

**SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN INTEREST IN ONE'S LOOKS****DOI: <http://doi.org/10.26758/10.1.6>**

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**Abstract**

**Objectives.** It is important to study the interest in one's appearance because it may influence on health status and social functioning. The objectives of this study were to be determined the degree of manifested interest in one's appearance and the impact of sociodemographic variables on the interest in one's appearance.

**Material and methods.** A self-report scale was constructed by using seven items of a questionnaire focused on narcissism, because narcissism expresses an excessive interest in oneself and one's physical appearance. This scale measuring the interest in one's appearance had good psychometric properties among 528 participants.

**Results.** Medium/moderate interest in one's appearance prevailed, followed by low interest, and then high interest in one's appearance. Extremely low interest in one's appearance was very rare. None participant manifested extremely high interest in one's appearance. The family status and age differentiated the answers on some items of the scale ( $p < .05$ ). The interest in one's appearance slightly diminished in the cases of more own children, a longer period of work experience, and among the male participants ( $p < .05$ ).

**Conclusions.** The people in the social roles of female, youth, recent worker, or a beloved seem to express stronger interest in one's appearance that may be followed by behaviour directed to maintenance of a positive body image and attractiveness to others. The most vulnerable social-demographic groups for neglecting the care of one's overall outlook by reason of extremely low interest in one's appearance seemed to be the workers with very long work experience, and more advanced in age.

**Keywords:** appearance, attitude, gender, interest, need.

**Introduction**

Body image consists of personal perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about own appearance (Carcieri, 2018). Appearance may be considered as the way that someone looks, and the impression given by him/her (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2019a). It is important to study the interest in one's appearance, because it may express the need for self-knowledge, positive attitude towards oneself and emotional attractiveness of one's body image.

The interest expresses some realized needs (Stefanov, 1988). The interest is an emotional manifestation of human need for knowledge (Maklakov, 2001). People should strive to accumulate knowledge about their appearance if they are interested in it.

The interest indicates a specific attitude towards an object that is emotionally attractive, and this object could satisfy the need for knowledge (Ivanova, 1976). The interest expresses the positive attitude towards some kinds of activity, object or knowledge (Vasilev and Merdzhanova,

2003). It is expected the interest in one's appearance to express the positive attitude towards overall appearance as an aspect of body image. Appearance and emotions are related (Comfort Keepers, 2017). One's appearance should provoke strong feelings in order to direct the interest. The interest is a pleasant feeling that is created by a new impression appearing in the mind (Izard, 1977). Every change in one's appearance should increase the interest in it.

The interest acts as a motive because of realized significance and emotional attractiveness of an object (Rubinstein, 2000). The interest guides individual behaviour in some sphere of social activity (Yadov, 1975). The interest in one's looks is related to eating behaviour and physical activity (Alexandrova-Karamanova, 2018). Greater interest in how we look is related to social communication and frequent social contacts (Comfort Keepers, 2017). The impressions based on facial appearance influence social communication (Gheorghiu, Callan and Skylark, 2017). Physically attractive people may benefit more from their social contacts (Nerdlove, 2014). The interest in one's appearance may guide individual behaviour in human communications in family and society.

American college students made their negative appearance comments most often in reference to their body weight/shape/size and they made their positive appearance comments most often in reference to their overall appearance (Park et al., 2009) that means one's overall appearance should be estimated mainly positively and should provoke mainly positive emotions.

Contemporary men show greater interest in their appearance than men in the past (IANS, 2017). Bulgarian men from 18 to 29 years old seem interested in their appearance in order to be healthy, to feel good, to achieve high self-esteem, to be attractive, to avoid being teased by others, to be able to defend themselves physically, and for professional development in sport (Alexandrova-Karamanova, 2018). Bulgarian women from 23 to 59 years old attach great importance to the way they look, pay attention to their appearance and engage in behaviours aimed at improving their appearance (Bonev, 2018). Appearance is very important for females because of socialization practices (Devon, 2017) and for elderly people because of maintaining purpose in life (Comfort Keepers, 2017). These findings imply some social-demographic differences in the interest in one's appearance, especially gender and age differences.

It is important to study the interest in one's appearance because it may influence on health status and social functioning. When it comes to college-age individuals, appearance is more important than health (University of Missouri-Columbia, 2012). Consistent exposure to the body and beauty ideals presented in the media may result in some discontentment with one's appearance and body image (Carcieri, 2018). Body Obsession is a conviction that one's appearance is severely flawed related to extreme body image dissatisfaction and preoccupation with own physical appearance (Butterfly Foundation for Eating Disorder, n.d.). People who have Body Dysmorphic Disorder, i.e., a body-image disorder, are preoccupied with some defects in their appearance that may cause severe emotional distress and problems in social functioning (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2018). This type of disorder is a negative body image, marked by an intense preoccupation with a flaw in own physical appearance (Butterfly Foundation for Eating Disorders, n.d.), it is characterized by preoccupation with one's appearance and perceived deficits in one's appearance even if they are not observable by others (Carcieri, 2018). This disease often develops in adolescents and teens, and it affects men and women almost equally (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2018). These findings suggest age differences in interest in one's appearance, but not any gender differences.

European American adolescents who were less satisfied with their appearance at age 10 reported declines in self-esteem from age 10 to age 14, but adolescents with lower global self-esteem at age 10 did not decline in appearance satisfaction (Barker and Bornstein, 2009) that means appearance satisfaction determined global self-esteem, but global self-esteem did not reflect mainly appearance satisfaction. The relation between self-esteem and appearance satisfaction was the reason for choosing a self-report method based on self-assessment for measuring the interest in

one's appearance.

The objectives of this study were to determine the degree of manifested interest in one's appearance and the impact of sociodemographic variables on the interest in one's appearance. One hypothesis stated that the moderate interest in one's appearance would prevail over low and high interest in one's appearance. Another hypothesis supposed some sociodemographic differences in the interest in one's appearance, such as gender and age differences - it was expected women to be more interested in their appearance than men (based on the findings and assumptions by Bonev, 2018; Devon, 2017), as well as younger people to be more interested in their appearance than older participants based on specialists' findings and assumptions (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2018; University of Missouri-Columbia, 2012).

### Material and methods

Narcissism may be interpreted as an excessive interest in oneself and one's physical appearance, admiration of oneself and a need for admiration by others, a sense of entitlement, selfishness, self-centredness, and a lack of empathy (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2019b). That is why seven items from Shamshikova and Klepikova (2010)'s "Narcissistic personality traits" questionnaire were used in a study of interests in one's appearance - I think I take good care of my appearance; There are times when I like to capture the admired glances that are directed at me; In principle, I like to look good and get compliments about it; It would be nice if my picture decorated the cover of a fashion magazine; I like to be different from the others with my way of dressing; There are times when I love to dress sexy; Any shortcoming in my appearance spoils my mood. The answers were given on a 5-point scale from 1 - completely disagree to 5 - completely agree.

**Table 1. Reliability indexes for the scale used for data collection**

Type of reliability index	Value of reliability index
Cronbach's alpha	.657
Mean inter-item correlation coefficient	0.224
Guttman split-half reliability coefficient	.712
Spearman-Brown split-half reliability coefficient	.716

Table 1 reveals that the items formed a scale whose Cronbach's alpha indicated marginal reliability, according to Wigdor and Green (1991, p.118). The positive correlation coefficients between all the items in the scale (the minimum inter-item correlation coefficient was 0.084, and the maximum inter-item correlation coefficient was 0.351) also indicated its homogeneity (Stoyanova, 2007). Its split – half reliability was high enough (it was found dividing the items into two halves of the scale – the first half consisted of the items "There are times when I love to dress sexy", "Any shortcoming in my appearance spoils my mood", "I think I take good care of my appearance", and "There are times when I like to capture the admired glances that are directed at me"; the second half consisted of the items "In principle, I like to look good and get compliments about it", "It would be nice if my picture decorated the cover of a fashion magazine", "I like to be different from the others with my way of dressing").

Factor analysis (Principal component analysis with Varimax rotation) extracted one-factor solution that explained 34.164% of variance on the answers given to the items in the scale. This factor solution deserved to be interpreted, because Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = .795, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = 389.952,  $df = 21$ ,  $p < .001$ . The item loadings on the extracted factor varied between .468 (for the item "Any shortcoming in my appearance spoils my mood") and .712 (for the item "In principle, I like to look good and get compliments about it"). The extracted factor was named "Interest in one's appearance" based on the content of its items. In the original "Narcissistic personality traits" questionnaire by Shamshikova and Klepikova (2010), these

items were part of two scales - "Need for constant attention and admiration" and "Immersion in phantasies".

The participants in the study were selected to be adults, not minor youth, neither pensioners. The sample size followed the recommendations by Guadagnoli and Velicer (1988) for a minimum of 400 participants when applying factor analysis. More than 400 participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire, because they participated voluntarily and could refuse doing it. All the subjects who volunteered to participate in the study were 528 participants. They were studied from 2015 to 2018 in different Bulgarian cities. Their mean age was 29.31 years old,  $SD = 9.17$  years. One hundred and twenty participants informed about their working experience. Their average period of working experience was 79.22 months (approximately 6 years and a half),  $SD = 114.98$  months (approximately 9 years and a half), and their working experience lasted from 1 month to 456 months (approximately 38 years). The female participants, the participants living alone without children, and the subjects graduated from higher education prevailed in the sample (Table 2).

**Table 2. Sociodemographic description of the studied sample**

Sociodemographic categories	Sociodemographic sub-categories	Number of participants
Gender	Male	108
	Female	418
	Missing answers	2
Family status	Married	33
	Single	66
	Divorced	7
	Widowed	3
	Cohabitation	24
	Missing answers	395
Number of own children	Without children	88
	One child	22
	Two children	19
	Three children	4
	Missing answers	395
Educational level	Primary education	4
	Secondary education	63
	Higher education	213
	PhD degree	15
	Missing answers	233

Because of the small number of the participants in some compared groups (Table 2), the non-parametric method of Kruskal-Wallis was used for group comparisons concerning family status and educational levels. The non-parametric method of Mann-Whitney U was applied for gender comparisons of the responses on the items because of data distribution. Independent Samples T Test was used for gender comparison of total scores on the scale. Chi square analysis was performed for group comparisons of the levels of expression of interest in one's appearance. Statistical analysis was performed by means of SPSS 20. Some effect sizes were calculated – Cohen's  $d$  for Independent samples T-test (Vasilev, 2014; Stangroom, 2019), Phi for chi-square analysis (Zaiontz, 2019),  $r$  for Mann-Whitney U (Vasilev, 2014; Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016), eta-squared for Kruskal - Wallis test (Tomczak and Tomczak, 2014; Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016).

## Results

The participants' average score on the scale "Interest in one's appearance" was 25.831,  $SD = 4.785$ ,  $N = 498$ , with 30 missing answers. The participants' scores on the scale were normally distributed (skewness = -0.228, standard error of skewness = 0.109, kurtosis = -0.437, standard error of kurtosis = 0.218). The average score indicated the participants' interests in their appearance, because it was above the medium score on the scale (the total score varied from 7 to 35 with a medium score of 21).

The interest in how one looks was expressed mainly in the form of taking good care of their appearance and liking to capture the admired glances that were directed at them. Then the participants liked to be different from the others with their way of dressing, liked to look good and get compliments about it, sometimes loved to dress sexy, and considered that any shortcoming in their appearance spoiled their mood. The preference for decorating the cover of a fashion magazine with their picture was the weakest form of expression of interest in one's appearance (Table 3).

**Table 3. Ranking descriptors of interest in how one looks**

Items of the scale	Median	Mode	Range	Number of given responses	Number of missing responses
They took good care of their appearance	4	5	4	525	3
They liked to capture the admired glances that were directed at them	4	5	4	525	3
They liked to be different from the others with their way of dressing	4	4	4	527	1
They liked to look good and get compliments about it	4	4	4	526	2
They sometimes loved to dress sexy	4	4	4	507	21
They considered that any shortcoming in their appearance spoiled their mood	4	4	4	503	25
They preferred that their picture decorated the cover of a fashion magazine	3	4	4	526	2

The interests in one's appearance reflected the participants' satisfaction with their overall appearance, their positive attitude towards their overall appearance as an aspect of body image, because most participants considered that they took good care of their appearance (86.9%), they liked to look good and get compliments about it (83.9%), they liked to capture the admired glances that were directed at them (80.5%), they liked to be different from the others with their way of dressing (58.5%), they sometimes loved to dress sexy (58%), they considered that any shortcoming in their appearance spoiled their mood (55.1%), and almost a half of the participants (44.3%) preferred that their picture decorated the cover of a fashion magazine.

Low interest in their appearance (below the mean score on the scale minus one standard deviation) characterized 94 participants (17.8%), and 16 out of them (3%) manifested extremely low interest in one's appearance (below the mean score on the scale minus two standard deviations). Medium/moderate interest in their appearance was typical for 313 participants (59.3%). High interest in their appearance (above the mean score on the scale plus one standard deviation) was expressed by 91 participants (17.2%), and no one manifested extremely high interest in one's appearance (above the mean score on the scale plus two standard deviations). 30 participants (5.7%) did not answer all the items of the scale and their interest in one's appearance was not assessed. Most participants expressed their interest in their overall appearance.

The participants who thought that they took good care of their appearance also liked to look good and get compliments about it (Spearman's  $\rho = 0.309$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $N = 526$ ). The participants who liked to capture the admired glances that were directed at them also liked to look good and get compliments about it (Spearman's  $\rho = 0.442$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $N = 526$ ), and preferred for decorating the cover of a fashion magazine with their picture (Spearman's  $\rho = 0.327$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $N = 527$ ). The participants who liked to look good and get compliments about it also preferred their picture to decorate the cover of a fashion magazine (Spearman's  $\rho = 0.392$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $N = 527$ ), and they loved to dress sexy (Spearman's  $\rho = 0.328$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $N = 507$ ). The participants who preferred their picture to decorate the cover of a fashion magazine also loved to dress sexy (Spearman's  $\rho = 0.304$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $N = 508$ ).

The female participants were more interested in their appearance than the male participants, as resulted from the statistics:  $t(495) = 3.402$ ,  $p = .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.401$  as computed, according to Stangroom (2019), i.e. intermediate effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard (2016) (Table 4).

**Table 4. Average values and standard deviations of gender scores on the scale measuring the interest in one's appearance**

Gender category	Number	Mean value	Standard deviation
Male	95	24.347	4.334
Female	402	26.187	4.828

More male participants than expected had low interest in their appearance, and more female participants than expected had high interest in their appearance (Table 5). Statistics showed that  $\chi^2 (N = 497, df = 2) = 13.025$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\Phi = 0.162$ , i.e. small effect size, according to Ziaontz (2019).

**Table 5. Gender differences in the levels of interest in how one looks**

			Levels of interest in one's appearance		
			Low interest	Medium interest	High interest
Gender belonging	Men	Empirical count	25	64	6
		Expected count	18.0	59.6	17.4
		% within men	26.3%	67.4%	6.3%
	Women	Empirical count	69	248	85
		Expected count	76.0	252.4	73.6
		% within women	17.2%	61.7%	21.1%

The female participants more often than the male participants (Table 6) liked to capture the admired glances that were directed at them (Mann-Whitney  $U = 19207.000$ ,  $p = .010$ ,  $r = 0.112$ , i.e. small effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016), liked to look good and get compliments about it (Mann-Whitney  $U = 18772.000$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $r = 0.133$ , i.e. small effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016), liked to be different from the others with their way of dressing (Mann-Whitney  $U = 20044.000$ ,  $p = .045$ ,  $r = 0.087$ , i.e. small effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016), loved to dress sexy (Mann-Whitney  $U = 13616.500$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = 0.236$ , i.e. intermediate effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016), considered that any shortcoming in their appearance spoiled their mood (Mann-Whitney  $U = 17381.500$ ,  $p = .044$ ,  $r = 0.088$ , i.e. small effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016).

**Table 6. Mean ranks of male and female's answers to the items of the scale measuring interest in one's appearance**

Item	Gender	
	Male	Female
They liked to capture the admired glances that were directed at them	232.34	271.55
They liked to look good and get compliments about it	227.22	272.98
They liked to be different from the others with their way of dressing	238.89	270.55
They loved to dress sexy	185.82	270.96
Item	Gender	
	Male	Female
They considered that any shortcoming in their appearance spoiled their mood	226.86	258.69

The family status did not differentiate the participants' interest in their appearance (Kruskal Wallis Test = 2.253,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .689$ ) measured with the total score on the scale. However, the family status differentiated the answers on some items of the scale. The family status differentiated the participants who liked to be different from the others with their way of dressing (Kruskal Wallis Test = 10.674,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.052$ , i.e. small effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016). The studied cohabitating people most preferred being different from the others with their way of dressing (mean rank = 80.48), followed by the married participants (mean rank = 67.38), then by the single participants (mean rank = 66.61), the widowed participants (mean rank = 47.67), and the divorced participants least preferred being different from the others with their way of dressing (mean rank = 30.93).

The educational level did not differentiate the participants' interests in their appearance (Kruskal Wallis Test = 1.849,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = .604$ ). There were not any significant educational differences in the answers on the items of the scale regarding interest in one's appearance ( $p > .05$ ).

The interest in one's appearance slightly diminished with more own children (Pearson correlation coefficient = -0.236,  $p = .006$ ,  $N = 132$ ) and with a longer period of work experience (Pearson correlation coefficient = -0.204,  $p = .026$ ,  $N = 119$ ). The workers with longer work experience liked less to be different from the others with their way of dressing (Spearman's rho = -0.195,  $p = .033$ ,  $N = 120$ ), and loved less to dress sexy (Spearman's rho = -0.251,  $p = .006$ ,  $N = 120$ ) – the correlational coefficients expressed a weak, but significant relationship between the studied variables. The participants with more children loved less to dress sexy (Spearman's rho = -0.194,  $p = .025$ ,  $N = 133$ ), less preferred their picture to decorate the cover of a fashion magazine (Spearman's rho = -0.213,  $p = .014$ ,  $N = 133$ ), and less liked to look good and get compliments about it (Spearman's rho = -0.183,  $p = .035$ ,  $N = 133$ ).

Interest in one's appearance (measured with the total score on the scale) was not significantly related to age (Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.049,  $p = .589$ ,  $N = 124$ ). Age correlated significantly, but weakly, only with the answers on the item "It would be nice if my picture decorated the cover of a fashion magazine" (Spearman's rho = -0.193,  $p = .001$ ,  $N = 308$ ). Younger participants preferred more than older participants their picture to decorate the cover of a fashion magazine.

## Discussions

Interest in one's appearance may be considered a positive attitude towards oneself, because of taking good care of one's appearance, and striving to receive social recognition in the forms of admiration and compliments for one's appearance. Interest in one's appearance was expressed also as a positive feeling provoked by looking differently from the others in the way of dressing, being sexy, the lack of shortcomings in one's appearance, even readiness to decorate the cover of a

fashion magazine with one's picture. More than a half of the participants expressed their interest in their overall appearance.

The results relevant to the objective of this study to determine the degree of manifested interest in one's appearance supported the hypothesis that the moderate interest in one's appearance would prevail over low and high interest in one's appearance. A limitation of this study could be that the items were modified from a questionnaire measuring narcissism, and no one participant revealed to be diagnosed with Narcissistic Personality disorder that could explain the lack of extremely high interest in one's appearance.

The results relevant to the objective of this study to determine the impact of sociodemographic variables on the interest in one's appearance supported the hypothesis that some sociodemographic differences would exist in the interest in one's appearance, such as gender and age differences. A limitation of this study concerned the small and uneven number of the participants in some compared social groups, such as for example the prevalence of female participants in the sample, and the small number of divorced and widowed participants. The small number of the participants in some compared social groups does not permit generalisability of results concerning family status differences and educational differences in the interest in one's appearance.

Some social-demographic differences were found in the interest in one's appearance such as gender differences, differences related to the number of own children and time of work experience. The participants who were most interested in their appearance were found to be the women without children whose work experience was shorter. As some authors (Devon, 2017) state, appearance is very important for females. Socialization practices emphasize on the importance of female appearance for attracting a partner (Argyle and Henderson, 1989) that could explain female high interest in their appearance. The women without children should have more time to take care of themselves than the women with own children that may explain the differences in their interest in their appearance. Besides the shortage of time, the women with own children have already attracted their partner and have implemented their main biological programming task (i.e., birth-giving) together with their partner that may diminished their interest in one's appearance and their motivation in this regard may drop down. The decreased frequency of intimate contacts in lasting intimate relationships may also be related to weaker interest in one's appearance.

Shorter time of work experience may characterize a young person who puts more efforts to build one's favourable image at workplace than an experienced worker who has already established his/her favourable image and only maintains it. The differences related to age and family status concerned only the answers on some items measuring some components of the interest in one's appearance. Younger participants, as suggested also by "Anxiety and Depression Association of America" (2018) and the participants who had an intimate partner expressed more interest in one's appearance. The efforts put for being attractive contribute to retaining the partner in the relationship.

## Conclusions

A new scale was constructed for measuring the interest in one's appearance based on combining several items from two scales of the questionnaire "Narcissistic personality traits" by Shamshikova and Klepikova (2010). Its total score can be used for the purpose of measuring the interest in one's appearance, as well as its items separately. This scale has high enough reliability and proven construct validity based on the theoretical model of expected differences between some social-demographic groups' interest in one's appearance. The lack of cases with extremely high interest in one's appearance indicated minimal risk for developing body image disorder among the individuals participating in the study. All participants were not diagnosed with such a disorder that also proved the construct validity of the scale. The small percentage of participants with extremely



low interest in one's appearance indicated small risk for neglecting the care of one's outlook. The most widespread was the medium interest in one's appearance that was necessary for motivating the maintenance of positive body image by taking cares of oneself. Besides developing a new scale for measuring the interest in one's appearance, this study contributes to the scientific knowledge about interests and body image in relation to social functioning. The established sociodemographic differences in the interest in one's looks reveal that the social roles of female, recent worker, youth, or a beloved seem to function by means of expressing stronger interest in one's appearance that may be followed by more frequent behavioural acts directed to maintenance of a positive body image and attractiveness to others. The most vulnerable social-demographic groups for neglecting the care of one's overall outlook seemed to be the workers with very long work experience, more advanced in age, because they expressed extremely low interest in their appearance. Interest in their own appearance may be stimulated by means of support in this regard by significant others at home and in the workplace, as well as by awareness of relationship between health status and one's outlook.

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