Goldthorpe, 2005; Peterson & Kern, 1996). However, only one ethnic difference was found to be significant in the current study. This result can be attributed to African American culture because it is highly communicative throughout material culture. It can also be attributed to the devaluation of appearance consumption by Caucasian American men, as suggested in related literature (Lizardo, 2006). We also interpret active engagement by African Americans or female Caucasian Americans as a strategic consumer behavior similar to the strategic nature of appearance consumption of subcultures (Kates, 2002). The expressive lifestyles of marginalized groups can be viewed as proactive communicative dispositions to empower themselves by the appropriation of consumption practices.

The tendency toward multifaceted appearance management was found to correlate with highbrow and omnivorous cultural engagement. Consumption is, indeed, a quasi-aesthetic experience (Gronow, 1997). The relationships between seemingly discrete fields suggest that an individual's ability to use appearance-related goods, in all likelihood, draws upon the same qualities that enable that individual to enjoy cultural activities.

3. Study 2: Qualitative Study

In our qualitative study, we explored the meanings participants assigned to appearance-related choices and actions. We also explored the ways that cultural capital is manifested in participants' conceptions.

3.1 Research Method

We conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 16 female participants selected from upper-middle- and middle-class backgrounds who reside in the Midwestern United States. Participants were selected by a combination of chain referrals and purposive sampling that allowed us to compare groups that possessed different levels of cultural capital. Women were chosen because we expected that they would feel more comfortable engaging in conversations about appearance. Participants ranged in age from their 20s to mid-40s. The average age was 32.8

years. The majority of participants were Caucasian American. Most had earned bachelor's degrees or had achieved some graduate education. Participant information is available at Table 1.

We identified participants as members of either the high (HC) or the low (LC) cultural capital group based on their levels of education, and the occupational status of self, spouse, and parents (as described in Holt, 1988). This resulted in a sample that consisted of nine HCs and seven LCs (Note 2). During the interviews, we asked questions related to participants' appearance management practices. We asked about preferred styles and matters they considered important in appearance consumption. A coding guide was developed and the data was coded by the two researchers. The consistency between the two coders was checked. Intercoder reliability was assessed at 95.4% from the coding of the half of the transcripts. Our analysis focused on elucidation of the meanings participants assigned to appearance management and on identification of the different understandings that existed between the two groups.

Table 1. Participant profile

Group	Pseudonym	Age	Ethn*	Self		Spouse		Father		Mother	
				Edu**	Occupation	Edu	Occupation	Edu	Occupation	Edu	Occupation
HC	Olivia	29	C	G	Post-doctoral		n.a.	G	Doctor	B	Home maker
	Sophia	42	C	G	Professor	G	Professor	B	Business owner	B	Teacher
	Ashley	30	C	G	Museum education	H+	Computer technician	G	Teacher	G	Teacher
	Alexis	31	C	G	Lecturer		n.a.	B	Sales	H+	Home maker
	Elizabeth	37	A	G	Attorney	G	Doctor	B	Retail manager	B	RN
	Alyssa	39	A	G	Professor		n.a.	G	Professor	B	Home maker
	Emily	29	C	G	Governmental analyst	H+	Carpenter	B	Engineer	B	Editor
	Abigail	40	C	G	Business owner		n.a.	G	Small Business	H+	Home maker
	Grace	24	C	B	Publishing/editing		n.a.	G	Doctor	B	Home maker
LC	Lauren	43	C	B	Home maker (sales)	B	Director of insurance	H	Small Business	H+	Home maker
	Samantha	30	C	H+	Home maker (dental)	B	General contractor	H+	Accountant owner	H+	Customer
	Madison	24	C	B	Coordinator at NGO		n.a.	B	Sales manager	H	Home maker
	Sarah	38	C	B	Home maker	B	Bank Manager	H	Plant manager	H	Clerk
	Isabella	37	C	B	Governmental buyer	H+	Technician	B	Insurance consultant	H	Clerk
	Emma	25	C	B	Home maker (dietician)	B	Real estate agent	H	Farmer	H	Factory worker
	Hannah	27	C	B	Sales service	H+	Sales	H	Sales	H+	Administrative

* Ethnicity C-Caucasian, A- Asian

**Education G-graduate degree, B-bachelor degree, H+-some college, H-high school graduate

3.2 Findings and Discussion

3.2.1 Protean Interpretation in the Integration of Self and Appearance

Participants related their appearance management behaviors to body image and reported their preferences for styles that complement their physical appearance (i.e., styles that enhance their body image). The term, body image, is used to represent the comprehensive mental image that individuals hold of their bodies. This image includes perceptions, attitudes, and emotions (Fallon, 1990). Body image is an integral part of self-concept (Belk, 1988). Two participants expressed strong affections for high heels. The following statements illustrate the ways these respondents integrate their body images and heels:

Emma (LC, 25 years old, homemaker, and former dietician): I like shoes with heels because I am shorter. I like taller shoes. I like the look better. It makes me a little bit taller and *I like the look of that*. It looks cleaner (Note 3).

Abigail (HC, 29 years old, governmental analyst): I like height. Heel width does not matter at all to me. So I wear little kitten heels. It can even be an inch tall; it doesn't matter as long as there's some height I have a hard time with the platforms, too. I don't wear any other type of platform heel [platform heels: shoes with thick soles that add height in addition to heel height] because I just feel like *you're getting to the point where you're trying to be something you're not, in a way. You're trying to be taller. Even*

though that's my main goal ... it says they want to be taller in a way that people can notice even though I wear regular heels just because I feel short. I don't think I want to portray that I want to be something that I'm not.

The responses of these women demonstrate that the role of possessions includes self-expression and self-transformation (Ahuvia, 2005). To Emma, heels allow her to transform her self-concept as a short person. Heels act as an expression of a transformed self as a taller person. Although both participants imputed wearing heels to discontent with their height, more precisely, their mental image of the authentic self includes *themselves in heels*. The integration of self-concept and heels matches up with the concept “we are what we have” (Belk, 1988, p. 139).

In comparison to Emma, Abigail engages in a greater degree of micro-management of her own appearance. Abigail's comments suggest that the meaning of the consumption object (i.e., heels) is not fixed. She explains that the meaning is attached to the self only when the heels look as they are supposed to look and when they are congruent with her self-concept. Abigail does not want to signal that she uses heels to disguise herself, as she notes in her discussion of platform heels. The object is detached from the self when the object, in the wearer's perception, overpowers the subject. In addition to easily identifiable attributes such as body or social roles, HCs tended to integrate appearance with more subjective components such as values related to their professions, accomplishments, and personality traits, such as creativity, consideration, and love of fun.

3.2.2 Contextual Self-identification

Appearance is one of the main tools individuals rely on to contextualize self. Consumption objects and self form a three-way relationship between self, objects, and other persons with whom the individual interacts (Belk, 1988). The three-way relationship often emerges in relation to normative aspects of appearance. Participants commonly valued appropriateness of appearance, explaining with this three-way relationship in consumption. They stated that appropriateness of appearance was determined by context, namely size, age, body type, and situation. Particularly in work-related contexts, participants were mindful of the people with whom they interact:

Martha (LC, 24 years old, coordinator at a non-governmental organization): What makes a difference is usually *who I'm going to be working with that day* If we have a meeting with someone outside our school district or someone who I need to look more professional around, then that's when I make the decision to wear a suit or dress up just a little bit to the next level.

Ashley (HC, 30 years old, museum education director): Tuesdays and Wednesdays are generally the days *I have a lot of morning meetings, so I like to look professional those days.* I might wear something like a skirt and mock turtleneck ... a shoe with a little bit of a heel. Thursdays are the days we train *our volunteers.* They are generally a little bit older, and they love to comment on what you are wearing, so I try to *dress up for them.* I usually try to wear a much dressier outfit on Thursdays, even though on Thursdays, I'm on my feet.

The data demonstrates that appearance plays a crucial role in the construction and performance of multiple selves in both personal and work settings. We discovered a difference between the two groups in their adoption of normative behaviors. As to contextual self-presentation, HCs showed more malleable contextual self-presentation. In addition to their consideration of conventional dress codes, HCs give more careful consideration to actual interactions that might take place during situations. Their goal is not just to gain acceptance by wearing appropriate clothing. Rather, they use appearance as a lubricant to facilitate the development of good interpersonal relationships. HCs invested more thought in what the other party might think and what consequences their appearance might have on their various interactions:

Sarah (LC, 38 years old, homemaker): Here's my purple dress that I got for the Christmas party. It fits well and was relatively inexpensive. I thought it was relatively unique. It just happened to fit.

Elizabeth (HC, 37 years old, volunteer attorney): I have to attend a holiday party at my husband's office. Most of those people will be support staff because they graduated high school They are receptionists. For me to walk in there the best dressed with lots of glitter and lots of jewelry—that would be inappropriate. I want to fit in and make them feel comfortable. I always ask my husband, do I look okay? Am I going to offend anybody? When I go to a party that's attended by my husband's peers or my peers, then I feel more comfortable dressing like I would like to I want to look a little bit special So I think *every situation is different.*

HCs were more likely to factor in additional context-specific things that are not prescribed in general norms. This disposition relates to their ability to understand and adapt themselves to the unique configuration of each

context. Modernization entails a shift in the cultural image of self (Susman, 1984), and requires employment of a range of resources. HCs' stronger tendency toward contextual self-identification suggests their adaptability in this modern society.

3.2.3 Management of Fashion Trends

Participants' responses varied based on the degree of trendiness or fashion-consciousness they chose to aspire to and regardless of the amount of cultural capital they possessed. However, both groups demonstrated differences in their sense of adaptability and in their provision of rationales for the adoption of new styles. Although all participants selectively prefer to wear new styles, HCs placed more emphasis on their intervention during the adoption process. HCs emphasized that they are highly selective of styles that fit their age, body type, roles, or personal preferences. They perceived themselves as active participants in the creation of trends:

Isabella (LC, 37 years old, governmental buyer): I'd say I try to find a cross between the real conservative stuff and the stuff that is in fashion You know the sweaters that have boat necks. They were real popular last spring. *I bought a bunch of those because I liked how they look on me and they are a little trendy.*

Alyssa (HC, 39 years old, professor): *I adopt a modified or toned-down version of trendy clothes If I just adopt whatever is in trend, I will look insane and very inappropriate for my age and job. If I completely ignore what's in fashion, I will look like a very boring forty-year-old working woman or working mom. I have to avoid that, because that's not who I am. I guess, instead of keeping up with fashion, not doing anything is socially unacceptable. Those people [who are said to be fashionable] adopt looks that are young and trendy, but they incorporate those into their styles.*

HCs' self-perceptions of filtering and modifying trends relates to self-images that rely on skillful adaptability to the changing world. Alternatively, LCs showed much less evidence of this type of self-concept. Because HCs possessed self-images that valued adaptability, they appeared to escape the feeling that they were victims of fashion. Thus, they were able to maintain coherent self-concepts.

To conclude the qualitative study, we discovered that self-presentation by appearance is a process that extends beyond the simple pursuit of attractiveness or the display of wealth. The process does not operate separately from individuals' development of self-concept. We believe that possession of cultural capital contributes to the development of multiple and contextual senses of self. It exerts an impact on the process of identification and presentation of those selves. Cultural capital encourages individuals to become highly attentive to the protean and symbolic nature of appearance.

4. Overall Conclusion

By the use of mixed methods, the current studies investigate the significance of complexity and diversity of thought processes in appearance management. The quantitative study firstly confirms the objectivity of the concept (i.e., multifaceted appearance management) and the fact that individual consumption processes are shaped by one's possession of cultural capital that is structured by society. Then the qualitative study uncovered how the cultural capital is applied in actual consumption practice (i.e., appearance management) at the individual level. By demonstrating the use of cultural resource in appearance management, we conclude that multifaceted appearance management is an indicator of cultural competence that is advantageous in consumption society. The research design and findings are summarized in Figure 1.

In the quantitative study, we proposed the concept of multifaceted appearance management as appearance-related thoughts and activities with a variety of goals and then tested the relationship between cultural capital and multifaceted appearance management. The result reveals that possession of cultural capital determines the degree of multifaceted appearance management as if the possession determines engagement in cultural activities. In other words, both appearance consumption and cultural consumption are based on cultural capital. In addition to the function of cultural capital, we discovered that multifaceted appearance management varies by sociocultural segments such as gender and ethnicity.

In the qualitative study, we explored the ways in which cultural capital induces multifaceted meanings and activities in appearance consumption. Findings revealed that appearance management as self-identification process involves presentation and integration of self and one's appearance and that this self-identification process becomes much more multifaceted when individuals are capable of perceiving the protean character of contextual cues from appearance-related commodities and people around the self as well as self-identity. In sum, possession of cultural capital results in the complexity and diversity of subjective meanings.

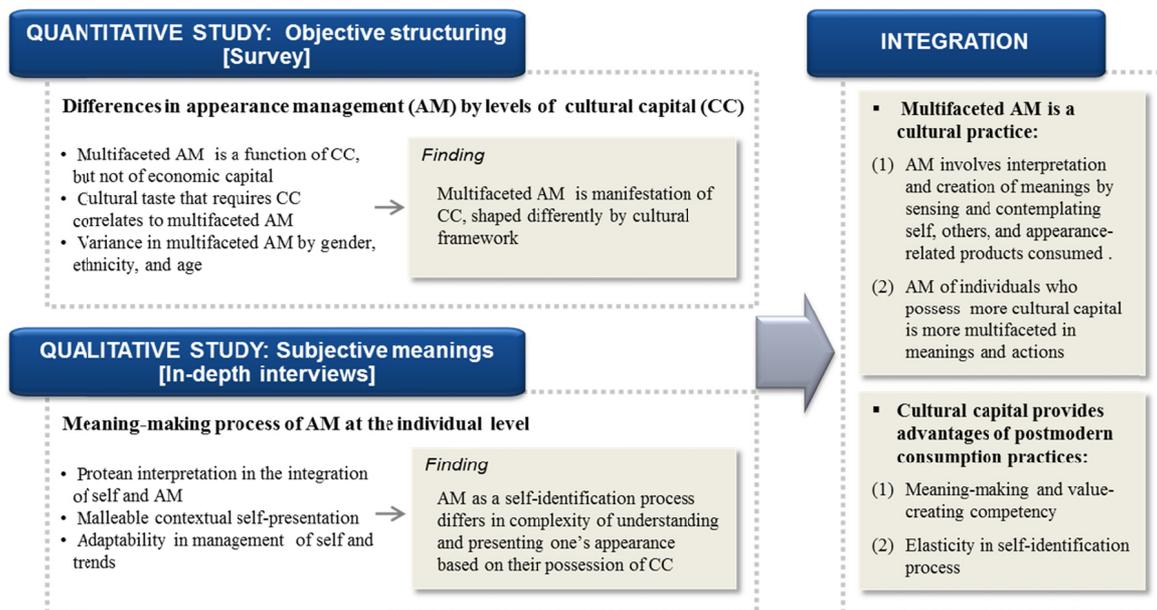


Figure 1. Summary of research design and findings

Integrating findings from both studies, we maintain that multifaceted appearance management is a consumption practice by culturally competent consumers who interpret, create, and communicate meanings out of cultural objects. The establishment of individuality by consumption is considered particularly important in Western societies (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). Consumption of appearance-related commodities is an important part of establishing and maintaining individuality. Through the examination of an individualistic practice like appearance management, our study demonstrates that consumption practices of individuals are grounded in resources that are subject to social structure. However, individuals are active agents, as in practice the meanings and activities of individuals create social distinctions. Drawing on the sociological perspective, our study interprets the dynamics of the structural influence of society on individual practices and the practical role of individuals who hold cultural capital.

The theoretical implications of our study can be found in its illumination of the function of cultural capital. Our study confirmed that cultural capital, as a universal cross-disciplinary competence, remains a useful concept that can be used to explain mundane but highly multifaceted practices of everyday consumption. We discuss the advantages that cultural capital provides individuals from two perspectives. First, cultural capital involves meaning making, which allows value creation. Consumers with high levels of cultural capital are better able to make sense of their choices to themselves and to others (Holt, 1998). This meaning-making ability is related to communicative competence (Warde et al., 1999) that determines legitimacy of choice in consumption. Value-creating ability is a critical competency in a postmodern society where objectivity of judgment is strongly questioned, trends change constantly, and meanings are fluid.

Second, cultural capital provides elasticity for self-identification. Overall, participants demonstrated efforts to build coherent self-images by appearance management. They constantly negotiated appearance to fit both self-concepts and external conditions. In particular, participants with high levels of cultural capital tailored their appearance to the subtleties of self-concept in particular situations. Cultural capital enables consumers to develop core values in their self-conceptions. It allows skillful integration of these values into contextual and versatile self-presentation. Cultural capital allows consumers room to maneuver to their advantage. It facilitates the performance of multiple roles in everyday presentation.

We would like to note a few limitations in our research. The sample we used consists of predominantly Caucasians (77%) and African Americans amount to nine percent of the sample. Although the imbalanced composition of a sample is not problematic in statistical testing for group comparisons, we would like to suggest future research that uses a sample with a more balanced composition for consistent findings. Another limitation related to the nature of secondary data analysis lies in the measurements. The appearance management items were not exhaustive and the cultural capital measures did not include inherited resources. These limitations warrant future research. However, the objective of the quantitative study was to test the effects of cultural capital on consumers' consumption at the societal level. Therefore, we believe we could not have accomplished this goal

without the use of large-scale data that reflected the characteristics of the population.

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Notes

Note 1. For the sake of convenience, the term, highbrow or middlebrow taste was used, but the term was not intended to convey any judgment or value.

Note 2. The labels, HC and LC, merely designate a hierarchy of cultural capital, as noted by Holt (1988). They are not intended to express any evaluation of the two groups.

Note 3. Emphasis was placed by italicizing to highlight direct relevance to the theme hereinafter.

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