AESTHETIC SELF-MANAGEMENT OF
PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Unfortunately, I believe, the dominant paradigm in the psychology of physical appearance is the "trait perspective"—the view that physical attractiveness is a static, fixed attribute of persons and that body images are essentially invariant. To the contrary, however, body-image percepts and attitudes also function as "state" variables, which fluctuate around some modal level in response to a variety of social environmental events—for example, weight-related cues (Cash & Brown, 1987; DelRosario et al., 1984) or the presence of social-comparison persons with certain physical characteristics (Cash, Cash, & Butters, 1983). The trait perspective further ignores the fact that people frequently and actively alter and control their physical aesthetics. At one extreme, people elect to receive cosmetic surgery (Cash & Horton, 1983; Pruzinsky & Edgerton, Chapter 10, this volume). People also achieve gradual physical changes by behavioral efforts to lose or gain weight. With time and a little help from their hormones, men grow facial hair. Yet everyday, with immediate results, men and women across the world engage in grooming behaviors to vary their physical appearance (Morris, 1985). As we saw in Table 3.1, the vast majority of American men and women are active in their orientations toward the development and maintenance of an attractive appearance. In my research on male pattern hair loss (Cash, 1987b, 1989b), the majority of balding men reported increases in various
appearance-managing behaviors to compensate for or cope with their hair loss—dressing nicer, growing facial hair, improving hairstyle, working out to enhance physique, and so forth. Thus, in part, physical appearance is a self-creation—in response to general cultural and specific situational norms, self-presentation goals for social image and for body image, and varying mood states (Cash, 1981, 1987a, 1988).

Two aspects of aesthetic self-management have received the most scientific attention: (1) the use of facial cosmetics by women and (2) the use of clothing (see Figure 3.2 for an example of the ways in which a woman might use clothing to manage aesthetic appearance). Women's cosmetics use for aesthetic enhancement is a salient practice throughout the world, as has been true in many cultures for centuries (Cordwell, 1985; Liggott, 1974). Considering cosmetics from our two perspectives, social image and self-image, produces two basic questions: What are the social-perceptual effects of cosmetics use? Do women feel differently about themselves, particularly in terms of body images, as a result of the application of facial makeup?

In a recent review of the available research literature (Cash, 1987a, 1988), I have argued, from a self-presentational point of view (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 1980), that cosmetics use in particular, and grooming behaviors in general, function to manage and control not only social impressions but also self-images (e.g., body-image affect, self-perceptions, and mood states). On the social perceptual side, Graham and Jouhar (1981) compared social judgments about women, preselected as average in attractiveness, who were photographed either without facial makeup or with professionally applied makeup. In the eyes of both male and female raters, the cosmetic makeover enhanced perceived physical attractiveness and generally produced more favorable personality attributions. Cox and Glick (1986) examined how several average-looking women were perceived when cosmetics-free versus following a professional makeover. The researchers found that raters' judgments of the amount of cosmetics did correlate positively with perceptions of attractiveness, femininity, and sexiness.

In a more recent investigation, social perceptions of women were compared under conditions in which the women were wearing their customary facial cosmetics versus following the removal of their makeup (Cash, Dawson, Davis, Bowen, & Galumbeck, 1989). Male social perceivers were more favorable in their judgments of attractiveness toward the women in the cosmetics-present than in the cosmetics-absent photograph. Surprisingly, female perceivers were not differentially affected by the presence or absence of makeup. Perhaps, as consumers of cosmetics, females are able to "see through" makeup to discern the person's natural appearance.

Turning to the self-image side of aesthetic self-management with cosmetics, several, mostly correlational, studies suggest a link between cosmetics use and a more positive body-image and feelings of social confidence and effectiveness (e.g., Cash & Cash, 1982; Cash, Kiss, & Chapman, 1985; Theberge & Kerraleague, 1979; Wright, Martin, Flynn, & Gunter, 1970). In our aforementioned experiment on cosmetics (Cash et al., 1989), we also examined the subjects' body-images in the customary cosmetics-present versus cosmetics-absent conditions. Results indicated more positive body-image cognitions and affect with cosmetics present than when subjects were cosmetics-free. A comparison of subjects' self-appraisals of physical attractiveness with observer ratings revealed that the women overestimated their attractiveness in the cosmetics-present condition and underestimated their attractiveness when without makeup. Moreover, the more makeup typically worn by the women, the greater the body-image differences between the two cosmetics conditions. In sum, "on the face of it," cosmetics appear to make a positive difference on self-image as well as on social-image.

Observed associations between specific individual-difference variables and cosmetics use also are in line with a self-presentational perspective. For example, high self-monitors, who are especially sensitive to impression management and are responsive to the physical appearance of others (Snyder et al., 1985), also report greater cosmetics use (Cash & Wunderle, 1987). Women with greater

![Figure 3.2](image-url)
attentional self-focus and body-focus (i.e., public self-consciousness) are more apt to engage in aesthetic self-management with cosmetics (Cash & Cash, 1982; Miller & Cox, 1982). In another study (Cash, Russ, & Chapman, 1985), greater cosmetics use was associated with less externality in locus of control; and women who were more situationally variable, or “strategic,” in their pattern of cosmetics use were also more liberal in sex-role attitudes and more internal in cosmetics use who were more feminine on a particular measure of sex-role identity (i.e., a measure reflecting histrionic emotionality and need for social approval and attention) used more facial cosmetics.

Let’s now consider another universal tool of aesthetic self-management—clothing. Solomon (1985) and Kaiser (1985) have compiled interesting works concerning the social psychology of fashion and clothing. Many of the observations that these authors convey are congruent with self-presentational, impression-management perspectives. The popularity of Molloy’s Dress for Success books (1975, 1977) attests to the importance of clothing and impression management in our society. One national field experiment (Cash, 1985b) manipulated grooming style, largely through the manipulation of clothing, to evaluate its influence on decisions about women in management. In short, this experiment involved “makeover” conditions that were equal in physical attractiveness but differed in the extent to which the image was socially perceived as “managerial” or “nonmanagerial.” The nonmanagerial appearance was largely that of aesthetic feminization. The more androgynous, managerial appearance was generally successful in fostering more favorable professional decisions about women applying for managerial positions at several personnel decisions about women applying for managerial positions at several personnel decision-making sites. Akin to the earlier discussion of the U.S. corporate data-collection sites. Akin to the earlier discussion of the U.S. corporate data-collection sites. In a similar experiment on women’s attire and personnel selection decisions, Forsythe, Drake, and Cox (1985) found the masculinity-femininity of professional dress to influence interviewers’ perceptions and recommendations regarding job applicants. Moderately masculine styles were more advantageous than either feminine or masculine extremes. Perhaps the motiveness, the femininity, or the individuality of women are deemed suspect if women go far as to become “clones” or “women in men’s clothes.” What’s good for the gender may not always work for the goose. The meanings of specific types of attire should interact with situational contexts; “uniforms” are not uniform. For instance, a man or woman in a conservative (masculinized) suit is apt to be regarded differently if applying for a “financial district” position than for a job in a creative art department. Other investigations included in Solomon’s (1985) Psychology of Fashion further reinforce the proposition that clothing communicates messages about its wearer to social audiences.

Though the literature is unfortunately sparse, grooming behaviors may be vital from the point of view of the characteristics of their intended audiences.

In an interesting study by Daly, Jogg, Sacks, Smith, and Zimring (1983), preening or self-grooming was unobtrusively observed among young adults in the restrooms of restaurants and bars. Females were found to preen more than males. And consistent with impression management theory, people preened more when they were about to join someone with whom they were having having a new relationship as opposed to someone they knew very well. In other words, people are more motivated to manage their physical self-presentations early on in potentially meaningful or consequential relationships—such as new romances or a crucial job interview. Alas, as spouses know, sometimes “familiarity breeds contempt.”

Audiences are not always anticipated accurately by persons constructing their own physical self-presentations. In an experiment on job interviewing, von Baeyer, Sherk, and Zanna (1981) discovered that when female applicants believed their interviewer would be a “male chauvinist” (as opposed to a male with less traditional gender-role values), the interviewed women actually presented themselves in a more traditionally “feminine” manner. They did so not only in their verbal and nonverbal communications but also by grooming in a more physically attractive and traditionally feminine style. Because, as was discussed above, prettiness and feminine attire may elicit sexist assumptions and discrimination, especially by sex-typed perceivers (see Cash, 1985b; Cash & Kilcullen, 1985), such self-presentations may backfire and confirm interviewers’ biases.

As was the case with women’s cosmetics use, individual differences relevant to self-presentational processes have been associated with the strategic use of clothing as well—for example, public self-consciousness (Miller, Davis, & Rowold, 1982, Solomon & Schopler, 1982) and self-monitoring (Davis & Lennox, 1985; Zaidman & Snyder, as cited by Snyder, 1987). What is quite surprising, however, is the lack of scientific study concerning the effects of clothing on body-image affective states. From the “power tie” to one’s combed, well-worn jeans, I believe that clothing, along with other accomplishments of appearance, are “mood-altering substances.” Surely some individuals engage in appearance-managing behaviors to create desired self-perceptions and emotional experiences. Here, good research is greatly needed.

We must begin to think creatively about the clinical applications of these findings and perspectives. An area of significant promise is the incorporation of “physical appearance training” into the treatment regimens for such diverse groups as socially anxious and inext youth, socially withdrawn and depressed elderly, severely obese persons, disheveled schizophrenics, cancer patients undergoing appearance-altering chemotherapy, to name but a few (Graham & Kligman, 1985a, 1985b; Mulready & Lamb, 1985; Pertchuk, 1985, Roberts, 1985).