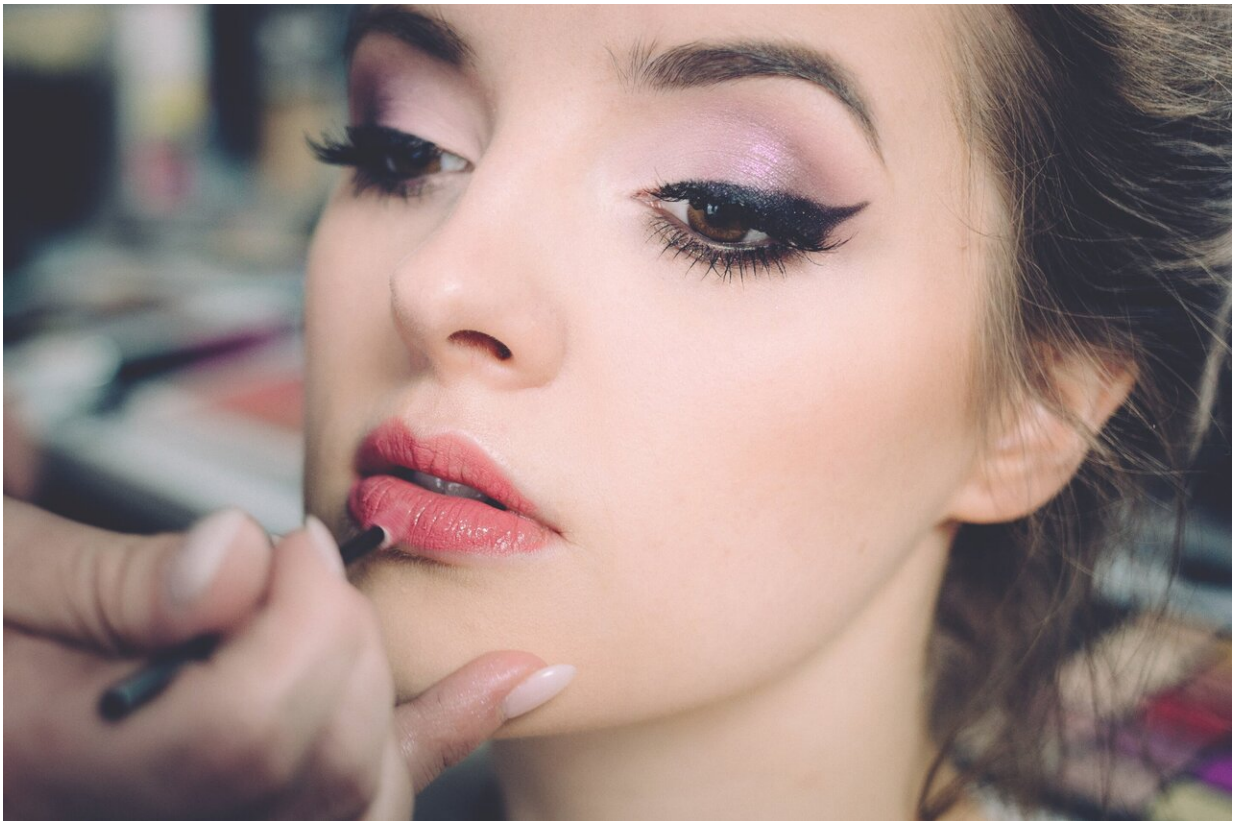


People spend 1/6th of their lifetimes enhancing their appearance, says study

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An international team including HSE researchers has conducted the largest ever cross-cultural study of appearance-enhancing behaviors. They have found that people worldwide spend an average of four hours a

day on enhancing their beauty. Caring for one's appearance does not depend on gender, and older people worry as much about looking their best as the young do. The strongest predictor of attractiveness-enhancing behaviors appears to be social media usage. The study findings have been published in *Evolution and Human Behavior*.

People have always valued beauty. Throughout history, we have gone to great lengths to enhance our physical appearance. Early Homo sapiens are known to have applied pigment to decorate their bodies, and ancient civilizations widely used cosmetics, ornate clothing, and jewelry. According to some scholars, our tendency for appearance enhancement might have originated from primate self-grooming behaviors.

But what exactly motivates us to spend time trying to look more physically attractive? From an [evolutionary perspective](#), this may be part of mating behavior, since good looks indicate [good health](#) and good genetics, maximizing the chances of having healthy offspring; therefore, physical appearance is one of the key criteria in selecting a mate. From this perspective, women are assumed to be more interested in enhancing their physical attractiveness than men, and younger unmarried women are thought to be particularly concerned with their appearance.

There are a few other theories explaining people's preoccupation with their physical attractiveness. One of them, the pathogen prevalence theory, suggests that people in countries with a high prevalence of dangerous infections such as leishmaniasis, trypanosomiasis, malaria, and leprosy are likely to spend more time improving their appearance, in particular to conceal visual imperfections which may be perceived as signs of disease. Sociocultural characteristics, such as gender inequality or individualistic vs. collectivist attitudes, and the influence of mass media or social media usage can also impact on how much time people invest in their appearance.

An international team of scientists, including HSE researchers, has tested a range of these theories to determine which factors have the greatest impact on beauty-enhancing behavior. The authors surveyed more than 93,000 people across 93 countries about the amount of time they spend every day enhancing their [physical appearance](#). To date, it is the largest study carried out in in [evolutionary psychology](#).

"We were able to collect data on almost 100,000 people across a very large sample in terms of age, education and [income level](#), including many participants from non-industrial countries for which we had no previous data," said Dmitrii Dubrov, study co-author, a Research Fellow of the HSE Centre for Sociocultural Research.

According to the evolutionary hypothesis, people want to look good to improve their chances of finding a suitable mate. The survey found both men and women spend an average of about four hours a day on behaviors designed to enhance their physical attractiveness. In addition to putting on makeup, grooming their hair grooming and selecting clothes, such behaviors include caring for body hygiene, exercising or following a specific diet for the purpose of improving one's appearance (as opposed to taking care of one's health, for example).

It has also been found that [older people](#) spend about as much time as younger ones enhancing their attractiveness. People in early romantic relationships tend to spend more time enhancing their appearance compared to those who are married or have been dating for a while.

The pathogen prevalence hypothesis was only partly confirmed: Individuals with a history of serious pathogenic diseases were likely to spend more time enhancing their appearance, e.g. by applying makeup to mask traces of the disease, but no association was found between one's investment in beauty and living in a country where certain pathogens occur. The reason may be better healthcare, even in [poorer countries](#)

which used to struggle with severe infections in the past.

As expected, women from countries with pronounced [gender inequality](#) tend to invest more time and effort in beauty enhancement than women in countries which have advanced gender equality. The same is true of countries and cultures with traditional attitudes towards gender roles.

Individualistic cultures that value individual accomplishments over those of the collective also emphasize the importance of enhancing one's physical attractiveness.

Social media usage appears to be the strongest predictor of attractiveness-enhancing behaviors. Active social media users—in particular, those who strive for unrealistic beauty standards and become concerned when their pictures get fewer likes—have been found to invest more time in improving their [appearance](#) than those who spend less or no time on social networks.

"In this paper, we tested five existing theories that shed light on people's attractiveness-enhancing behaviors. These theories are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. We confirmed certain assumptions and came up with some interesting and less expected results. This study is an important step in evolutionary and sociocultural research that will allow a better understanding of human psychology and our attitudes towards beauty," concludes Dmitrii Dubrov.

More information: Marta Kowal et al, Predictors of enhancing human physical attractiveness: Data from 93 countries, *Evolution and Human Behavior* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2022.08.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2022.08.003)

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