

## **The beauty as a value. The present and the future**

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*Abstract:* Young people want to differentiate themselves from others, but in the end, the choices made following the dynamics of fashion (Simmel, 1911). They want the novelty, following the rules dictated by fashion. It is a way to please them and to interest others in a constant game of seduction (Baudrillard, 1979). In our society, the beauty is a symbol of progress, as a post-material value (Inglehart, 1977; 1990). As the primary tool of seduction, all the instruments that bring the body to the maximum of beauty, such as clothing, beauty care, fitness, are becoming increasingly important. This is an attempt to improve the image of ourselves, obscuring our limitations and our weaknesses. This obscures our identity, our true face (Viviani, 2009). In this research, the size and importance of aesthetic appearance of the body are explored through four questions. Objective of this research is whether beauty is a value: is the aesthetic appearance is a value? How important is the beauty and aesthetic value?

*Keywords:* body, beauty, esthetical appearance, value

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## **Introduction**

In postmodern society, the primacy of view (Featherstone, 1991) determines the development of aesthetic criteria as an important yardstick in interpersonal relationships. The identity of the subject and the social relationships comply with the logic of fashion and the dynamics of consumption (Simmel, 1895). If you always mutual recognition takes place on the body plan, now there is a primacy of the aesthetic dimension. A perspective that promotes the body, which becomes the business of the subject (Le Breton, 2000).

In this process, which takes shape in the social interaction that creates the same subject or to which it participates, corporeality is socially constructed (Le Breton, 2004): through working on their personal appearance, with a look at the choices made by those around him.

Then, young people want to differentiate themselves from others, but in the end, the choices made following the dynamics of fashion (Simmel, 1895). They want the novelty, following the rules dictated by fashion. It is a way to please themselves and to interest others in a constant game of seduction (Baudrillard, 1979).

In this research, the size and importance of aesthetic appearance of the body are explored through four questions:

1. *How important are the following values for you?* (item: Beauty/Esthetical appearance);
2. *A little bit of imagination is required about the culture of the future for the next questions. In 2030, the following aspects of society, these aspects will increase, decrease or stay the same?* (item: Importance of physical appearance);
3. *In your opinion, in 2030 the following phenomena will decrease, stay the same or increase?* (item: Diffusion of use of aesthetic surgery);
4. *To make your future better, how important do you think the following are?* (item: Beauty).

In general, therefore, the attention to beauty and body care is considered both an individual value both and collective and future value.

Questions *How important are the following values for you?* and *To make your future better, how important do you think the following are?* relate to the existence of the subject. These questions ask how important is beauty for the young interviewee.

The other two questions (*A little bit of imagination is required about the culture of the future for the next questions. In 2030, the following aspects of society, these aspects will increase, decrease or stay the same?* and *In your opinion, in 2030 the following phenomena will decrease, stay the same or increase?*) invited respondents to make a prediction about the relevance of such issues in the future society, and then considering what the social interest in these values.

It will be interesting to see if there are differences between what young people consider important for themselves and what, instead, they expect from future.

This scenario takes the view presented by Simmel (1895). This author believes fashion is the result of the need to conform to others and, simultaneously, the need to distinguish them.

Social relations are based on the principles of recognition and acceptance and approval to a link that allows anyone to recognize each other. Is this true for the young people interviewed? Is the aesthetic appearance a value? How important is the beauty and aesthetic value? And how does it affect the future of young people interviewed?

### **The body-portrait of the postmodern society**

The process of individualization that characterizes our society leads the individual to live in a new situation of isolation. The man is now surrounded by endless possibilities, but has no real datum point. The identity ceases to be an innate characteristic. Identity becomes the result of continuous definition and redefinition of the subject, it is the result of an attempt to create a microcosm in which to escape and simultaneously exercise their freedom.

Add two different processes to this new centrality of the ego (Pulcini, 2001).

*First, the transformation of the traditional perspective of health in the new concept of wellness* (Secondulfo, 2011; Viviani, 2010).

Today, following the growing rapprochement between the world of medicine and consumer<sup>2</sup>, health is related to beauty treatments.

For this reason, the subject is more concerned for his health. The man becomes responsible for his health. It focuses on the lifestyle as an important variable affecting the well-being. In our society, a healthy body is not suffering from illness, old age, death. Health deletes weaknesses and limitations. In this sense, health is built through rituals involving the body: body building, massage, spa treatments, fitness, cosmetic surgery, etc.

*Second, the primacy of sight.*

Our society is the period of the showcase, exaggeration, gossip, placing in the field of emotions<sup>3</sup> (Baudrillard, 1979). The view is the new and important sense that governs and regulates the individual and social choices. The visual attraction enriches everyday life, every object, situation and person. Every element of society, especially the subject, aims to become an aesthetic artifice.

The body is the business card of the subject (Le Breton, 2000). The subject becomes a new and important project for the subject. The individual pursues the best performance. Our society is characterized by a veritable ecstasy of the body. The new god, the god of our time is body. There is a growing awareness that leads to a religious body, with their liturgies, ceremonies (Camporesi, 2008). The physicality is part of the pleasure-seeking that characterizes postmodernity. It is the source of desires and, simultaneously, a solution for their fulfillment. It creates and satisfies the desire of subject to feel good, to feel accepted by others and, therefore, feel more secure. The body is the fulcrum of a double narcissism: I seek pleasure because I have the body and I find pleasure in the care of the body.

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<sup>2</sup> Consider the development of wellness centers, or the spread of functional foods, those foods modified in the laboratory to which are added some properties useful for the prevention of diseases and / or treatment of some of them. These realities well portray the implosion of the medical dimension to that of consumption and aesthetic care.

<sup>3</sup> Consider the prevalence and the large audiences that have programs that enact the emotions; those programs that pose excessive attention to the emotions of the protagonists. The reality show, a 24-hour staring up 24 people living in extreme situations trying to push the feelings experienced by the protagonists (meeting with distant parents, ex-girlfriends that reappear, lovers, etc.).

Like a dress, but also because of the dress<sup>4</sup>, the individual reshapes itself, modify the social representation, tries to manipulate their identity (Viviani, 2009). This leads to an obsessive attention to the subject's own body.

The subject changes to his body in an attempt to satisfy the desire for self-assertion and the need for visibility (Inglehart, 1977; 1990). It emerges the image of a body as body-portrait. The embodiment is the depiction of the subject. The body makes visible the identity of the subject himself, his lifestyle. At the same time, the body is a canvas, a painting in which the man draws himself. The subject is the only artist. The individual designs and changes in a continuous self-image through the body (Viviani, 2009). This primacy of the body, elected to the new god of our society, also characterizes the world of youth<sup>5</sup>.

In fact, more young people living in a state-oriented to the present time. Young people live with a continuous series of choices and changes. They live in a situation of instability, in which there are no fixed points and the certainty. Young people try to join to the behaviors and lifestyles of their target groups. They seek a leading role, seeking to eliminate the insecurity of their lives. This explains the search for a body trendy. An interest that enables young people to feel recognized and accepted by the peer group. This scenario justifies the key role of young people in the dynamics of consumption, especially in the care of the body. This involves attention to the body the same way males and females (Viviani, 2010). In fact, increasingly, the market for beauty and aesthetic treatments, including cosmetic surgery, even passionate male audience. A real process of democratization of beauty (Vigarello, 2004). A process that eliminates the differences of gender and age.

### **The aesthetic appearance as an individual value: the present and the future**

#### *Aesthetics for young people surveyed: the present*

We begin to analyze the four questions presented in the first part of this contribution. We consider the views of young people interviewed in

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<sup>4</sup> As the cosmetic.

<sup>5</sup> Defined invisible generation (Diamanti, 1999).

reference to their life: *How important are the following values for you?* and *To make your future better, how important do you think the following are?*.

In the question *How important are the following values for you?*, the beauty is the eleventh (out of 13 item). The beauty value is indicated as *very important*<sup>6</sup> by 17,5% of respondents, followed only by religion (10,6%) and politics (7,2%)<sup>7</sup>. 35% of respondents believe the beauty is a quite important property. In this case, the beauty is eight<sup>th</sup>. The beauty is located before of health (21,4%) and friends (20,1%), which are the third and the second item among the values considered *very important*.

We evaluate the gender difference.

The girls (58,3%) than boys (55,9%) consider the beauty an important value (*quite* and *very important*). The position of the girls seems extreme, because, at the same time, 7,8% (against 3,5% of boys) indicates that beauty is *not at all important*.

We now analyze the same question in relation to the age of the young respondents.

If we consider the three age groups (13-15 years, 16-17 years, 18 years and over), the data show that 58,4% of the youngest believe the beauty of a *quite* or *very important* value, followed by respondents' "older" (50,3%).

The three countries that consider the aesthetic appearance is a *very important* value are Romania (36,2%), United Kingdom (28,4%) and Belgium / Luxemburg (20,6%). Conversely, the three countries that believe that beauty is *not at all important* value, are: Spain (12,2%), France (9,4%), Italy (7,7%) (Fig.1).

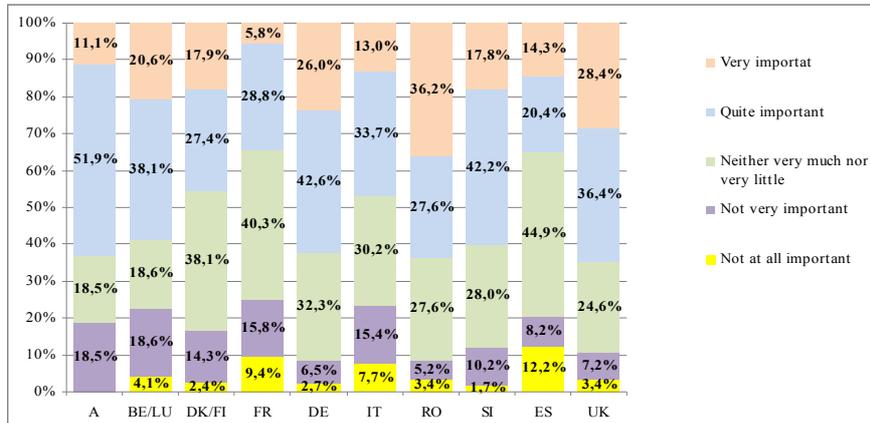
Specifically, we see that the last countries in order of time to have joined the EU, ie Romania (entry in 2007) and Slovenia (in 2004), are nations in which there is a high regard value beauty. 63,8% of young Romanians (of these, 36,2% indicate *very important*) and 60% of Slovenia considers the beauty *quite* or *very important*.

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<sup>6</sup> In the scale of values, the choices were: *not at all important, not very important, nor very much neither very little, quite important, very important*.

<sup>7</sup> At first the family (81.1%), at second the friendship (74.5%).

Figure 1. How important are the following values for you? (item: Beauty-Esthetical appearance)/Countries where your school is



Countries: A: Austria; BE: Belgium; LU: Luxemburg; DK: Denmark; FI: Finland; FR: France; DE: Germany; IT: Italy; RO: Romania; SI: Slovenia; ES: Spain; UK: United Kingdom.

However, among the countries that consider aesthetic appearance a *quite* or *not at all important* value, there are the three founding EU nations: France (with 25,2%), Belgium/Luxemburg (22,7%) and Italy (23,1%).

If we put together the nations in different regions of Europe:

- Northern Europe: DK:Denmark, FI:Finland;
- Central Europe: A:Austria, DE:Germany, SI:Slovenia;
- Southern Europe: IT:Italy, RO:Romania, ES:Spain;
- Western Europe: BE:Belgium, LU:Luxemburg, FR:France, UK:United Kingdom,

and we analyze the distribution of answers to the same question (*How important are the following values for you?– item: Beauty/Esthetical appearance*), data show that beauty is regarded as *quite* or *very important* value in the nations of Central Europe (59,2%). On the contrary, it is considered a value *not at all or not very important* by young people who come from southern Europe (20,7%).

Finally, the importance given to beauty grows with the family’s economic situation perceived by the respondents (*Which socio-economic*

*class do your parents belong to currently?*<sup>8</sup>). 62,3% of those who believe they have a high economic (*middle-high, high, very high*) see the beauty of an important value.

#### *Aesthetics for young people surveyed: the future*

Now we consider how beauty will be important for young respondents' future: *To make your future better, how important do you think the following are?* (item: Beauty).

Among the values, which are considered *very important*<sup>9</sup> by respondents to improve their future, beauty lies in the seventh and last place (13,3%)<sup>10</sup>.

Among the values *quite important*, beauty is the second lowest (27,4%) followed only by work (10,3%).

The aesthetic appearance is an important value for a better future especially for girls. 73% indicates, in fact, *so and so, quite* or *very important* (compared to 53,6% of boys), of these 41,2% indicates *quite* or *very important*.

Let's look at the frequencies compared to the nations (Fig. 2). Young people, who believe that a aesthetic appearance is an important (*quite* and *very*) value to make a better future, are those who are in: Belgium/Luxemburg (60,9%), Romania (56,2%) e United Kingdom (51,5%). Conversely, it is not important (*not at all* e *not very*) for the future of young French people (45,3%), with a large percentage difference compared to other nations.

Compared to European regions, young people in Central Europe are those who consider the aesthetic appearance an important value to improve their future (41,6%). The beauty is not an important value for those in countries of Northern Europe (26,3%).

It is interesting to note that the data show that the aesthetic appearance will be an important tool to improve their lives for those young people who claim to belong to a low socio-economic class<sup>11</sup>.

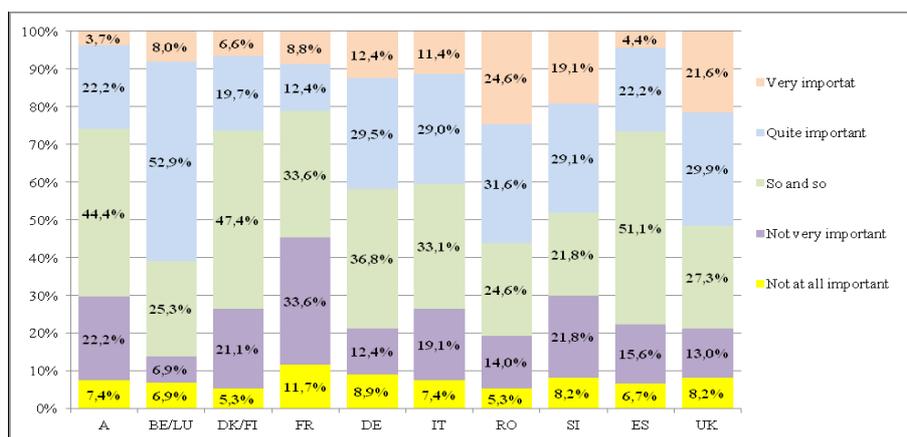
<sup>8</sup> Scale of values: *very low, low, quite low, middle, middle-high, high, very high*.

<sup>9</sup> Scale of values: *not at all important, not very important, so and so, quite important, very important*.

<sup>10</sup> First position Family relationships (49,1%), second position Knowledge (42,8%).

<sup>11</sup> *Which socio-economic class do your parents belong to currently? – d45*

Figure 2. To make your future better, how important do you think the following are? (item: Beauty) / Countries where your school is



Countries: A: Austria; BE: Belgium; LU: Luxemburg; DK: Denmark; FI: Finland; FR: France; DE: Germany; IT: Italy; RO: Romania; SI: Slovenia; ES: Spain; UK: United Kingdom.

If you look at the percentages of the three modes of response (*very low, low, quite low*) we see that 38,3% of these young people consider beauty *quite or very important*. If we add those who answer *so and so*, the percentage becomes 72,7%.

This view is confirmed by the question *Which socio-economic class do you think you'll belong to in 2030?*. In fact, those who predict a *low*<sup>12</sup> socio-economic future, think that the aesthetic appearance may be an improvement. 41,6% think that beauty is important<sup>13</sup>, and the percentage becomes 67,7% if we add respondent *so and so*.

Now, we analyze the responses of those indicating a low or medium present economic situation (*Which socio-economic class do your parents belong to currently?*) and a better (*middle-high or high*) future situation (*Which socio-economic class do you think you'll belong to in 2030?*).

<sup>12</sup> *Very low, low, quite low.*

<sup>13</sup> *Quite or very important.*

73,2% of those who believe that they will improve their economic situation in future, think beauty is an important element (*so and so, quite important, very important*). 37% choose *quite o very important*.

Who report a *low* economic situation and future situation *middle* or *high* considers an important (*so and so, quite, very*) value beauty (71,9%). 34,4% choose *quite o very important*. 73,6% of those involving the transition from a medium (present) to high (future), consider the beauty of an important value, 38,8% choose *quite o very important*.

### **The aesthetic appearance as a social value**

#### *Aesthetics and the society of the future*

We now continue the analysis and consider the two questions which explore the society of the future. We investigate the value of beauty and the spread of cosmetic surgery in a hypothetical society in 2030. We analyze the question *A little bit of imagination is required about the culture of the future for the next questions. In 2030, the following aspects of society, these aspects will increase, decrease or stay the same?* (item: Importance of physical appearance).

The importance of physical appearance is at sixth place (out of 15 items) and is indicated by 46,4% of respondents as something that will increase in future. Among the aspects that will decrease the aesthetic appearance is the fourth-last place with 7,8% of respondents, followed by the importance of work (7,5%), money (4,3%) and competition (3,6%). The three aspects that will increase more in the future<sup>14</sup>.

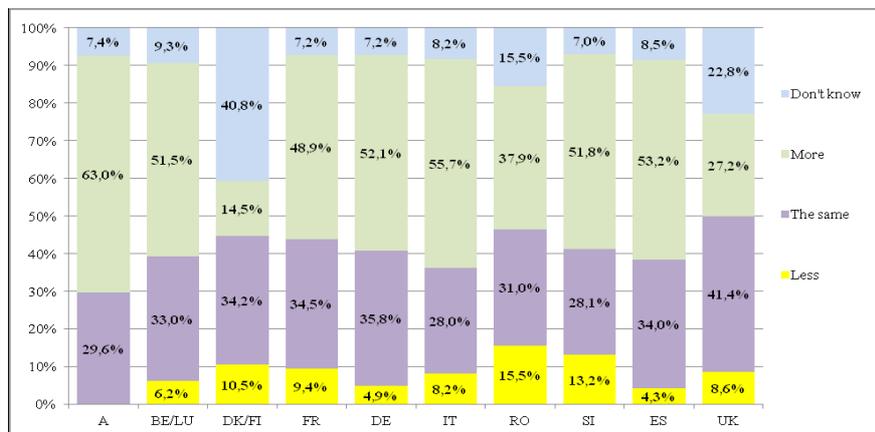
The boys believe that the importance of beauty will grow in the future (52,5% vs. 38,9% - girls). Look also confirmed from that 9,2% of girls who think that the beauty of fall (vs. 6,6% - boys). Regards age, students with more than 18 years provide a greater importance of beauty in the future (55,2%).

We analyze the question in relation to geographical area (Fig.3). Austrians (63%), Italians (55,7%) and Spanish (53,2%) believe the importance of beauty will increase. Instead, Romanian (15,5%), Slovenian (13,2%), and Danish/Finnish (10,5%) think the importance of beauty will

<sup>14</sup> Importance of work 55%, competition 59,5% and money 68,9%.

decrease. It is interesting to note that 40% of Danish/Finnish answer *don't know*.

Figure 3. A little bit of imagination is required about the culture of the future for the next questions. In 2030, the following aspects of society, these aspects will increase, decrease or stay the same? (item: Importance of physical appearance) / Countries where your school is



Countries: A: Austria; BE: Belgium; LU: Luxemburg; DK: Denmark; FI: Finland; FR: France; DE: Germany; IT: Italy; RO: Romania; SI: Slovenia; ES: Spain; UK: United Kingdom.

Central Europe is the area in which most respondents believe that in the future the importance of beauty will increase (50,7%); the opposite choice (*less*) is indicated especially by the students of Northern Europe (10,5%).

Now compare this question with the perceived economic situation (*Which socio-economic class do your parents belong to currently?*).

In the first case, beauty is a value held up by those who perceive a *high* (*middle-high, high, very high*) economic situation (49%). Those who perceive a *low* (*very low, low, quite low*) economic situation, believe the importance of beauty will decrease (11,1%<sup>15</sup>).

<sup>15</sup> 10.5% of respondents to this question.

*The plastic surgery*

According to data ISAPS *Biennial Global Survey*<sup>16</sup>, the United States ranked first among 25 countries in the world with greater spread of cosmetic surgery, followed by China and Brazil. Italy is in thirteenth position. In 2008 an American survey conducted by ISAPS and sent to over 20,000 plastic surgeons in 84 countries, asked: what influence celebrities have on the patients' decisions? The data showed that for each type of intervention, consumers want to look like famous people. Some examples. Women want lips like Angelina Jolie, they want buttocks like Jennifer Lopez. Men want abdominal muscles like Brad Pitt, they want legs like David Beckham (Viviani, 2011).

We analyze the question *In your opinion, in 2030 the following phenomena will decrease, stay the same or increase?* (item: Diffusion of use of aesthetic surgery). Surgery is in fourth place (out of 13 items) between the phenomena that, according to respondents, will increase (54,4%), preceded by Diffusion of virtual friends (58,5%), Circulation of cars without gas (71,8%) and Use of solar/wind Energy (80%). 58,8% of boys believe that cosmetic surgery will have a greater spread in the future, perspective chosen by respondents with more than 18 years (66,1%). The girls believe the situation will remain unchanged (30,1% vs. 18,1% - boys) or decrease (6,1% vs. 5,6% boys).

We compare to the geographical area, we have the following situation (Fig.4). Austrians (74,1%), Italians (69,5%) and French (62,8%) believe that future surgery will have a greater diffusion. United Kingdom (9,6%), Romania (8,8%) and Spain (6,4%) expect *less*. Here again<sup>17</sup>, 42,5% of students who are in Denmark / Finland indicate *do not know*.

The spread of the surgery is growing in relation to importance of beauty. Those who believe that the beauty in the future will have greater importance (54,7%), also believes it will spread more cosmetic surgery (76,8%). Instead, who thinks aesthetic will be less important in the future (5,9%) provides the same future for cosmetic surgery (27,8%).

<sup>16</sup> ISAPS (*International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery*) is the organization of major importance in the field of cosmetic surgery world.

<sup>17</sup> As with the previous question.

Figure 4. In your opinion, in 2030 the following phenomena will decrease, stay the same or increase? (item: Diffusion of use of aesthetic surgery) / Countries where your school is



Countries: A: Austria; BE: Belgium; LU: Luxemburg; DK: Denmark; FI: Finland; FR: France; DE: Germany; IT: Italy; RO: Romania; SI: Slovenia; ES: Spain; UK: United Kingdom.

### Conclusions. Success through the body

Taking up the study of Inglehart (1977; 1990), economic development and some specific generational experiences have led to the spread of greater importance to the needs of belonging and self-esteem. For this have become more important studies on lifestyles.

The end of grand narratives, the absence of large scenarios and future horizons, forces you to center the attention on itself, creating experiences and situations highly individualized and individualizing (Secondulfo, 2005). There is a tendency today to address the needs or immediate threats to find the instant gratification and pleasure (Inglehart, 1990).

In general, the beauty is not considered an important value. The girls and people who have a family's economic situation medium or medium-high, are those who think beauty is important to their lives or the future. The data show a similar attitude between males and females.

Of course, if you think that in future beauty will be a more important value, this will also affect the diffusion of cosmetic surgery. The growth of value “beauty” affects the spread of skin care, because cosmetic surgery is an important tool for improving the appearance.

The aesthetic work, especially cosmetic surgery, shows that all the body level can be modified, shortened and lengthened to taste. How about a canvas, the subject draws and re-draws himself on a continuous. Although in 2009 the COLIPA has indicated Germany, France and Italy as the three EU countries where there is the primacy of consumption of products for body care, the data of our research does not seem to explain these trends in consumption. These three countries, in fact, don't consider the beauty a very important value. Issue highlighted by countries but more recently the EU: Romania and Slovenia.

It is interesting to note that it is mainly those who live an economic medium to medium-high a value important to consider the aesthetic appearance. This also occurs in response to the economic future. This connection of beauty with the economic level could be interpreted in two ways.

First, those who has a better economic opportunities may follow a lifestyle more attentive care and consumption related to aesthetics. This interpretation is however limited when one considers that despite the current economic crisis, the cosmetics market does not suffer a decline. In fact, despite the economic crisis that characterizes our social-historical moment, the cosmetics market seems to not really be affected by this situation. In Italy, for example, the expense of the Italians for cosmetics has been an increase of 1% over the previous year

It is therefore important to consider a different interpretation of this phenomenon. The aesthetic care can be a way to demonstrate their economic opportunities, social status. The possession of material allows the individual to have power and admiration. Although this last point does not exhaustive interpretation.

The analysis shows that those who believe (and hope) an economic future of greater wealth consider the aesthetic appearance an important value. The beauty is therefore a symbol of progress. The symbolic value attributed to objects of consumption and the body itself, pushing more and more young people to seek self-esteem and build their social image through

cosmetic surgery. The care of the body allows it to be accepted by others. As suggested by the world media, power and success are often associated with aesthetic care, the quest for beauty.

The goods, the goods required by our young people, are symbolic image and are enriched with a new value dictated by fashion and mythological world of celebrities. Advertising is not only advertise these goods, but the myths that they are related to.

The star system of cinema, in fact, stars that are true gods, which are recognized by the community as unique. VIPs are not only unique, but they seem immortal (Featherstone, Hepworth e Turner, 1991). Approaching the star with clothing, looks, dress and ask, attitudes, behaviors, can help you see better from the physical point of view and to feel, therefore, accepted and admired by others.

Returning to Inglehart (1977, 1990), the aesthetic appearance emerges as a post-material value. The post-material values indicate a change in individual priorities, a shift due to the presence of new levels of economic and physical security. There is an accentuation of the values of belonging, of self and quality of life. The aesthetic care and attention to your body fit in this process of searching for satisfaction and personal fulfillment. The aesthetic care is a value symbol of expansion and improvement.

While modern man has a fixed identity, which prompts him to search for order and security, in postmodern society, the great flow of information and objects extends the scope of individual choice. Any decision of the subject is particularly unstable, because immediately threatened by another "opportunity".

The subject is driven to seek solutions on their own, trough the creation of new standards and new safety devices. The body becomes the business card, the factor of identification, for a man who finds himself separated from the other and separated from himself and his own identity.

The body is therefore both text and project. Text as a vehicle for meaning means that the person uses to communicate himself to others. Project because on it the person must work to make it better. As the primary tool of seduction, all the instruments that bring the body to the maximum of beauty, such as clothing, beauty care, fitness, are becoming increasingly important. This justifies the continuing work on the body, interventions of various types and of different thickness, which act

permanently on some parts of the body and affect the image of the individual: lip more pronounced, more or less prosperous breast, liposuction to become leaner, etc. This is an attempt to create oneself, to find its own security by obscuring what we think is our limitations, our weaknesses. This obscures our identity, our true face (Viviani, 2009).

The subject seeks satisfaction folds back on itself more and more. He focuses on his own pleasure and desires and looks for a confirmation for your self-esteem. His ongoing revision through manipulations that proceed to the aesthetic perfection increasingly removed the body from its original form, creating an estrangement between being and appearing.

The young today live twice this discomfort, as it is in a situation that emphasizes the non-stability, not certainty. The world of youth is a constant oscillation between standardization and differentiation. Young people are encouraged to turn strategies of seduction for the immediate pursuit of happiness, pleasure and the desire to feel accepted. The first vehicle, perhaps because the simplest and the one that gives more immediate results, is the body.

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