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A central illustration of a woman with a large, spiky, circular headpiece, wearing a long, dark, belted dress. She is surrounded by several hands, some holding objects like a comb and a brush, suggesting a grooming or styling process. The background is a solid purple color.

KEEPING UP APPROPRIATE APPEARANCES

Physical appearance, social norms
and gender in Finland

Erica Åberg



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To girls who are willing to unlearn that beauty equals their worth.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the social norms concerning physical appearance and gender in Finland, and the variations among these norms in different contexts. This study elaborates on the importance of appearance and introduces the concept of aesthetic capital. It also approaches gendered norms on the accumulation and exploitation of physical appearance. Finally, it explores, whether physical appearance operates as a source of inequality in Finland.

The focus of this dissertation, namely physical appearance, has only recently gained attention as a research topic in sociology. However, the other focus of this study, social norms, constitute a foundational concept in sociology. Moreover, the limited sociological research on physical appearance with a Bourdieusian approach has not sufficiently addressed the role of gender in detail.

The study comprises four research articles. The first concentrates on the gendered double standards concerning the exploitation of physical appearance at a societal level. The second focuses on young women in online environments, and the third on appearance norms of appropriate motherhood. The fourth concerns age-appropriate appearance. This dissertation utilises data from two separate surveys: 'Everyday life and appearance' (N=1,600) and 'Finland in the digital age' (N=3,724) as well as interview data drawn from examining 10 Finnish mothers.

The gendered variations of these norms, or rather double standards, are established in the findings of the first article. These norms are contextual: the use of physical appearance was disapproved in job-related situations. However, in the context of finding a partner, the probability of disapproval was significantly less. Women who considered themselves less attractive than their peers were more likely to endorse double standards against other women. However, in addition to gendered differences, the norms and their applicability also varied based on demographic factors such as age, life stage, and social class of the person being evaluated. The four articles represent different arenas or turning points for one's appearance, starting from studying the gendered norms in online environments in the second article, affirming that young women are especially more likely to report experiences of appearance-related pressures on social media. The preferred platform and the size of networks had an impact on the emergence of these pressures. The third article confirms that in the context of middle-class motherhood, women are expected to shift the focus of their consumption to their children and manifest their aesthetic

capital through the clothing choices for their offspring. The fourth article reveals that a double standard of ageing shapes women's perceptions of themselves, as women feel that ageing erodes their appearance. They tend to appreciate their appearance more, and are afraid to look old from early on. While examining the effect of social class, the results indicate that ageing working-class women are less confident about their appearance when compared to upper-middle-class women. A 'triple standard' extending to men was also found wherein upper-middle-class middle-aged men evaluated their appearance as being equally important when compared to women of a similar age and social background. This implies that the effect of ageing varies by gender and social class.

Certain assumptions characterise the Finnish context, such as ranking high in gender equality indices and women-friendly welfare policies, and the ethos of naturalness and unpretentiousness as a normative foundation for appearance-related consumption. Regardless of these, this study confirms that the norms concerning physical appearance vary based gender and are affected by other aspects as well.

Norms concerning physical appearance are generally more intense for women, who face greater disapproval for utilising their looks in their social interactions. However, the definition of appropriate appearance shifts throughout women's lives, based on different contexts such as age, life stage, and class, which shape the conception of successfully managing one's physical appearance. The complexity of the process should be addressed by approaching physical appearance as a gendered and age- and class-related phenomenon that individuals face in response to the aesthetic requirements of society based on their economic, social, and cultural resources.

KEYWORDS: Physical appearance, gender, norms, capital

TURUN YLIOPISTO

Yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta

Sosiaalitieteiden laitos

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämä väitöskirja käsittelee ulkonäköön liittyviä sosiaalisia normeja ja sukupuolta suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa. Väitöskirjassa tarkastellaan ulkonäön tärkeyden sukupuolittuneisuutta sekä ulkonäön kerryttämiseen ja hyödyntämiseen liittyviä sukupuolittuneita normeja. Edellisten lisäksi se esittelee esteettisen pääoman käsitteen ja avaa lopuksi empiiristen tulosten pohjalta teoreettisen keskustelun ulkonäöstä potentiaalisena eriarvoisuuden lähteenä suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa.

Sosiologisena tutkimusaiheena ulkonäkö on melko uusi, kun taas normit ovat pitkään olleet keskeinen tutkimuskohde sosiologiassa. Lisäksi olemassa oleva pääomatutkimus on keskittynyt hyvin vähän sukupuolen vaikutukseen ulkonäköön liittyvissä normeissa.

Väitöskirjan empiirinen osa koostuu neljästä tieteellisestä artikkelista. Ensimmäinen artikkeli koskee ulkonäön hyödyntämiseen liittyviä sosiaalisia normeja yhteiskunnan tasolla, kun taas loput artikkelit keskittyvät tarkastelemaan ulkonäköä koskevia normeja eri elämänvaiheissa ja konteksteissa: sosiaalisessa mediassa, äitiyden myötä ja ikääntyessä. Tutkimuksissa käytetään kahta kyselytutkimusaineistoa: 'Arkielämä ja ulkonäkö'-aineistoa (N=1600) ja 'Digitaalinen Suomi'-aineistoa (N=3724) sekä kymmenen suomalaisäidin haastatteluaineistoa.

Sukupuolittuneen kaksoisstandardin olemassaolo vahvistetaan ensimmäisessä artikkelissa, jossa ulkonäön hyödyntämisen todetaan olevan vähemmän hyväksyttävää naisilla. Normien sitovuus vaihteli eri tilanteissa: erityisen paheksuttua oli taloudelliseen etuun pyrkivä ulkonäön hyödyntäminen, kun taas puolison löytämiseen liittyvissä tilanteissa sitä pidettiin sosiaalisesti hyväksyttävänä. Naiset, jotka pitivät itseään vähemmän viehättävinä kuin vertaisensa, todennäköisemmin vahvistivat tätä kaksoisstandardia. Sukupuolittuneiden erojen lisäksi normit ja niiden soveltaminen toisiinsa vaihtelivat iän, elämäntilanteen ja sosiaalisen luokan mukaan. Loput artikkelit edustivat erilaisia ulkonäön esittämisen areenoita, kuten sosiaalista mediaa tai naisten elämän kannalta keskeisiä elämäntilanteita, kuten äitiyttä tai ikääntymistä. Toinen artikkeli ulkonäkönormeista verkkoympäristössä vahvistaa erityisesti nuorten naisten kokevan ulkonäköpaineita sosiaalisessa mediassa. Samalla artikkeli osoittaa alustavalinnan sekä seuraajien lukumäärän vaikuttavan ulkonäköpaineiden kokemiseen. Kolmannen artikkelin tulokset osoittavat, että normit ohjaavat äitejä siirtämään kulutuksensa lapsiinsa ja lastensa ulkonäön kautta

osoittamaan omaa kompetenssiaan. Neljäs artikkeli ikääntymisen kaksoisstandardeista vahvistaa naisten kokevan ikääntymisen eri tavalla kuin miesten: he huolehtivat ikääntymisen ulkonäkövaikutuksista, arvostavat ulkonäköään enemmän ja pelkäävät vanhalta näyttämistä. Yhteiskuntaluokan näkökulmasta tarkasteltuna ikääntyneet ylemmän keskiluokan naiset olivat hyvinkin tyytyväisiltä ulkonäkönsä, kun taas työväenluokkaisten naisten ulkonäköasenteet erosivat huomattavasti muiden naisvastaajien asenteista. Tulokset vahvistivat myös ikääntymisen kolmoisstandardin, eli sukupuolen, iän ja luokan risteymän, jossa keski-ikäiset ylemmän keskiluokan miehet arvioivat ulkonäön yhtä tärkeäksi osaksi identiteettiään kuin vastaavassa iässä ja yhteiskuntaluokassa olevat naiset.

Suomalainen yhteiskunta on kiinnostava tutkimuskohde ulkonäköön liittyvissä asioissa, koska se sijoittuu aina korkealle sukupuolten tasa-arvoa mittaavissa kansainvälisissä vertailuissa. Väitöskirja haastaa näitä kulttuurisia oletuksia tuomalla esiin uutta tietoa siitä, että sukupuolet eivät kuitenkaan ole tasa-arvoisessa asemassa ulkonäön suhteen. Samalla se haastaa suomalaisessa keskustelussa usein korostetun luonnollisuuden ja vaatimattomuuden normin ulkonäköön panostamisessa.

Yhteenvetona todetaan, että ulkonäköön liittyvät normit ovat tiukempia naisille, joiden ulkonäön hyödyntämistä sanktioidaan myös sukupuolten välisen tasa-arvon esimerkkinä pidetyssä Suomessa. Soveltana pidetty ulkonäkö muuttuu läpi naisen elämän, ja määritelmät ovat iän, elämäntilanteen ja luokan muokkaamia tilanteisia normeja. Ulkonäkönormien monimutkaisuutta tulisi lähestyä sukupuolen, iän ja elämänvaiheen lisäksi myös yhteiskuntaluokkaan sidottuna ilmiönä, koska ulkonäköön liittyvät vaatimukset kohdataan aina omaan taloudelliseen, sosiaaliseen ja kulttuuriseen pääomaan sidottuna toimijana.

ASIASANAT: Ulkonäkö, sukupuoli, normi, pääoma

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After graduating high school, studying sociology was one of my biggest dreams. Still, I never had enough confidence or stamina to study adequately before the entrance exams. I sat in the library, more fascinated about watching people than reading, looking at other people's clothing or thinking things like what kind of family background they had, why they touched their hair so irritatingly, or sniffed so loudly. After several useless attempts, I buried the dream, advanced towards other aspirations in my life. However, after the birth of my first child, I remembered this dream that never came to life. I started to read 'the green book' by Saaristo and Jokinen and decided to try once more. I got accepted, and it was one of the happiest days of my life. Now, writing this final part of my dissertation, I still feel at least as fascinated by sociology as I was back then. I could not have believed how much joy (but also feelings of inadequacy, envy, agony and pain) academic life would give me.

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Erica Åberg

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List of Original Publications

This dissertation is based on the following original publications, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

- I Kukkonen, Iida, Åberg, Erica, Sarpila, Outi & Pajunen, Tero. Exploitation of aesthetic capital – disapproved by whom?. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 2018, 38:3/4, 312–328.
- II Åberg, Erica, Koivula, Aki & Kukkonen, Iida. A feminine burden of perfection? Appearance-related pressures on social networking sites. *Telematics and Informatics*, 2019, 46, 101319.
- III Åberg, Erica & Huvila, Jarna. Hip children, good mothers –children’s clothing as capital investment? *Young Consumers*, 2019, 20:3, 2019, 153-166.
- IV Åberg, Erica, Kukkonen, Iida & Sarpila, Outi. From double standards to triple standards - Perceptions of physical appearance at the intersections of age, gender and class. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 2020, 55 (Online First).

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1 Introduction

*'If you're not a size six, and you're not good lookin'
Well, you better be rich, or be real good at cookin'
You should probably lose some weight
'Cause we can't see your bones
You should probably fix your face, or you'll end up on your own'*

Lily Allen, 2013

When this song by pop star Lily Allen, 'Hard out here', was released in 2013, it was referred to by journalists as a 'feminist anthem, that tackles everything from tired gender roles and expectations to double standards regarding sex and appearance for men and women' (Blistein, 2013). In this song, Allen put forward an idea that men and women are treated differently in society, which makes it '*Hard out here for a bitch*'. In addition to illustrating the gendered norms around physical appearance in contemporary society, the lyrics also resonate with recent sociological discussions on consumer culture and physical appearance as a form of capital. Modern society indisputably places importance on physical appearance. Individuals are offered different ways to '*Lose some weight*' or to '*Fix your face*' by dieting, styling, grooming, pinching, and poking to alter one's appearance. Fulfilling the appearance ideal is seen as being full of promises of a better life and is thus, worth pursuing.

Allen's lyrics entangle the central themes and concepts of my dissertation concisely: physical appearance, social norms, and gender. In the context of postmodern consumer culture, there is a shared understanding that our outward appearance reflects our inner self (e.g. Bauman, 2007; Featherstone, 2010; Shilling, 2012; Smith Maguire, 2008). Therefore, it is considered crucial to invest time and money in creating an appropriate look that captures our essence. In our everyday activities, we evaluate others and are being assessed for the way we look, both in face-to-face interactions and on social media. Somewhat paradoxically, we believe

that the perceptions we have based on other people's appearances are valid but hope that people around us appreciate us for our *true inner selves*.

The importance of appearance varies from one sphere of life to another but also gender, age, and life-stage affect its imperativeness. Despite the saying 'Love is blind', one area of life where the importance of physical appearance is considered 'natural', is romantic relationships. However, in contemporary visual culture, the importance of physical appearance does not only affect who one dates. Looks are increasingly important also in, for example, the work-life context. These customs have gained currency specifically with the rise of the service sector, where hiring someone for their brand-compliant looks is deemed a part of a standard sales promotion tactic, rather than a discriminatory practice (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). However, while some situations seem less harmful, like a customer tipping a waitress wearing red lipstick rather than a modest looking waitress (e.g. Guéguen & Jacob, 2012), some situations are more detrimental, such as teachers deducing the career suitability of a student by whether he or she had adopted an appropriate 'hairdresser look' (Juul et al., 2019). These are just a few examples of how appearance works in everyday situations as we consciously or subconsciously evaluate people's character or competence based on their looks.

If physical appearance has an essential role to play in contemporary society, having good looks must have positive consequences for those who meet the prevailing appearance ideals. The importance of appearance can be approached with multiple theoretical lenses: as an individual expression of one's identity (e.g. Bauman, 2007), as something defined by social class (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; Skeggs, 1997), or as a gendered source of power (Hakim, 2010), or patriarchal values and relics that suppress women (e.g. Wolf, 1991). Despite the chosen approach, it seems evident that certain individuals can benefit more from attending to their body and looks than others. Those who have more wealth or power can define the cultural products and the appropriate ways to cultivate oneself to be considered having 'the right look'. Following this strand of thinking, physical appearance can also be conceptualised as an asset, a form of capital (Bourdieu, 1984), or rather aesthetic capital (e.g. Anderson et al., 2010; Holla & Kuipers, 2015; Sarpila, 2013) that can be used in social exchange to enhance one's social standing. However, as Lily Allen's pop lyrics also suggest, physical appearance is an issue concerning women more than men. This claim is confirmed by feminist scholars who are interested in physical appearance (e.g. Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1991) and who emphasise on the role of socialisation that direct women to construct their self-worth on their looks while also being appreciated by others for that investment.

In addition to physical appearance as a gendered form of capital, another central concept in this dissertation is social norms. In sociology, norms are defined as rules, which are socially enforced and understood, and sustained by sanctions (Horne,

2009). The more recent theorisations of normative behaviour emphasise their emergent and dynamic nature by considering them social mechanisms, processes, and narratives that are continually shifting (Xenitidou & Edmonds, 2014). According to this understanding, norms are not self-contained social objects or facts, but are more likely ‘an interplay of many things that we label as norms when we take a snapshot of them at a particular instant’ (ibid, p. 3). Other scholars see social norms as falling into two categories: first, as a moral imperative and second, as behavioural regularities that generate certain social expectations (Hechter & Opp, 2001). Philosopher Christina Bicchieri (2005) referred to social norms as ‘the grammar of society’, emphasising the definition of norms as context-related as well as situated in the categorisations and social scripts they activate. She classified norms into social and descriptive norms and conventions. In the context of physical appearance, social norms can be seen as emerging as appearance pressures to conform to beauty ideals (Widdows, 2018). The imperativeness of these norms are internalised rather than imposed by an identifiable other (See also Foucault, 1977; Pylypa, 1998).

Consequently, norms shape our behaviour and have implications that vary contextually. Physical appearance is an asset that benefits people in some cases while penalising others. It bears different utility and exchange value, based on the person using it (Skeggs, 2004). These normative differences are called double standards. This argument can be approached by placing Allen as an example. Three years after the release of the video, Allen apologised for not considering different *intersections* such as those of race and class while addressing gendered norms of physical appearance (Monroe, 2016). Intersectionality contests the universal claims presupposing that women and men form homogenous groups, without any subgroups or specific differences concerning, for example, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and life situations (e.g. Calasanti & King, 2018; Crenshaw, 1989). Previous studies have demonstrated that double standards result in treating men and women asymmetrically. However, taking other intersections besides gender into account would help understand asymmetry more profoundly.

Allen herself can be seen as an example of intersectionality and appropriating culturally stigmatised recourses and discourses in the video for the song. She wears fake nails, heavy makeup, and uses the word ‘*bitch*’. In her case, they are framed as an empowering individual statement, whereas for a working-class woman outside the music industry, people around her may interpret investing in similar looks and artefacts as less legitimate, even vulgar. Nevertheless, the artist herself depicted the video as responding to patriarchal conditions that exist in the music industry. Still, it was criticised for marginalising black performers and for resigning to the traditional arrangement of women as objects that cater to the male gaze (Moore, 2013). Thus, it can be seen as responding to the requirements of postfeminist sensibilities, where body-related prescriptions objectify women, but replenished with discourses of

individualism and empowerment, thus offering a watered-down version of feminism (Gill, 2007, 2011). Consequently, those, who actually ‘Have it all’ (e.g. McRobbie, 2015), can afford to make fun of their post-partum bodies and ‘baggy pussies’ publicly without risking their careers in the music industry or elsewhere.

The objective of this dissertation is to examine the normative regulation of physical appearance and whether those norms vary by gender in Finland. It focuses on the variations of those norms in different contexts. Finland offers an interesting subject of inquiry as it is considered a country with comparatively high levels of gender equality in the fields of educational attainment, political empowerment, and health (Hausmann et al., 2012), as well as paid work, money, decision-making, power, and time (Plantenga et al., 2009). Thriftiness and practicality have been acknowledged as the cornerstones of Finnish consumption patterns for decades (e.g. Autio, 2006; Wilska, 2002). This has been identified especially in the realm of appearance-related consumption (Sarpila, 2013). The presupposition behind the storyline of the articles included in this dissertation is that physical appearance-related norms take shape at different levels: global, local, group, and individual, and these norms shape the normative expectations and individual perceptions of appropriate appearances in different contexts and eventually, turn it into capital.

The global and contextual level norms are covered in Article I, which speaks about gendered double standards regulating the exploitation of physical appearance. The articles that follow concentrate on group-specific or individual-level applications and perceptions of ‘appropriateness’ in different contexts, namely the online environment, motherhood, and ageing. The articles represent different arenas or turning points for one’s appearance: starting from the normative presentation of oneself in online environments, followed by women entering motherhood, and finally, concentrating on the gendered double standards of ageing.

Physical appearance is an important research topic as it affects all our lives in some way. Despite its centrality, the impact of looks in social interaction is often seen as a private or overly sensitive matter, and thus, entrusted to individuals. This taboo nature of the subject is partly behind the social consequences they construct. Previous sociological studies on physical appearance as a form of capital have not addressed the role of gender in detail. Also very little is known about gendered and contextual norms around physical appearance. This study is theoretically positioned between different strands of literature: economic and cultural sociology, sociology of consumption, and consumer culture. It also touches upon some of the concepts of feminist media and gender studies as well as psychology and marketing. This dissertation predominantly uses a quantitative study approach, except for the article on children’s clothing as being a part of their mother’s appearance, which uses a qualitative approach. The research questions in this dissertation are presented and discussed in Chapter 3.

This dissertation comprises four articles and a short introductory section. The first chapter presents the theoretical background of the study and sheds light on the overall focus of this dissertation. The first section in this chapter discusses the global importance of physical appearance, and the role of body and identity in consumer culture. As the emergence of social media has changed our communication fundamentally and has put our appearances on display, the chapter also considers the meaning of media and visual culture in explaining people's interest in physical appearance. Second, it looks at physical appearance as a form of capital to complement the existing literature on the economic, cultural, and social capital of Bourdieu. The second section in this chapter focuses on social norms concerning physical appearance. It discusses the meaning of gender and other relevant variables such as age and life stage, in examining the normative regulation of physical appearance. After that it reviews physical appearance as a gendered source of inequality, concerning possible benefits that it may bring in for some while causing harm for others. The final part of this chapter focuses on introducing the specific features of the Finnish context. Chapter 3 presents the research questions, and Chapter 4 focuses on the data and methods used. Chapter 5 summarises the main findings. The final chapter is dedicated to discussing findings and conclusions.

2 Theoretical approaches used in this study

2.1 Importance of physical appearance

2.1.1 Physical appearance in consumer culture

The introductory section of this dissertation proposed that physical appearance influences individuals and groups of people differently. In other words, the way in which one's physical appearance, its accumulation as well as its exploitation, is judged depends firstly on the individuals' gender, but also on other attributes, such as age and class.

In premodern times, favourable looks were almost a woman's only asset for entering marriage for economic support if one was not able to inherit family money (e.g. Lahtinen & Vainio-Korhonen, 2015). Now, over the years, the economic centrality of physical appearance to a woman's life course has diminished. However, the social emphasis on appearance still intensively affects women, but it has become something that concerns men as well. This alleged 'democratisation' is apparent, for example, in swiping left or right on Tinder, choosing to ask for help from a particular salesperson in a supermarket, or in selecting a candidate in the local elections. It seems inevitable for people to make assumptions about each other based on first impressions. Still, the origin of those impressions is not necessarily elaborated on or concentrated on in the broader-level consequences of individuals' daily choices.

This chapter presents different theoretical approaches to the importance of physical appearance and its role in consumer culture. After introducing postmodern consumer culture theories, I focus on feminist writings on physical appearance, firstly concentrating on the discussions emphasising the centrality of beauty to women. Then, I move on to more recent feminist discussions of the contemporary postfeminist media culture where the intensified requirements of beauty are destined towards especially young women. After that, I focus on how feminist theories using an intersectional approach contest the centrality of sole gender, calling forth more multifaceted approaches to axes of both inequality and physical appearance. Deploying this storyline, I illustrate how physical appearance is conceptualised,

defined and discussed in consumer culture and how it changes in time and between platforms and contexts. Lastly, I widen these approaches by introducing to these discussions a new life stage element. In sum, this section explores who is said to bear most value in terms of physical appearance and whether that value is contextual or dependent on gender and/or class.

Theories of consumer culture have long declared physical appearance as an essential expression of personal identity in postmodern societies (Bauman, 2007; Featherstone, 2010; Negrin, 2008; Shilling, 2012; Smith Maguire, 2008). The emphasis on body maintenance and physical appearance within consumer culture consists of two basic categories: the inner and outer body. The former refers to the health and the body's functioning, whereas the latter refers to appearance, movement, and control within a social space. (Featherstone et al., 1991.) Within the consumer culture realm, the inner and outer body have become tightly connected to one another. The primary purpose of looking after the inner body becomes to enhance the outer body's appearance and vice versa. Individuals are thought to project their inner selves with their looks and construct their identities through consumption by purchasing numerous forms of adaptable guises of potential selves (Bauman, 2007; Featherstone, 2007; Giddens, 1991; Negrin, 2008). Moreover, according to Bauman (2013 [2000]), in postmodern consumer culture, the individually maintained body acts as a social structure while other forms of social collectiveness fade. This means that a person's identity is no longer tied to being a worker, working, or middle class, but identities are created through marketing campaigns in the selling of goods and services, and assembling a valid identity within the chosen lifestyle. Thus, consumer culture logic is considered universal and ungendered, as these scholars placed very little, if any, importance on gender in their analyses. Following this logic, both men and women must invest in their appearance, as the societal ideal of having a fit body is seen as a status symbols and sign of dedication to the appearance-related norms of consumer society (Sassatelli, 2010).

In sum, the previously presented approaches accentuate that emphasising one's physical appearance is beneficial for all. However, a plethora of feminist scholars have claimed that consumer culture's genderless ethos disregards the widespread consensus that physical appearance is a more constitutive part of life for women than it is for men (Bordo, 1993; McRobbie, 2009; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). They assert that the feminine body has traditionally been a site (both subject and object) of consumption and commodification stressing the importance for women to be desirable and presentable. The media and marketing cues suggest that empowerment, subjecthood and agency have become a question of whether one appropriately consumes products that help them to fashion their bodies into objects of heterosexual (male) desire (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). These scholars locate this gendered difference originally to socialisation, where women are taught to be more concerned

with their appearances than men (e.g. Bordo, 1993; Bartky, 1988, 1990), but also, more often judged by their appearance (e.g. Sarpila et al., 2020; Wolf, 1991). The most commonly used and generally accepted framework for understanding how the essentiality of physical appearance is passed on to women is the sociocultural theory that claims contemporary beauty ideals are reinforced and sustained by sociocultural influences, most notably parents, peers and media (e.g. Thompson et al., 1999; Tiggemann, 2011).

Self-objectification is a central concept often used in explaining the gendered difference. Fredrickson and Roberts's (1997) objectification theory submits that Western societies socialise girls and women to adopt an observer's perspective to their self, and thus embody others' evaluations as the primary view of their worth. Self-objectification manifests as a constant monitoring of the body's external appearance and self-surveillance. As a result of viewing themselves as objects or sights to be appreciated by others, women are said to more often suffer from, for example, low self-esteem (e.g. Grogan, 2016; McMullin & Cairney, 2004) and body dissatisfaction (Groesz et al., 2002; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013) that results in 'normative discontent' towards their bodies (Cash & Henry, 1995; Rodin et al., 1984), particularly concerning their body shape and weight. In light of these theories, physical appearance is then said to bear more importance for women.

However, it is impossible to talk about consumer culture, objectification and physical appearance without considering their mutual connection with visual social media. Despite how people use social media for different purposes and platforms that can be used with different emphasis and for different audiences, social media is a site that primarily relies on expressions of visually appealing physical appearances and selective self-presentation (Fox & Vandemia, 2016). Thus, social networking sites provide a perfect medium for the 'performing self' (Featherstone, 1982), which is an illustration of an archetypical individual of consumer society that is mostly preoccupied with a stylised presentation, visual impressions and display. In its original context, such individuals only had limited opportunities to showcase their self-expression, as opposed to what we have in modern society. However, while adapting to the world of social media, that performing self can go beyond its wildest dreams by uploading photographs as well as inviting evaluations and comments on those self-expressions without being restricted by adhering to prevailing beauty ideals (e.g. Barnard, 2016; Sastre, 2014) or normative gender roles (e.g. Dobson, 2016). That said, rather than solely offering self-gratification or 'selfie-esteem' (Gill & Elias, 2014), these networked practices also introduce individuals, especially women, as objects to be looked at. This induces a new kind of gender dynamics and mental fragility that builds on 'likes' and comments on appearance (Tiggemann & Barbato, 2018). Despite the empowering nature of positive feedback, people with more followers may be subjected to the 'popularity paradox' (Tiidenberg & Gómez

Cruz, 2015), where validation functions as a control mechanism and exposes a tension between individual self-presentation and the pressure of public demand on social media.

More recent feminist writings locate the intensified requirements for having a normatively accepted body and attractiveness to neoliberal consumer culture (Evans & Riley, 2015; Gill, 2007, 2017; Winch, 2013), both inside and outside social media. Where gender and the body are discussed, the neoliberal conversations emphasise a discourse of free, rational choice, and place value to fit and 'healthy' (Drake & Radford, 2019) as well as sexy and agentic (e.g. Evans & Riley, 2015) appearances. Adding these ideas to those of consumer culture encourages individuals to curate their appearance through self-surveillance, monitoring and disciplining their bodies to appear 'perfect' (McRobbie, 2015) or 'authentic' (Dobson, 2016) in the eyes of another, and social media offers fruitful soil for performing that perfection. The gendered expression of neoliberalism, postfeminism, has shaped media cultures to claim femininity as a bodily property, linking a woman's worth to her body and overall appearance (Barnard, 2016; Dobson, 2016; Gill, 2007, 2011). Thus, a female body must be monitored and shaped to conform to societal standards, but those actions are framed as a choice made in the pursuit of happiness or as individual empowerment (Gill, 2017; McRobbie, 2015). Moreover, in this context, the pressures to visually lead a perfect life as well to adhere to notions of sexually appealing appearances are not seen as a patriarchal plot where men objectify women, but women themselves voluntarily conform to these values and internalise them as their own ideals (e.g. Dobson, 2016; Evans & Riley, 2015, see also Foucault, 1977). These notions highlight a key contradiction in the postfeminist cultural context as well as the idealized femininity within that culture. That is, positioning girls and young women as empowered, agentic and powerful sexual subjects, but simultaneously positioning them as cultural dopes who are 'at risk' and vulnerable to the harms of cultural sexualization and objectification (Dobson, 2016; Tiggemann, 2011; see also Paasonen et al., 2020).

While previous approaches to studying physical appearance have emphasised the role of gender, scholars of different fields have suggested (e.g. Skeggs, 1997; Calasanti & King, 2018) that, in using gender as a single analytic frame, more nuanced forms of appearance dynamics may escape researchers' attention. To avoid this pitfall, scholars formulated the term intersectionality, challenging the false universals regarding shared experiences and the primacy of gender. This approach focuses on race, sexuality, gender and class as being simultaneous lived experiences as well as the interconnected social processes that shape the person's identities and social relations (e.g. Choo & Ferree, 2010; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Kang, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Thus, by introducing the term intersectionality, the gendered approaches to physical appearance have been supplemented with considering

different axes of inequality while approaching different subjects such as gender and ageing (e.g. Calasanti & King, 2018; McMullin & Cairney, 2004; Slevin, 2010). Applying the intersectional approach, Calasanti and King (2018) confirmed that middle age could also be seen as a time of relative privilege with professional career peaks and respect from peers, while consumer culture usually associates ageing with negative outcomes. Similarly, the cumulative resources gained from experience are seen as accruing 'ageing capital' among middle-aged gay men (Simpson, 2016). However, this capital comes with a downside. For example, studies that have examined body dissatisfaction in both heterosexual and non-heterosexual populations suggest that gay men report a higher degree of dissatisfaction with their appearances later in life than heterosexual men (Tiggemann et al., 2007) and experience a stronger pressure to invest in working on their appearance (Jones & Pugh, 2005). Consequently, scholars endorsing this approach to physical appearance have found many overlapping forms of oppression and inequality besides gender alone that shape people's experiences.

Although intersectionality takes into account other axes of inequality besides gender in social interaction, it can be expanded by stressing the importance or centrality of certain life stages for women's self-esteem. For example, motherhood offers a unique arena in consumer culture for analysing the class-related requirements of women's physical appearance. After giving birth, a woman's appearance is under surveillance, resulting in dichotomies such as 'yummy mummy' versus 'slummy mummy' (McRobbie, 2009; Littler, 2013). These moral judgements and comparisons are made both between women and on an individual level, for example by setting the ideal of 'not letting herself go' (Orton-Johnson, 2017; Littler, 2013). For comparison, similar exhaustive claims and aesthetic requirements do not apply to fathers in consumer culture (Hughes et al., 2015). Moreover, for middle-class mothers, children's clothing has been transformed to a field where mothers express their competence through symbolic negotiations of consumption (Andersen et al., 2007; Hughes et al., 2015; McNeill & Graham, 2014). Mothers see their children as an extension of themselves (Belk, 1988), and in this context, as an extension of their appearance. Thus, the clothing and overall appearance of one's children make the parent appear socially more interesting and acceptable, and failing to fulfil the middle class expectations might result in being deemed less respectable working-class mothers, the socially stigmatised 'Chav mums' (Tyler, 2008).

More recently, Belk (2013) expanded the 'extended self' concept to representations of the self that are enacted in the digital world and on social media, claiming that online presentation influences the construction, development and maintenance of the offline self. This may suggest that an individual's engagement in 'sharenting,' digitally sharing one's parenting and children online is fundamental to the individual's identity as a parent, and says more about the parent as an individual

than the child depicted (Holiday et al., 2020). In the context of (middle-class) motherhood, that performance highlights visually appealing children with carefully crafted compositions intended as representations of the mother herself as well as her aesthetic assets.

To conclude this section, it seems that, regardless of life stage or platform, women are more often expected to invest in their appearance. The appropriate manner of that investment transforms, as women also deal with different normative expectations in terms of appearance and consumption in different life stages (e.g. Tiidenberg & Baym, 2017; Twigg, 2013). These life stage-specific or context-related requirements also vary by social class, thus intersectional approaches are also necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of socially defined physical appearance norms. Notwithstanding these contextual differences, one could justifiably argue that with the importance placed on achieving ‘perfect looks’ regardless of platform, contemporary consumer culture emphasises physical appearance’s capitalistic nature. This feature of physical appearance is discussed in the next section.

2.1.2 Physical appearance as a form of capital

The importance of ‘good looks’ in contemporary society can be examined through theories of capital. Recent viewpoints on physical appearance define it as an independent form of capital that can be used in social exchange (Anderson et al., 2010; Holla & Kuipers, 2015; Sarpila, 2013). In these considerations, the so-called ‘aesthetic capital’ is understood as a combination of different resources or assets related to physical appearance including facial beauty, body shape, size and physique, as well as styles of grooming and clothing (Anderson et al., 2010).

Different forms of capital have been the core of Bourdieu’s conceptual system. The approaches to physical appearance as a form of capital are an extension of his famous theory, highlighting the role of the body in contemporary society. According to Bourdieu (1984), capital consists of three primary forms: economic, cultural and social. *Economic capital* refers to financial resources or having money to buy things that define one’s social standing. *Social capital* comprises the people who one can be in contact with, that is, social networks. *Cultural capital* refers to *institutionalised cultural capital* such as official degrees and *objectified cultural capital* such as records, books, posters, clothing, etc. These objects can be purchased, but knowing ‘the right things’ to buy and then consuming them in the ‘right way’ to gain social recognition requires *embodied cultural capital*, which is the hardest to attain as it requires more or less active cultivation, and not everybody is capable of achieving it. Different forms of capital are convertible into each other—possessing one helps to accumulate others.

Introducing the concept of *habitus*, Bourdieu (1984) demonstrated how social structures and components of different forms of capitals, such as practices, tastes and lifestyles, materialise in the body. These habitus-specific factors, such as embodied cultural capital and sense of taste have been studied, for example, in the context of wearing flip-flops to work (van den Berg & Arts, 2019), women's underwear (Tsaousi, 2016), the area of sports (Kahma, 2012) and bodily appearances of women in Turkey (Karademir Hazir, 2017). These studies confirm that embodying 'the right' capitals define a person's sense of distinction and social value. When cultivated successfully, they also elicit respect in public presentations, and offer emotional support or reduce anxiety when moving between different contexts. Similarly, Bourdieu's concept of capitals is relational: economic, social and cultural capital exist in conjunction with each other, and together constitute advantage (or disadvantage) in society (Reay, 2004). Thus, these capitals should not be understood separately.

Bourdieu considered aesthetic traits, which he referred to as 'body capital,' to be a part of cultural capital. As Bourdieu recognised the importance of economic capital in accumulating physical appearance-related assets, he saw body capital more or less as a by-product of other forms of capital that can help individuals maintain or improve their positions in the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1984; Holla & Kuipers, 2015). In this respect, physical appearance yields inequality in itself; appearance-related resources and the capabilities of appropriately enhancing one's appearance are unequally distributed between individuals. Moreover, the social norms concerning the acceptability of taking advantage of such capital can vary in different life spheres and can also place more value on certain class-based appearances. Beauty standards are not universally shared, and aesthetic repertoires often reflect the opposing popular and highbrow tastes, such as an appeal for unique, as opposed to friendly looking, female faces (Kuipers, 2015). Given this, and that social groups and situations vary in their norms and moral codes concerning proper maintenance and the manifestation of one's aesthetic assets, it is highly likely there are differences in the normative regulation of exploiting one's physical appearance in social interaction.

Erotic capital is a concept occasionally referred to in explaining the gendered differences for the possibility of utilising one's physical appearance (Hakim, 2010). The idea of erotic capital is presented to complement Bourdieu's theory of capitals. In her argument, Hakim (2010) offered a combination of aesthetic, social, visual and sexual attractiveness, emphasising the competition for power and control in social relationships. According to Hakim (2010), women can exploit their erotic capital over men because of the 'sexual deficit' that men suffer from throughout their lives, and she sees the use of erotic capital as a significant advantage for women over men. To avoid being swindled by deceitful women, men try to prevent women from using

their erotic capital by morally disapproving women who work to use that capital for their personal benefit.

While Hakim's theory can be considered sexist, heteronormative and problematic, and her concept of erotic capital can be overstretched and inconsistent (see Green, 2013), it is credited as an attempt to explore the gendered differences in the usability of physical appearance. Hakim's (2010) theory applies concepts that are usually referred to in economics, such as supply and demand, to social interaction, as she believes women should use their sexual power over men to gain social and economic advantages. Unfortunately, she dismissed how power relations are always present in social interactions, placing other people in positions where they are more vulnerable to abuse or exploitation than others. In economic sociology, shifting power relations and interconnections are referred to as *embeddedness* (e.g. Swedberg, 2009). In Bourdieu's theory, similar social interaction mechanisms are approached using the term *fields*. In these theorisations, different capitals are exchanged in social contexts, that is, markets or fields that are shaped by social positions that mediate gaining, possessing and utilising one's appearance-related assets in social interactions.

However, even though meeting field-specific physical appearance requirements can successfully bring benefits at the individual level, society's overall aesthetic evaluations highlight and maintain the cultural dominance of the higher classes (Holla & Kuipers, 2015; Kuipers, 2015; Vanderbroeck, 2016, see also Bourdieu, 1984). Although society appreciates highbrow appearances, niche appearances are valued and carry social worth in limited settings (Bourdieu, 1984; Holla & Kuipers, 2015). The preferred look or parts of the body that bear most value in aesthetic judgements might vary considerably across different fields, as has been studied in the context of sexuality (Green, 2014). A similar logic of appreciating field-specific appearances applies on the visual economies of different social media sites (Schwartz, 2010), where 'corporeal capital' embodied in a virtual body, combined with local cultural capital (i.e. knowing how to present oneself in that specific platform), are convertible into social capital (i.e. social ties and status), both online and offline.

Furthermore, the demands of the post-industrial service economy and its connection with middle-class lifestyles overlaps class, gender and capital logic. In this context, the so-called 'aesthetic labour' in modern-day service jobs requires a stylised and attractive self-presentation as part of job qualifications (Witz, Warhurst, & Nickson, 2003). Individual employees are encouraged to 'look good and sound right' for their personal benefit, such as career development (Warhurst & Nickson, 2001). The aestheticisation of labour is a general trend in post-industrial societies and is seen as customary, especially among urban youth (Kuipers, 2015) and primarily young women who are employed in the service sector. However, the

benefits derived from a person's looks can be appropriated by others, and the beneficiaries of such labour seem to be employers rather than employees. For example, in her study of VIP-party girls, Mears (2015) concluded that the girls who embodied cultural capital were used to generate status and social connections for wealthy men in business and to gain profits for the VIP venue. Feminist scholars working with theories of capital have put forth similar thoughts. By coining a term *sign-bearing capital*, Skeggs (2004) claimed that men use women as resources to demonstrate their wealth and status and other forms of self-accrued capitals.

This dissertation approaches aesthetic capital as an independent form of capital (Anderson et al., 2010) and sees attractiveness as a partly inherited quality of a person that, to some extent, yields benefits that do not conform to class, ethnic or other social hierarchies (Edmonds & Mears, 2017). However, the existing power relations determine the value of this resource and govern its conversion to other resources. Thus, this asset can bring individual-level benefits in social interaction, but being able to identify, let alone accumulate or utilise, 'the right look' also reflects having other forms of capitals (Edmonds & Mears, 2017; Holla & Kuipers, 2015; Kuipers, 2015; Kuipers et al., 2019; Mears, 2014; Vanderbroeck, 2016; see also Bourdieu, 1984).

It seems that women and their physical appearances are especially under strict surveillance throughout their lives. They face normative claims regarding their appearance, which require constant investments and readjustments in the form of consumption. However, other kinds of capitals are necessary to recognise the personally relevant, though also age and life stage appropriate, modes of accumulating one's aesthetics. This knowledge is apparent in the context of motherhood, for example, where consuming the right commodities has become a central part of what it means to be a mother in the present consumer culture (Cook, 2004; Schor, 2004). A good mother also evidently shifts her focus of consumption to commodities that provide children with a normatively acceptable and materially good life (Birmingham et al., 2014; Miller, 1998). Simultaneously, products are tools for constructing middle class maternal identity and signal maternal competence (Clarke, 2014; Kehily, 2014; Paxson, 2004; Ponsford, 2014; Thomson et al., 2011; Tiidenberg & Baym, 2017). Successfully manifesting these normative claims for a mother-child dyad can operate as a certain life stage-specific capital in this life stage. It can also enhance one's social standing in the motherhood field with signs that are not necessarily visible to people outside the field, but constitute an essential message for people in this specific context.

As examples of physical appearance in the context of motherhood and ageing show, the capital nature of one's appearance is contextual. The appropriate appearance is negotiated among different situations, platforms and people, and defines the way one's habitus is interpreted and given value in interactions. The

value assigned to one's appearance is also embedded in human relations—it depends on the person evaluating it. Moreover, the given value's significance varies among individuals.

2.2 Normative regulation of physical appearance

2.2.1 Appearance-related norms and gender

The concept of social norms is used widely in the social sciences. Despite its essentiality in sociological theories, there is an ongoing discussion on what norms are and how they emerge in social life. Elements constituting a norm remain unanimous, as norms overlap with a variety of other concepts such as customs, values and morality, to name a few. Like most norms, the ones related to physical appearance also are upheld through social sanctions, ranging from subtle non-verbal or verbal hints to more tangible benefits and penalties for (non)adherence to norms, including social and economic ones (for a review, see, e.g. Anderson et al. 2010).

Several sociological explanations of social norms are founded in the seminal research of Michel Foucault (1977), who described norms and normality as being embedded in discourses that form a part of everyday practices, habits and interactions. This knowledge represents particular perspectives, conventions and motivations that are predominantly based on scientific discourses of medicine as well as the criminal justice system and psychiatry. These discussions result in a desire to aspire for the conceptions of normality and to avoid deviance in all spheres of life through self-discipline and self-surveillance.

In terms of physical appearance, social norms are usually defined as fitting in and having a 'normal' appearance. This is present in Foucault's works as well. It must be emphasised that one's internalised normative perception of the sought-after 'normality' is based on the cultural norm of appropriate appearance and that this norm is not the same for all. Nonetheless, specific characteristics like youthfulness, thinness and healthiness (e.g. Mears, 2011; Sassatelli, 2017; Wolf, 1991) define global ideals of physical appearance. Corroborating Foucault's work, Pylypa (1998) claimed that the worldwide obsession with these appearance ideals is the result of two types of discourses. The first is health discourse, which includes both knowledge produced by the medical profession and the popular discourse on health. The second discourse is the product of the media and advertising industry, in which a fit and thin body is portrayed as healthy but also beautiful and sexy. Although these ideals are frequently presented in scientific and objective terms, talk about health and fitness is not value-free. Instead, it is a moral discourse that defines the unfit and overweight

body as deviant and associates those traits with personal irresponsibility and immorality.

In addition to the ideals of youthfulness, thinness and healthiness, the discourses on normative beauty often emphasise naturalness and authenticity as appropriate ways of attending to one's looks. However, there is no such thing as 'natural beauty' or a 'true' body (Widdows, 2018). All bodies are always socially constructed, and the requirements of 'natural' beauty are attainable only for the blessed few – who are privileged in terms of economic, social and cultural power as well. Simultaneously, framing this ideal of natural beauty as a way to achieve 'respectability' (e.g. Skeggs, 1997) in another's eyes condemns other ways of attending to one's beauty as 'excess' or 'wrong' femininity (McCann, 2015; see also Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). However, as Lawler (2005) concludes, the issue is not solely about middle-class people 'looking down on' working-class people. These discourses also *produce* working-class people as abhorrent and as foundationally 'other' to a middle-class existence that nonchalantly is framed as normal and desirable. Similarly, they produce *middle-classed* identities that rely on *not* being the repellent and disgusting 'other' (Lawler, 2005; emphasis in original).

Failing to fulfil the societal ideals of beauty comes with psychological costs (e.g. Wolf, 1991), as well as social sanctions. Although women normatively are expected to accumulate aesthetic capital, it seems that compared to men, their possibilities of using their physical appearance over the course of social exchanges are more limited (Mears, 2015; Kuwabara & Thébaud, 2017; Sarpila et al., 2020). The norms that regulate the use of aesthetic capital in economic and social exchanges are gendered and are stricter for women than for men (Sarpila et al., 2020). Evidence has been found for a so-called gendered double standard, which can be defined as the differences in how identical behaviour of men and women are evaluated and assigned morality differently (Foschi, 2000), usually based on gender. These double standards imply, for example, that to be inferred as being at the same level of task competency as men are, women must try harder and are allowed fewer mistakes than men are (ibid.).

As reviewed by Crawford and Popp (2003), sexuality is the most salient sphere for applying these gendered double standards. Promiscuity and extramarital affairs are judged as less acceptable for women than for men. Although more egalitarian sexual standards have emerged since the review of Crawford and Popp (2003), the conditions under which specific behaviours are considered acceptable for men versus women still remain different (Allison & Risman, 2013; Bordini & Sperb, 2013). Another example is the double standard of ageing (Sontag, 1972), in that the physical signs of ageing result in more negative evaluations of the attractiveness of women than of men (e.g. Deutsch, Zalenski & Clark, 1986) as well as shape women's perceptions of themselves (e.g. Hurd Clarke & Bennett, 2015).

In addition to ageing and sexuality, double standards in norms have been studied in other contexts as well such as family norms (Rijken & Merz, 2014; Rijken & Liefbroer, 2016) and adolescents' entry into adulthood in the Nordic countries (Räsänen, 2009). These studies have recognised that the applied norms vary for men versus women and that double standards are tied to relative status between the examined groups and thus reflect society's structural relations (cf. Fiske et al., 1999). However, previous research presents inconsistent results on the endorsement of those norms, depending on the respondent's gender and the sphere of life examined. On the other hand, the differences in these norms imply that men are more disapproving in their attitudes towards women in some fields of life such as sexuality (Allison & Risman, 2013). In other social contexts such as voluntary childlessness, women themselves (Rijken & Merz, 2014) seem to hold double standards against themselves. Overall, these examples indicate that women's actions normatively are more controlled than those of men are, regardless of the social context scrutinised.

Studies on social norms and physical appearance suggest that women more often construct their self-worth on how other people see them and thus place a premium on, for example, comments given by others. Moreover, the tendency towards self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Tiggemann, 2011), combined with the propensity for social comparisons (Festinger, 1954; Fox & Vandemia, 2016) and upward appraisals (Fardouly et al., 2017; Leahey et al., 2007; McMullin & Cairney, 2004), reinforces the socially constructed normative ideals regarding women's appearance and social conduct. Previous research increasingly has endorsed these norms and ideals on social media and correlated them with various negative outcomes, specifically the internalisation of thin ideals, comparisons of appearance and dissatisfaction with one's weight (Fardouly et al., 2015; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018). Notably, however, despite its well-documented drawbacks, scholars have also stressed the positive sides of social media, emphasising possibilities for individual empowerment or improving one's self-esteem (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Barnard, 2016; Dobson, 2016; Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015).

Furthermore, previous research reveals a tendency for women, first, to receive compliments on their appearance and, second, to compliment each other's appearance more frequently (Holmes, 1988; Lauzen & Dozier, 2002). Moreover, social media reinforces and normalises these gendered differences in appearance-commenting norms (Åberg et al., 2020). This constitutes a double bind: endorsing this social norm emphasises the importance of appearance and, as a result, preserves physical appearance as a primary source of self-esteem for women (e.g. Fox & Vandemia, 2016; McMullin & Cairney, 2004; Tiggemann, 2005). Another gendered norm that also prevails in social communication is men seeming more likely to trade insults with each other than compliments (Holmes, 1986). This 'competitive verbal

abuse' among men and boys is usually seen as a sign of male solidarity (Talbot, 1988). Overall, men endorse verbally less compliant manners compared to women in their social interactions (Fischer, 2011). These gendered tendencies probably shape perceptions somewhat regarding the normative necessity for a particular appearance, more likely reinforcing the social norm for men of not paying (at least, not positive) attention to, let alone commenting on, other men's appearance.

Moreover, these gendered commenting norms emphasise female appearance and thus reinforce the norm of women being equalled to their appearance. This norm carries over to both traditional and social media, directing the focus towards women's appearance. For example, contemporary society relates fitness and health to attractiveness and moral worth, while being unfit and unhealthy is seen as a personal failure and as failing one's civic duty (LeBesco, 2011). Women are discursively 'put in their place' by focusing on the appearance of their individual bodies (Drake & Radford, 2019, see also e.g. Littler, 2013; McCann, 2015; Orton-Johnson, 2017). Body-related messages define the average body shape and self through praise, shame and expert knowledge to incite conformity among women who diverge from the appearance norms (Drake & Radford, 2019; Leahy, 2009; Shankar et al., 2006).

All of the ways of normatively governing female bodies mentioned above are present on social media, and they all place value on fit and 'healthy' appearances. Following the Foucauldian line of thinking, consumers are encouraged to fit this norm with self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline (Drake & Radford, 2019). The previous literature focuses on women. However, this does not necessarily mean that men do not experience appearance pressures or are not dissatisfied with their bodies. In contrast, aesthetic requirements for men have become more prevalent in consumer culture, resulting in body pressures (e.g. Grogan, 2016) and self-objectification (Martins et al., 2007) for men as well. Some scholars link such precarious feeling structures with neoliberal austerity and argue that they also force men increasingly to rely on their bodies for value-creation (Hakim, 2015, 2018). Murnen and Karazsia (2017) proposed that male body-image concerns should be considered an important topic in their own right, not just in comparison with female body concerns.

Regarding the pursuit of attractiveness and appearing as the 'best version' of oneself, a variety of practices can be seen for modifying one's looks. These practices are often referred to with terms such as 'body work' (e.g. Gimlin, 2002; Sassatelli, 2010), 'beauty work' (e.g. Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008; Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Wolf, 1991) and 'body modification' (e.g. Crossley, 2005; Featherstone, 2010). Aiming to achieve these objectives is normatively considered more or less appropriate, based on their placement on the mundane–extreme continuum. Everyday grooming practices involving health and hygiene are on one end of the

continuum, and transformative ‘artificial’ methods such as plastic surgery are on the other (Featherstone, 2010; Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Sassatelli, 2010; Widdows, 2018).

Similarly, Widdows (2018) claimed that practices that are considered normal or a part of everyday ways of attending to one’s appearance are also considered culturally appropriate. However, she claimed that looking good has become a moral duty in itself. In this sense, it is unproductive to divide different practices into the mundane–extreme continuum, as people aim to serve a moral imperative of helping themselves look their best (Widdows, 2018). Similar moral values are identified elsewhere also, with deservingness and authenticity being critical values in establishing legitimate ways of performing body work (Gimlin, 2000; 2002). Thus, practices involving hard work, commitment and dedication, such as exercising, are distinguished as culturally more appropriate and as aiming for a ‘naturally beautiful body’ (Holliday & Taylor, 2006). Simultaneously, practices such as plastic surgery are considered inauthentic and are thus normatively less accepted ways of attending to one’s appearance (Gimlin, 2000, 2002).

2.2.2 Physical appearance and social inequality

Traditionally, sociology has approached the motives behind attending to one’s physical appearance by emphasising the role of social class and the desire for social distinction through consumption. Simmel (2005 [1895]) attached this desire to fashion—and more specifically to clothing—and to a social distinction that the upper classes desire to make from the lower classes. Simmel noted that fashion is always on the move and that it unites people of similar tastes and class. Veblen’s (1994[1899]) *Theory of the leisure class* presents parallel thoughts, identifying physical appearance as a means to show one’s wealth and status by impressing others through one’s looks. In modern society, Veblen’s original idea of conspicuous leisure—that is, the possibility of pursuing a non-productive lifestyle—is substituted by *conspicuous consumption*. In conspicuous consumption, the most obvious way of displaying one’s wealth is by conspicuously consuming useless or overly expensive goods. Thus, one’s social worth is most importantly based on wealth, which the leisure class indisputably accumulates more than any other class does. In Veblenian thinking, the leisure class can define socially meaningful objects and consumption habits, which the lower classes strive to emulate. In contrast, the leisure class continually seeks to differentiate its consumption from that of the lower classes. Bourdieu (1984) differs from these approaches by claiming that this class-related distinction is embodied in practices, tastes and lifestyles and are thus inimitable by the lower classes. Perceiving the body as ‘the most indisputable materialization of

class taste' (1984, p. 190), he sees social divisions as being inscribed into bodies and naturalised in everyday interactions.

The body, or possessing 'physical capital', unquestionably bears more value in and of itself in a consumer society (e.g. Smith Maguire, 2008). While the positive effects of physical appearance are well documented, its linkage to social stratification has received much less scholarly attention (Schneikert et al., 2020). However, the interplay of aesthetics and morality is indeed central to the reproduction of social inequalities because physical appearance is a resource that benefits mainly the middle class (Smith Maguire, 2008). Successfully meeting appearance-based ideals is a question of proper and appropriate performance of (middle) class-based tastes (Holla & Kuipers, 2015; Kuipers, 2015; Vanderbroeck, 2016; see also Bourdieu, 1984). Thus, achieving and appropriately manifesting this capital are not equally possible for all.

Inequality is also reproduced through shared understandings of social classes and their privileges. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argued that power works through misrecognition, as manifested in the culturally shared understanding of cultural privilege. Such privileges are presumed as ascribed, rather than as achieved, and are thus natural and legitimate. However, Bourdieu (1984) claimed that the upper classes enhance that misrecognition by having the power to verify and place value on their interests and by allowing only themselves to access those systems of value. Skeggs (2004) furthered this argument by claiming that the misrecognition process also can occur in reverse, at the end of the social scale. This is done by ascribing negative characteristics such as immorality, excessiveness and bad taste to people, especially women, of lower classes.

However, investments in appearance connected to working-class femininity can accrue relatively high profit or use-value in areas such as the institutions of marriage and heterosexuality, while being simultaneously devalued in others (Skeggs, 1997; 2001). Such alternative values remain misrecognised because they are not parallel to the aspirations and ideals of middle-class women, whose respectability, cultural capital and appropriate appearances accrue exchange value within the larger society (e.g. Skeggs, 2004; see also McRobbie, 2009). Similar processes of making parallel value and constructing self-worth are also evident in the visual landscapes of late-modern digitally networked societies—in images and other visual objects that can amass viewers' gazes, attention and engagement (e.g. Banet-Weiser, 2018; Dobson, 2016; see also Schwartz, 2010). However, despite the accrued value in these social settings, the labour market and the education system, for example, places more emphasis on presenting more subtle middle-class values and appearances. Class relations are made through these material and symbolic struggles (Bourdieu, 1987; Wacquant, 1991): imitation of the tastes defined by the upper- or middle-class is essential for performing appropriateness in certain fields.

In addition to misrecognition, the social embeddedness of valuation and exchange is a fundamental assumption in Bourdieusian capital theory. This assumption has also been used as a framework in recent studies focusing on the societal-level norms regulating the utilisation of ‘aesthetic capital’ as well as the possible stigmatisation of using that capital for economic gain. For example, Mears (2015) investigated how the value of physical appearance is formulated within different labour market contexts by what she calls ‘aesthetic labour’. Contrary to the findings of the consumer culturalism approach, such as those in Smith Maguire (2008), her results show that physical appearance brings relatively little value to its owners. However, these studies suggest that the social or economic rewards accumulated from appearance are often culturally stigmatised and that investing in one’s physical appearance in working life seldom accumulates women’s economic capital but instead benefits their employees (Mears, 2011, 2014, 2015).

The definition of beauty and appropriate appearance is not universally shared, as Kuipers (2015) concluded in her research concerning beauty and taste in different countries. Despite common beliefs, people do not agree upon what is beautiful. Instead of shared aesthetic evaluations, significant social differences emerge in female and male beauty standards, and these ‘beauty tastes’ serve as a means of distinction (*ibid.*). While contrasting these findings with the research tradition approaching physical appearance as an individual asset that yields social and economic advantages, Giselinde Kuipers (2015) offers a more elaborate interpretation of how the value of physical appearance is accrued in different cultural contexts, or *fields*.

Physical appearance-related inequality is also distinctly related to different practices being appreciated more or less based on their perceived connotations of masculinity or femininity. These connotations may stem from common cultural beliefs on ‘doing gender’ in everyday life. For example, the theory of erotic capital (Hakim, 2010) emphasises women’s sexual power over men and claims that accumulating such capital can improve their social standing if only women were to use that power without being morally judged by men and other women—or more specifically, feminists. Following a similar view of women being normatively restricted, cultural theorist Efrat Tseëlon (1995) discussed the ‘masque of femininity’, referring to the normative conceptions of femininity’s essence that have resulted in procedures deemed ‘feminine’ in modern culture becoming morally judged for seduction, deception and threat (*ibid.*). Analogous to previous connotations is Bartky’s ‘artifice of femininity’ (1988), which refers to women expressing their worth by controlling their bodies through disciplinary practices that revolve around shaping their body’s size, shape, comportment and movement. However, because of their association with femininity, such practices are considered trivial, shallow and unimportant; still, refusing to invest in such practices violates

the gender order. While not being valued, this beauty work constitutes a ‘third shift’ in women’s lives that takes time from other more critical activities (Wolf, 1991).

Regardless of whether the ‘invisible hand’ of sexuality should be allowed to operate in the quiet or whether women are shallow or seductive, age is unanimously unbeneficial for women. Thus, inequality related to physical appearance may also emerge as differently gendered standards towards ageing (Sontag, 1972). The gendered differences in socialisation direct women to perceive their bodies in terms of looks (e.g. Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1991), whereas men are led to see their bodies in terms of functionality (e.g. Ojala et al., 2016; Slevin, 2010; Wearing, 2010). This gendered difference results in the loss of good looks, associated with ageing in our youth-fetishising culture, being mentally and socially more harmful to women than to men (Sontag, 1972; Twigg, 2013). These claims are confirmed by suggesting that, for example, women are deemed old at an earlier age than men are (Barrett & von Rohr, 2008; see also Itzin & Phillipson, 1993), and the early signs of ageing, such as grey hair, are read as marks of social dominance, maturity and authority in men (Twigg, 2004). In contrast, women are expected to maintain good and youthful looks throughout their lives (e.g. Clarke, 2002; Twigg, 2013) and to use age-concealment techniques (Harris, 1994). However, men who invest in similar practices, such as attempting to conceal greying hair and wrinkles, may be condemned (*ibid.*)

A similar process is evident in ageing, which naturally comes with changes and bodily decline that are mediated by different gendered, classed and aged power relations. According to feminist gerontology (e.g. Calasanti & King, 2018), ageing requires a more nuanced approach, rather than focusing on gender alone. Men and women experience ageing with respect to the different social categories they form within their gender group, like class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation (e.g. Calasanti & Slevin, 2001, Slevin, 2010). For example, class plays a critical role in managing one’s ageing body, such as in denying or providing economic resources to actively resist ageing, which is expensive and time-consuming (*ibid.*). In addition to reducing social acceptance, the disparity between younger and older women is also projected onto the labour market and pay levels (e.g. Walby, 1993). Similarly, race and ethnicity critically shape women’s possibilities for jobs and economic opportunities.

The motherhood context also contains requirements that partly resemble gendered and classed double standards of ageing. In a study on pregnancy and fitness, Dworkin and Wachs (2004) claimed that including pregnant bodies in the analysis of gendered bodily norms and the corporeal tensions faced by the contemporary pregnant woman offers a unique opportunity to extend previously established arguments on bodies, sexuality and feminism. On the one hand, as ageing women have acknowledged (e.g. Hurd, 2000; Tiggemann, 2004), motherhood also

can offer a haven from earlier appearance pressures or a momentary release from prevailing appearance norms (e.g. Bailey, 2001). Nevertheless, such bodily changes can intensify previously established aesthetic claims, as in the case of successful ageing—that is, not appearing ‘old’ (Twigg, 2013)—and women who are capable of ‘bouncing back’—that is, returning as they were before pregnancy—seem to be nearly celebrated figures in postmodern consumer culture (e.g. Dworkin & Wachs, 2004; Patterson & O’Malley, 2013). However, the norms of physical appearance and motherhood are contradictory. They require a mother to shift her interest towards the well-being of the child and not focus much on herself (e.g. Hays, 1996; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010), yet ‘looking like a mother’ can be socially stigmatised as well (e.g. Littler, 2013).

Notably, engaging in beauty practices can also be empowering to some people, while simultaneously reinforcing oppressive hegemonic ideals and thus sustaining and reproducing the traditional social order (e.g. Kwan & Trautner, 2009). Crucially, the urgency of these social norms again varies according to a person’s social class, which operates as a social setting to which one seeks to conform, as is also true in the case of ageing women, who must emphasise their appearance and age appropriately.

2.2.3 Physical appearance, gender and consumption in the Finnish context

Several scholars (e.g. Autio, 2006; Heinonen, 1998; Wilska, 2002) have claimed that Finland has certain features that significantly differ from those of other countries, in terms of appearance orientation and consumer attitudes. However, because of the lack of comparative studies between countries, these claims emphasising the distinctive nature of Finnish consumer culture are difficult to vindicate.

Despite the lack of comparative studies, it can be said that consumer cultures always, to some extent, reflect the history of the local, particular consumer culture (e.g. Keller, 2011; Steenkamp, 2019). One distinctive feature in the Finnish context is the short history of Finnish consumer culture: Finland transformed itself quite rapidly from a poor agrarian society into an urbanised, modern mass-consumer society in the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. Ekholm & Frisk, 2019; Heinonen, 1998). One distinctive feature in the Finnish context is its ‘women-friendly’ welfare state (Hernes, 1987), referring to its extensive public care services, which have freed women to join the labour market and provided economic autonomy for them (e.g. Virokannas et al., 2020). In addition to providing access to the workforce and paid labour, the universal social security system’s services and extensive public social care are seen as providing support against individual-level risks as well as reducing social inequality among Finnish women (Kangas & Palme, 2009; Virokannas et al.,

2020). Moreover, the Nordic countries, including Finland, are considered exceptionally homogeneous in relation to culture and population in academic, administrative and public discussions (e.g. Louvrier & Tuori, 2014; Keskinen et al., 2019). These homogeneity approaches have been criticised for neglecting the region's colonial and racial histories (Keskinen, 2019), such as Finland's subordinate position within Sweden and Russia before gaining its independence in 1917. The features specified above are usually seen as affecting Finnish values as well as defining the norms and morality among its citizens.

In line with Finland's history, the virtues of Finnish consumers are usually associated with values such as frugality, caution and rationality (e.g. Autio, 2006; Wilska, 2002). Moreover, some practices related to physical appearance are traditionally seen as more valued or appropriate than others are. For instance, ordinariness—or not standing out from the crowd and 'not making a scene'—can be considered the main normative goal of attending to one's appearance (e.g. Autio, 2006; Sarpila, 2013; Wilska, 2002). The orientation towards natural beauty and cleanliness seems dominant in advertisements by Finnish cosmetics companies such as Lumene, branding Finnish women as strong, natural and independent. Thus, standing out from the crowd, wearing overly distinctive clothing or having a distinctive overall appearance would be socially less valued in Finland. However, signs exist that physical appearance does matter for Finns as well (Sarpila, 2013; Sarpila et al., 2017), and the share of consumption of, for example, clothing in Finland does not differ significantly from the European median (Eurostat, 2018).

Notwithstanding these culturally distinctive features, the Internet and mass media are significantly contributing to the dominant conceptions of beauty. Moreover, the media has a significant role in constructing identities as well as in establishing and contesting cultural meanings, especially for young people, because it offers a glimpse of multiple possible ways of living and being (Livingstone, 2002). Today, the appearance ideal for young people is abundantly connected to social media (e.g. Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). Thus, the global range of acceptable appearances is becoming narrower, increasingly homogenised and globally aspirational (e.g. Jha, 2016; Widdows, 2018).

To summarise the themes in this section, previous research and theoretical approaches have proposed that physical appearance can act as a form of capital, but the possibilities to accumulate this asset successfully partly depend on other forms of capital. Moreover, the use of that capital is normatively sanctioned, especially for women, and the norms of using physical appearance vary contextually. The focus of this dissertation lies on these questions in Finland, a country within the 'Nordic nirvana' (Lister, 2009) that is considered a pioneer in gender equality in various ways (e.g. Louvrier & Tuori, 2014). Similarly, the norms of not paying too much attention to one's appearance and of emphasising virtues such as humility and modesty have

produced a local moral atmosphere that prevents one from seeing the importance of physical appearance. These specific features and beliefs make Finland as an appealing locus of inquiry for norms (Kukkonen et al., 2019). Moreover, regardless of the evidence available on how physical appearance affects different outcomes—for example, in working-life contexts (e.g. Hosoda et al., 2003; Langlois et al., 2000)—physical appearance is seldom identified as a source of inequality per se. Furthermore, previous sociological studies on physical appearance with a Bourdieusian approach have either not addressed the role of gender in detail or have concentrated solely on the responses of either women or men alone. Social norms on physical appearance that vary between social classes can be examined more profoundly. Similarly, sociological studies concentrating on contextual norms, gender and social class simultaneously, as well as studies using nationally representative data, are scarce.

3 Research questions, data, and methods

The first article aims to fill these previously assessed gaps in research by examining the social norms relating to physical appearance at a societal level in Finland. Second, it examines the role of gender in the endorsement of these norms. Moreover, to fill the gap in research on the situational or relational nature of physical appearance, the following articles concentrate on the contextual negotiations of ‘appropriateness’ in three contexts: social media platforms, motherhood, and ageing. Three of the four articles utilise nationally representative datasets and use multivariate analysis to define the contextual variations in social norms concerning appropriate looks at societal-, group-, and individual levels.

Table 1 presents the dependent and independent variables used in each quantitative article and establishes the focus areas in this dissertation, namely physical appearance, social norms, gender and contextual variations of those norms. Chosen variables are scrutinised in detail in each of the articles included at the end of this dissertation. A summary of the articles and their findings will be presented in the following chapter.

Table 1. Summary of objectives, data, methods, and ethical considerations

	Article I: 'Exploitation of aesthetic capital – disapproved by whom?'	Article II: 'A feminine burden of perfection? Appearance-related pressures on social networking sites.'	Article III: 'Hip children, good mothers – children's clothing as capital investment?'	Article IV: 'From double standards to triple standards of ageing – Perceptions of physical appearance at the intersections of age, gender and class.'
Article-specific objectives	1) Gendered double standards of exploiting physical appearance in different contexts, 2) The role of the respondent's gender, and 3) The role of self-perceived attractiveness in endorsing those double standards.	1) Appearance-related pressures on social networking sites and gender, 2) Differences between Facebook and Instagram, and 3) The number of friends or followers.	1) Children as an extension of the self, and 2) Negotiating their own aesthetic capital through children's clothing.	1) The internalisation of the double standards of ageing and gender, and 2) The role of self-identified class in the internalisation of these norms.
Data	'Everyday life and appearance' – survey	'Finland in the digital age' – survey	Interview data	'Everyday life and appearance' – survey
Method of analyses	Descriptive Ordinal logistic regression	Descriptive Ordinal logistic regression	Content analysis	Descriptive Ordinal logistic regression
Dependent variables/ measures	The strictness of norms regarding utilising physical appearance in different spheres of life: job, salary, getting friends, and finding a partner.	Experiencing appearance-related pressures on social networking sites.	Appropriate appearance in the context of motherhood. Children as aesthetic capital.	Subjective evaluation of one's appearance. Importance of one's appearance. Concern about ageing affecting one's appearance.
Independent variables	Target gender Respondent gender Level of attractiveness	Respondent gender Preferred social networking site Number of followers or friends		Age Respondent gender Social class

Ethical considerations and research limitations	Informed consent	Informed consent	Informed consent	Informed consent
	Anonymity	Anonymity	Anonymity	Anonymity
	Generalisability to the Finnish population	Generalisability to the Finnish population	Small sample size	Generalisability to Finnish population
	Social desirability bias	Social desirability bias	Short duration of interviews	Social desirability bias
	Over-/Under-represented data	Over-/Under-represented data	Homogeneity of interviewees	Over-/Under-represented data
			Generalisability to a larger population	

3.1 Research questions

This dissertation aims to examine the normative regulation of physical appearance in Finland and asked, whether those appearance norms vary by gender. It explores the variations of those norms between different people in different contexts, ages, and life stages. The focus of this study is women; however, the results are contrasted with the responses of men in quantitative studies. The empirical part of the study concentrates first on defining the societal-level norms concerning the utilisation of appearance and then proceeds to three particular social settings, namely social media, motherhood and ageing.

These social settings were chosen as they can be seen representing a phase or a context with a notable impact on one’s relationship with their physical appearance, as well as normatively governed in terms of appropriate investment in oneself (or someone else as the extended self, as in the case of middle-class mothers) appearance. Finally, these contexts represent life stages, demographics, or environments that are suitable for an elaboration of the effect of gender on the normative regulation of physical appearance.

The research questions in this dissertation are as follows:

RQ 1: How do social norms relating to physical appearance and gender vary in different social settings and contexts?

RQ2: How do age and class associate with these gendered and contextual norms?

RQ3: Can physical appearance be perceived as a form of capital that benefits people of different genders unequally?

3.2 Data, methods, and ethical considerations

3.2.1 Measures

3.2.1.1 Physical appearance as a form of capital

Physical appearance as a form of capital is the first overarching theme in this dissertation. The possession of this capital is gendered, as it bears value mostly for women who are evaluated through their appearances and as a result of that, they also place more importance on having it. Physical appearance as a beneficiary resource is discussed in the four articles, but is not measured explicitly. It is assumed that physical appearance bears value that takes shape in social interactions and can be used in different spheres of life, but its use is normatively sanctioned.

The capital nature of physical appearance was examined in Article I by assuming that physical appearance benefit individuals, especially women, in their social interactions. As the article focused on the norms around the utilisation of one's aesthetic assets in different spheres of life, there is no direct measure for aesthetic capital per se. In Article I, the influence of self-perceived attractiveness on endorsing double standards was measured, as it probably affects one's opinions on the role of physical appearance in different contexts.

Article II centres on how appearance-related pressures in different online contexts can be seen as measuring the capital nature physical appearance from the perspective of *having appropriate looks or compensatory resources* to not feel pressure in the online presentation and display of content on social media. Simultaneously, it can be assumed that if one does not experience pressure on social media, his or her followers or their comments do not focus on appearance commentaries. Moreover, receiving appearance comments or likes on social media may not be the primary source of self-esteem for these people.

In Article IV, a part of the analysis focuses on the double standards of ageing and the subjective evaluation of physical appearance in older age. In addition to individual assessments of physical appearance, even worry about age affecting one's looks measures the concern of *losing one's aesthetic capital and its effects on self-perception*. While considering physical appearance as a form of capital, its changeability to other resources is not fixed. Different aesthetics are valued in different contexts and by different social groups. It can be assumed that some social groups experience ageing more drastically and that it may affect their appearance because they appreciate it more than people in other social groups.

3.2.1.2 Norms regarding physical appearance

The second overarching theme of this dissertation is social norms. Article I approaches the strictness of *the gendered norms regarding the utilisation of physical appearance in different spheres of life*. The extent of disapproval involved in exploiting aesthetic capital was examined using the question, ‘How much do you approve or disapprove if a man/woman tries to take advantage of his/her appearance to a) get a job, b) increase his/her salary, c) get friends, and d) get a spouse he/she wants?’ The article uses a split-ballot design to investigate the possible differences in the normative assumptions for exploiting appearance. Thus, half the respondents were randomly assigned to answer questions concerning men, and the other half had to answer questions concerning women. The answers were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘definitely disapprove’ to ‘definitely approve’.

In this article, the interest also was on *how respondents’ self-perceived attractiveness affected these evaluations and the strictness of the norms*. This variable was investigated using the question, ‘How would you rate your own attractiveness in comparison with others of the same age and gender?’ The respondents were instructed to consider their appearance, on the whole, taking facial features, body shape and size, as well as their style of dressing and grooming into account. This variable was also measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘not attractive’ to ‘very attractive’. In further analysis, both variables were collapsed into a three-point scale.

Article II explored how the norms concerning physical appearance may cause pressure on social media especially for young women, who place the most value on their looks. They also consider social media an essential medium for self-presentation and seek validation from their online peers, but simultaneously experience body dissatisfaction while browsing through content showing unattainable appearances. We measured the extent to which respondents experienced the use of *social media to increase appearance-related pressures by being exposed to normative ideals of beauty*. The initial statement was ‘Social media sometimes causes me to have appearance-related pressures’. The respondents were given the following options: ‘1 = Completely disagree’ to ‘5 = Completely agree’. For the analysis, the original five-point scale was recoded by combining values 1-2 into the category ‘Disagree’, 3 into the category ‘Neutral’, and 4-5 into the category ‘Agree’.

Article IV approached the double standards around physical appearance using three variables concerning ageing, and their effects on physical appearance. The study aimed to explore whether men and women experience the loss of physical appearance and are rendered unable to meet the normative youthful beauty ideals in consumer society differently. The first variable focuses on the subjective evaluation of one’s appearance, and it was measured using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1=‘not attractive’ to 5=‘very attractive’ in response to the question ‘How would

you rate your own attractiveness when compared to others of the same age and gender?'. The respondents were instructed to consider their appearance as a whole, while taking their facial features, body shape, and size, and their style of dressing and grooming into account. The second variable focused on the importance of physical appearance. The respondents were asked to indicate how important their appearance was to them on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1='not important at all' to 5='very important'. Finally, the respondents were asked whether they were worried about how ageing would affect their appearance on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1='completely disagree' to 5='completely agree'. All the mentioned items were collapsed into three categories: not attractive/not important/disagree entirely, neutral, and attractive/important/agree.

3.2.2 Quantitative data and methods

This dissertation uses data from two different nationally representative surveys. A quantitative approach was followed in three articles to examine the attitudes and societal norms around physical appearance. This approach ensured the investigation of potentially gendered and classed differences underlying these attitudes and offered a broader level of understanding of the social norms concerning physical appearance.

Survey data on 'Everyday life and appearance' were collected by researchers at the Economic Sociology Unit at the University of Turku in the early part of the year 2016 (for more information, see Sarpila et al., 2016). The survey aimed to collect data on the aspects and meanings of physical appearance in Finland. The questionnaire was distributed via mail to a simple random sample of 4,000 Finns aged between 15 and 74 years and with Finnish as their native language. The sample was drawn from the Population Register Centre of Finland. In addition to the paper questionnaire, the respondents were also given a chance to complete the survey online. The final sample included 3,994 Finns, as those who could not be reached were omitted from the sample. A total of 1,600 Finns responded, indicating a response rate of 40 per cent. Of these, 280 responded online, and 1,320 delivered their responses via mail. As is typical in survey research, younger men were slightly under-represented in our final data when compared to the general population. In contrast, older women were, to some extent, over-represented when compared to the population. To correct the bias, the data were weighted to correspond to the age and gender distribution of the Finnish population aged between 15 and 74 years. All analyses were conducted using these weights. The data were utilised in Articles I and IV.

The secondary data used in this dissertation are sourced from the 'Finland in the digital age' survey collected by researchers at the unit of Economic Sociology at the

University of Turku at the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018. The data collection aimed to provide a comprehensive picture of citizens' digital skills, social media, Internet use, and physical appearance. The data were gathered using through a postal survey and an online panel data. The postal questionnaires were sent to a total of 8000 Finnish-speaking Finns aged between 18 and 74 years, who were selected using a simple random sampling technique from the Finnish Population Register Database. The online panel data were collected by a market research company. The final data from both data sources included a total of 3724 respondents, resulting in a 30.9 per cent response rate. As many as 66 per cent of the final data were based on probability sampling, and 34 per cent were based on nonprobability sampling. Although the total share represented the share of Finnish social media users relatively well, older users were slightly over-represented. The data were post-stratified in terms of age distribution to correspond to the official population distribution of social media users in Finland according to the Official Statistics of Finland. The analyses in Article II are based on these data.

The quantitative research articles in this dissertation comprise descriptive and multivariate regression analyses. Descriptive analyses in articles II and IV include cross-tabulations of the distribution of variables based on different background variables (gender, age, and self-reported class).

Ordered logistic regression is a suitable means to analyse ordinal variables, namely those with uneven categories. Ordinal regression analysis makes assumptions only with respect to the order of the categories of the dependent variable and not the distance between them, although the labels indicate a certain sameness among the variables. The odds ratios between all categories are assumed to be the same, irrespective of which categories are examined. This is called the parallel regression assumption or the proportional odds assumption (e.g. Long, 1997).

Ordinal logistic regression is used in articles I, II, and IV. In all articles, ordered logistic regression is first reported as odds ratios (OR). However, while reporting the results of interaction terms, the OR were converted into average marginal effects (AME) because these estimates are easier to interpret and are not affected by unobserved heterogeneity (Mood, 2010). AME show a change in probability when the predictor or independent variable increases by one unit. All statistical analyses were performed using Stata versions 14 and 15.

3.2.3 Qualitative data and methods

Besides the survey data presented earlier, this dissertation utilises qualitative interview data in one of its articles. These data were gathered to gain knowledge on how social norms are perceived at an individual level and how they are inscribed into action while entering a life phase usually experienced with great ambivalence,

motherhood. The data used in Article III were drawn from 10 semi-structured themed interviews with Finnish mothers, recruited from a popular Finnish Facebook group that focused on children's clothing and fashion. Each participant was interviewed once and the interview session lasted from half an hour to over an hour. The discussions took place in different locations throughout summer of 2017. However, most meetings lasted substantially longer, and after the official interview, children and their clothing were discussed. This study aimed to examine a specific group of middle-class mothers and their cultural tastes in children's clothing. All interviewees had somewhat similar educational backgrounds but held different jobs. They were aged between 28 and 37 years, and the vast majority cohabited with their partners.

Article III relied on content analysis to unravel the thematic semi-structured interviews to explore the meanings that the interviewees attached to their consumption choices. The data were first pre-coded thematically and classified for comparison as follows: consuming practices before and after their children were born, general consumption among children, motherhood, and their opinions on the appearance of children in general and with respect to their mother's appearance. The second stage analysis looked through the data for collective stories, prevalent discourses, and cross-cutting themes. Then, the results were analysed through the theory of extended self to explore how women saw their children in relation to their own lifestyle choices. We then concluded how children were seen as representing the aesthetic capital of their mothers and analysed how the representation of social class can be seen present in their descriptions.

In terms of fitting the overall objective of this dissertation, the article can be seen examining *the norms regarding the appropriate appearance of children as a part of their mother's appearance* in the context of motherhood. The women interviewed expressed in different ways that a good mother spends time and money on her children and not on herself. This proved that women are expected to adapt to changing situations in their life cycle, even with their physical appearance. The physical appearance of their children and their material possessions were seen as central to performing and constructing their collective middle-class maternal identities. This article thus addresses *the accumulation of aesthetic capital* by examining mothers' interests in designer baby clothing and children's fashion. The aesthetic requirements for women intensify after they have children and women consider their children as aesthetic extensions of their appearance. The consumption focus of the women interviewed had shifted from themselves to their children. This personal modesty and the successful manifestation of morally acceptable aesthetic capital through their children are seen as an asset in the maternal sphere. Following the capital logic, performing legitimate taste through children's fashion can be transferred into, for example, friendship or social recognition in their cultural context.

3.2.4 Ethical considerations and research limitations

Social scientists are always embedded within the society they study. Thus, it is fundamental to be open to and aware of the possible ethical risks in making science about humans. In addition to the importance of acknowledging one's position, technical challenges are part of the ethical problems that researchers face when conducting research.

The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK) defines the general ethical principle of research as 'the quest for knowledge obtained through systematic study and thinking, observation and experimentation'. While disciplines may use different approaches, they share the motivation to increase our understanding of ourselves and the world in which we live. Researchers must respect the dignity and autonomy of human research participants, strive to save the material and immaterial cultural heritage and biodiversity, and conduct research in such a way that it does not cause significant risks, damage, or harm to participants, communities, or other subjects of research (TENK, 2019).

The statement of ethical practice by British Sociological Association (BSA, 2017) concisely establishes that 'sociologists have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants is not adversely affected by the research'. Similar claims are stated regarding the complexity of ethical decision-making in social sciences, stressing the importance of, for example, informed consent, and respect for privacy, avoiding deceit and lying, and preparing the informants for the consequences of publication (e.g. Bulmer, 2001). In the chapter on research ethics, the ethical considerations for quantitative and qualitative research are divided. In quantitative analysis, respondents need to be assured of the auspices and purpose of the study, the use of personal information, anonymity, and confidentiality (ibid.). These established ethical guidelines are crucial to follow and apply in online environments, such as online surveys, as well.

Ethical concepts, such as informed consent and anonymity were achieved in the quantitative research in this study, as the respondents participated voluntarily in the study. In the cover letter provided with the survey, the respondents were given information on, for example, the study they participated in and how and where the data were going to be used. The final stage of the survey was also carried out in line with ethical procedures. After the forms were downloaded into a digital format, they were stored safely in line with ethical guidelines. The analyses were conducted in such a way that individuals cannot be identified.

However, some determinants affect survey responses, especially while studying sensitive issues, such as this study in hand. A review by Krumpal (2013) defined sensitivity in survey questions being related to behaviours that are taboo, illegal, or socially sanctioned, but encompassing unsocial attitudes and opinions as well. The survey items may be too intrusive, pose a threat of disclosure for the respondents, or

may be socially disapproved. Thus, the respondents may find it hard to answer them honestly. The respondents' need for social approval, strategies for self-presentation, and impression management yield socially desirable responses at the individual level and a predictable bias in survey estimates at the aggregate level. Thus, the risks of misreporting or not reporting at all, leading to sample proportions either underestimating or overestimating the prevalence of examined activities or opinions can be anticipated in survey designs as well (Krumpal, 2013). To avoid these risks of socially desirable responses, Article I used a split-ballot design, wherein half the respondents answered questions on men and the other half answered the same questions on women.

Notably, as a researcher, I am aware that different research methods and data can be used for different kinds of purposes and knowledge production. I believe the quantitative data representative for Finland can be seen as a strength of this dissertation, as it thus allows generalisation to a population in an unprecedented way. As such, it can be seen as contributing both empirically and methodologically to ongoing discussions in feminist media studies and sociological research. Simultaneously, however, focusing less on quantitative methods and emphasising qualitative data on such a sensitive and interpretative topic could have resulted in somewhat more profound interpretations for topics related to intersectionality. This could have been done, for example, by discussing the role of sexuality and providing discussions that better describe the gendered norms of physical appearance in the Finnish context.

In qualitative research, the ethical dilemmas that researchers face are different, and the freedom to address those problems is higher. Thus, ethical considerations are more probable in qualitative research solely because of personal differences in self-presentation during field research (e.g. Bulmer, 2001). In this dissertation, ethical considerations seem more necessary in Article III, where the data were collected from a closed Facebook group. We posted our request for recruitment of interviewees, and before publishing the ad, we asked for permission from the administrator of the group. We were not members of the community before this study. When we applied for membership, we told the members about our position as researchers. The article refers only to publicly visible information on the group, and information outside the interviews was not used. The data were gathered primarily for the second author's master's thesis, but some of the questions were formed to suit the research interests of this dissertation. Before starting the interviews, all participants signed a consent form, stating the purpose and mode in which the information gathered would be used. In the article, the participants were referred to using unidentifiable pseudonyms ranging from H1-H10.

4 Summary of the research articles

4.1 Social norms regarding the exploitation of physical appearance

The first article, titled ‘Exploitation of aesthetic capital – disapproved by whom?’ investigated the gendered double standards in Finland, that is, the differences in evaluating identical behaviour differently based on gender (cf. Foschi, 2000) in the context of utilising physical appearance in social interactions for personal advantages.

This article approached physical appearance as a form of capital, relying on Bourdieu’s (1984) understanding of capital logic in social interaction. Bourdieu first considered aesthetic traits as a part of cultural capital. However, in more recent considerations, aesthetic traits such as body shape and size, clothing and grooming have been considered an independent form of capital that can be used in social exchanges (Anderson et al., 2010; Hakim, 2010). The article employed Wolf’s (1991) and Bordo’s (1993) feminist approaches and concluded that disapproving attitudes towards women were a consequence of internalising patriarchal and capitalistic society norms that suppress the value of female characteristics.

Drawing from previously demonstrated strands of literature, this article explored whether men or women are more disapproving in their attitudes concerning the exploitation of one’s appearance. It also explored the extent of the double standards in different social contexts: applying for a job, seeking a raise in salary, making friends or finding a partner. Third, it explored whether self-perceived attractiveness influenced the gendered endorsement of double standards. The article utilised ‘Everyday life and appearance’ survey data with a split-ballot design to study gendered double standards at the societal level. Half the respondents were randomly assigned to answer questions on men, while the other half answered the same questions on women. The data are nationally representative of Finns aged between 15 and 74 years (n=1,600).

The main finding of this article was that women were more prone to endorsing double standards against other women. The most significant areas of disapproving the use of physical appearance were job-related situations: applying for a job and seeking a raise. In the case of finding a partner or making friends, the probability of

disapproving was notably less. Men were overall less disapproving in all cases when compared to women, and the differences between target groups were not statistically significant for them. Perceived attractiveness was associated with disapproving attitudes towards exploiting physical appearance-related assets for both women and men. Women who did not see themselves as attractive compared to their peers were more likely to hold double standards. Men were overall more approving when compared to women and did not generally maintain double standards towards exploiting appearance.

Primarily those who stand in vulnerable positions are more likely to uphold double standards prohibiting women from utilising their aesthetic assets in the course of social exchange. Developing aesthetic capital is more accepted for – perhaps even expected of – women than it is for men, and thus, the consequences of not possessing it are heavier for women. A possible explanation for this double standard is that women may have more negative experiences of appearance unjustly working as an asset or may have witnessed similar representations in the media that reduce women to their aesthetic and sexualised value. In this respect, rather than reflecting negative emotions such as envy, rivalry or moral judgement, women oppose the idea of aesthetic criteria having an extensive effect on their lives. This proposes an intriguing double-bind: endorsing gendered double standards is necessarily a sexist practice, although endorsing them can also perversely be a way to oppose sexism.

4.2 Social norms in the context of social media platforms

The second article, ‘A feminine burden of perfection? Appearance-related pressures on social networking sites’, examined how social norms and appearance ideals inflicted appearance-related pressures on social media platforms for men and women in Finland.

In its most rigorous definition, social media is a platform to publish content with visually appealing appearances. Those approaches stress the prevalence of normative beauty ideals on social media, reinforcing a narrow definition of beauty, which is almost impossible to achieve, and create bodily dissatisfaction for women especially (e.g. Tiggemann & Slater, 2013; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018). Despite well-documented negative outcomes, other scholars have also stressed social media’s positive side, emphasising its possibilities for empowerment (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Barnard, 2016; Dobson, 2016; Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015) as well as improving self-esteem (Pounders, Kowalczyk & Stowers, 2016).

The article concentrated on examining the differences between two platforms, namely Facebook and Instagram, in the probability of being linked to experiences of appearance-related pressures. It also explored how gender was associated with these

pressures as women placed more importance on portraying themselves as friendly and attractive, and how using social media may more likely promote appearance concerns among female audiences (e.g. Fardouly et al., 2015; Fox & Vendemia, 2016; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). The article finally assessed whether the number of friends or followers affected the probability of experiencing appearance-related pressures differently among men and women. The article offered insights into the relationship between the use of social media and appearance-related pressures. The hypotheses in this article asked how experiencing appearance-related pressures were mediated by gender and age and whether such pressures were more prevalent on specific social media platforms. Finally, it explored whether appearance-related pressures were more prominent among those with a high number of friends or followers. These hypotheses were approached with 'Finland in the digital age' data, which were nationally representative of the Finnish population aged between 18 and 74 years (N=3,724).

The results indicated that both gender and age are associated with experiencing appearance-related pressures engendered by social media. The tendency to report social media as a source of appearance-related pressure is higher, particularly among younger women. Besides, the preferred social network site, Instagram, has an impact on experiencing appearance-related pressures. Instagram users, regardless of gender, are more likely to perceive appearance-related pressures than Facebook users. The number of followers increased the likelihood of Instagram users to recognise appearance-related pressures caused by social media. However, the effect was apparent only for women.

4.3 Social norms in the context of motherhood

The third article, 'Hip children, good mothers: Children's clothing as capital investment?', examined Finnish mothers' consumption choices. More specifically, it examined the role of children's clothing on normative perceptions of appropriate appearances and successful motherhood.

Sociological approaches to consumption often focus on class-based distinction or socialisation processes that simultaneously normalise middle-class aesthetics and appearances (Brusdal & Frønes, 2013; Gillies, 2005; Skeggs, 1997). This is especially evident in children's appearance, which is also a means of judging self-worth and competence as a mother by conforming to the cultural norms and lifestyle choices of mothering (Wilska, 2002). The successful manifestation of these cultural norms demands significant investments into economic and cultural capital, which are accessible only for a few. The article investigated whether mothers see their children as their extended self by utilising these consumer culturist viewpoints (e.g.

Belk, 1988) and whether they negotiate their aesthetic capital (Anderson et al., 2010) through their children's clothing.

The study utilised 10 semi-structured and themed interviews with Finnish mothers. The study participants were recruited through an open call on a closed Facebook group with over 10,000 style-oriented Finnish parents, who shared a passion for ethically produced, small-scale premium brands for children.

This study's results indicated that women saw their children as extensions of themselves, representing their lifestyle choices and consumption ideals. The mothers negotiated their aesthetic capital through consumption practices. Still, in a way, it was normatively suitable in their life situation to shift the focus of their consumption to their children. Their investment in their children's physical appearance can be seen as constructing a contemporary understanding of proper motherhood in the middle-class context. Constructing such an aesthetic capital is a consumption practice in which certain brands form status markers of normatively constructed middle-class parenthood that may 'other' the working-class appearance. Social class is evident in interviews through consumption choices and this signaled the family's status and morality and dedication to middle-class parenting ideals.

4.4 Social norms in the context of ageing

The fourth article, titled 'From double standards to triple standards of ageing: Perceptions of physical appearance at the intersections of age, gender, and class', investigated the relationship among physical appearance, gender and class in the Finnish context. The article explored whether the so-called double standard of ageing (Sontag, 1972) still applied and resulted in men and women internalising ageist appearance norms in society differently. It also explored whether social class mediated individual experiences and if the double standard of ageing had been substituted by the 'triple standards of ageing,' manifesting in the form of gendered and classed requirements for ageing.

The article utilised nationally representative data pertaining to Finns aged between 15 and 74 years (N=1,600) from the 'Everyday life and appearance' survey. The article explored whether age affected the subjective evaluations of attractiveness, the importance of appearance and the concerns about ageing affecting appearances differently for men and women of different social classes.

The findings first suggested that both men and women felt that ageing eroded their appearance. More often women than men, regardless of class, responded saying that physical appearance mattered to them. All women internalized consumer society's youthful norms. From an early age, and regardless of their social background, women feared looking old. The article suggested that a double standard of ageing existed, and noticed that a 'triple standard' was also evident. People of

different gender and social classes responded to these norms differently at different ages, as the perceptions of upper-middle-class people differed from those of the working class. Women considered physical appearance important, but only the assessments of upper-middle-class appearance remained stable in age comparisons. In contrast, working-class women believed that age eroded their physical appearance.

Upper-middle-class women appeared less vulnerable while experiencing ageing when compared to women who had less social, cultural and economic capital to enhance their ageing appearance. The results can also be interpreted to mean that upper-middle-class people experience conflicting demands regarding ageing, that is, being compelled to seek anti-ageing solutions and not being allowed to surrender to the natural ageing process.

4.5 Main findings of the articles

This dissertation's focus was on social norms concerning physical appearance in Finland. It explored variations in norms between different genders and different contexts: life stages, platforms and ages. This study showed that even though women are encouraged to invest in their physical looks, they meet disapproval for trying to take advantage of their appearances, primarily for economic gain. The appropriate mode of manifesting this investment continually shifts throughout women's lives and depends on other factors such as social class and motherhood (Table 2, next page).

Table 2. Main results of the research articles

Study	Research question	Main results
I	Who holds double standards concerning the exploitation of physical appearance?	Women are more prone to endorsing the double standards against other women, and the most significant areas of disapproval include applying for a job and increasing one's salary. Self-perceived attractiveness is associated with disapproving attitudes.
II	Who is more prone to experiencing appearance-related concerns on social media and how does the platform or the number of followers affect these experiences?	The tendency to experience appearance-related pressures is higher among women, especially younger women. Instagram users are more likely to report appearance-related pressures and a larger number of followers increases these experiences.
III	Are children extensions of their mothers' aesthetic capital?	Middle-class mothers see their children as extensions of themselves, representing their lifestyle choices. These mothers can be seen negotiating a life stage-appropriate aesthetic capital through their consumption practices.
IV	Do men and women internalise the double standard of ageing differently and does class mediate these differences?	Both men and women feel that ageing erodes one's appearance. Women more than men, regardless of class, assert that physical appearance matters more to them and that they fear looking old from an early age, regardless of their social background. While a double standard of ageing exists, a 'triple standard' is also found, as the perceptions of upper-middle-class people differ from those of the working class, but are in line with women of similar age and class.

5 Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Discussion

In the introductory section of this dissertation, a quote by Lily Allen proposed that it's 'Hard out here (for a bitch)'. Thus, to unravel this argument profoundly, this dissertation focused on the normative regulation of physical appearance concentrating in Finland. Moreover, it examined whether these norms vary based on gender, as Allen argues, or whether also other axes of inequality besides gender shape women's experiences. It also explored variations in these norms among people across different contexts. In the quantitative research parts, the results were contrasted with the responses of men, whereas the qualitative part concentrated solely on the responses of women.

The introductory section of this study focused on the importance that is placed generally on appearance and explored the concept of aesthetic capital in these contexts. It approached the gendered norms concerning the accumulation and exploitation of physical appearance and examined whether physical appearance could serve as a source of inequality. The first article in this dissertation focused on the gendered double standards concerning the exploitation of physical appearance to explore norms around appearance at a societal level. The articles that followed concentrated on the negotiations of appropriate appearance, especially among women in different contexts. The second article concentrated on appearance pressures in online environments, and the third explored appropriate appearances in the context of motherhood. The fourth article focused on the double standards of ageing. This final chapter is dedicated to answering the research questions and discussing the dissertation's results.

5.1.1 Social norms and gender in different contexts

Philosopher Christina Bicchieri (2005) recommended approaching social norms as context-related as well as situated in the categorisations and social connotations that they activate. The first research question in this dissertation—‘How do social norms relating to physical appearance and gender vary in different social settings and

contexts?’—focused on these context-related social norms concerning physical appearance and their gendered variations.

While discussing norms around physical appearance and gender, the double standards concept is usually brought up. Relying on Foschi’s (2000) conceptualisation of double standards, the normative differences in social interaction are approached as differently evaluated and assigned degrees of morality based on gender. Gender-based double standards were approached first by assessing normative differences in exploiting appearance in different life spheres, confirming the existence of such double standards: women more than men were more normatively disapproved of for utilising their aesthetic assets. Women were evaluated harshly in job-related situations, in negotiations asking for a higher salary or in seeking a job, whereas they faced significantly less disapproval in the context of finding a partner or friendship. The further elaboration on endorsing such norms revealed that women were more disapproving of other women. Women who consider themselves less attractive when compared to their peers were more prone to endorsing the double standards against other women.

Second, context-related norms of physical appearance can also be approached by examining more segmented double standards in different life stages or platforms. Individuals and the social categories they inhabit—in this dissertation, that is young women experiencing appearance-related pressures on social media platforms, mothers and ageing people—are assumed to attend to their appearances according to context-specific social expectations. These requirements appeal to morality or behavioural regularities based on the prevailing normative environment, concerning, for example, constructing appropriate appearance for work-life, playground hierarchy, online environments, a certain age or successful ageing. Similar life stage-appropriate social expectations are not usually applied to men, thus this study identified more nuanced forms of gendered double standards.

5.1.2 Social norms, gender, age and class

The second research question addressed in this dissertation—‘How do age and class associate with these gendered and contextual norms?’—explored the role of different social divides or intersections, namely social class and age, that affect appearance norms besides gender.

The differences in social norms in the context of ‘successful ageing’ (Twigg, 2013) have been referred to earlier as double standards of ageing (Sontag, 1972), on the ground that an ageing woman is judged more harshly than an ageing man, and that the signs of ageing are more accepted for men than for those of women. The results of this study confirmed that despite the alleged gender equality and the prevailing ethos of naturality, the double standards of ageing apply in Finland as

well. Both women and men feel that ageing erodes their appearance; however, only women place more importance on their appearance and are afraid to look old from an early age. That said, while examining the effect of social class on ageing experiences, the previously confirmed double standards were replaced by triple standards. Ageing working-class women seem less confident about their appearances than upper-middle-class women of a similar age, which was referred to as the 'triple standard' of ageing. The triple standard extends to men as well: upper-middle-class middle-aged men evaluate their appearances as being equally important when compared to women of a similar age and social background.

Social norms are endorsed by social sanctions. However, these social sanctions can mean different things in different contexts for different people: respectability, personal merit, friendship and social media likes. In the motherhood context, conforming to the norm of shifting one's appearance-related consumption to children brings a sense of dignity and moral worth as well as a sense of ability as a mother. Manifesting their embodied cultural capital through their children is a suitable means of performing proper motherhood and brings friendship and personal merit with other mothers sharing similar tastes. Children's clothing also signifies ethical consumer attitudes, as mothers were highly conscious of signalling the value of their children's clothing to other mothers. Thus, they hid the unethical and visually unappealing items under carefully curated ones and avoided certain colours and prints in their children's clothing. In other contexts, such as social media platforms, social sanctions for appropriate appearance can be seen as not experiencing appearance-related pressures, but also social validation in the form of positive comments and likes.

Scholars of consumer culture and the body have posited that physical appearance is an essential expression of one's identity. Individuals have become commodities who are expected to be aware constantly of what is demanded of them in terms of their appearance in different markets or social contexts (e.g. Bauman, 2007). Internalising the idea of commodification was particularly apparent in middle-class mothers' clothing choices and how they perceived their children as an extension of themselves (Belk, 1988, 2013). When body maintenance and investing in physical appearance is imperative to adhere to the universal norms of consumer society, one must also invest in the appearance of those extensions. Regardless of the exhaustive claims of consumer culture, these aesthetic requirements do not apply to fathers (Hughes et al., 2015). However, the aesthetic claims may be expanding, as one of the interviewees referred to her husband as partially reflecting her middle-class maternity with his clothing choices.

Moreover, young women who experience appearance-related pressures in an online environment may also feel as though they are on display and may construct their self-worth on how other people see them. The source of such pressures lies in

the commodifying nature of social media, and not in physical appearance per se. However, despite its objectifying nature, social media also has its advantages, as it can offer women with negative body image room to enhance their self-esteem through positive feedback (Fox & Vendemia, 2016). It can also empower its users (Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015) and allow previously objectified groups or groups that had been denied their agency a chance to be seen in the way they desire.

5.1.3 Aesthetic capital and social inequality

The third research question—‘Can physical appearance be perceived as a form of capital that benefits people of different genders unequally?’—is a theoretical follow-up to the preceding two research questions. It focuses on assessing whether physical appearance, as an independent form of capital and consequently, induces gendered and classed inequality.

Bourdieu (1984) originally saw physical appearance and aesthetics as a part of a person’s cultural capital or at least, as a by-product of other capitals. Other scholars have introduced the concept of ‘aesthetic capital’ (Anderson et al., 2010; Mears, 2015; Sarpila, 2013) and have said it refers to different assets related to physical appearance including facial beauty, body shape, size and physique, as well as styles of grooming and clothing (Anderson et al., 2010). Following the capital logic, the effects of investing in these assets have been established to spread to other life spheres. However, as the empirical part of this dissertation demonstrated, although women are normatively encouraged to invest in their appearance, investing in this asset may not be a worthy pursuit. This is because utilising this capital is socially sanctioned in social exchanges or does not necessarily accumulate woman’s capital (see also Mears, 2015). Thus, the penalties can overcome the benefits that accrue from these investments.

As physical appearance can be an independent form of capital, but the beauty standards that people wish to appeal to are not universally shared, it elicits appearance-related inequality. The valued aesthetic repertoires often reflect opposing popular and highbrow tastes (Kuipers, 2015), placing greater value on upper- or middle-class appearance. The alternative values are misrecognised, as they are non-parallel to ideals of the middle class, whose respectability, cultural capital and appropriate appearances accrue exchange value within the larger society (Skeggs, 2004). The taste defined by the upper or middle classes is necessary for performing appropriateness in certain fields (Bourdieu, 1987; Wacquant, 1991), such as the labour market or the education system, which place greater importance on the presentation of more subtle middle-class values and appearances. This legitimate taste is difficult to imitate, let alone use in social interaction, without appropriate social, cultural and economic capital. Given this, social groups and situations are

highly likely to vary in their possibilities and capabilities towards accumulating other assets with their appearance. This assumption was confirmed in the results of the empirical parts of this dissertation, as they dealt with the normative regulations around physical appearance as classed aesthetics.

There are situations where successfully manifesting the middle class aesthetics or embodied cultural capital can benefit individuals in more subtle ways. For example, choosing the right clothing (even invisible or otherwise unidentifiable to others) can enhance one's self-esteem in social interactions. This may be especially relevant on social media, as the online context directs individuals to display their appearance-related assets. This is usually done in a norm-conforming and visually appealing manner and causes appearance-related pressures, especially among young women. However, these norms can also be contested by body positivity activists or social media campaigns addressing narrow beauty standards and can broaden the concept of acceptable appearances. Such non-conforming appearances can also attract positive attention and act as a form of capital in a certain field, although it may not necessarily be appreciated in the wider society. The online context has altered communication patterns profoundly, has challenged the previous meanings of 'friends' and has offered possibilities for individual empowerment for groups that had been denied agency previously.

However, in addition to gendered differences, the norms also vary by demographic factors such as age, life stage and social class. The aesthetic requirements and social norms around 'appropriate' appearances vary between and within the observed groups. These differences seemed evident in the context of motherhood: the interviewed mothers had a shared understanding of how they were supposed to consume and what brands were considered legitimate in their social context, and in line with capital logic, what could be accomplished with those investments. It was also evident that the construction of proper motherhood with certain brands excluded those who did not have enough social, cultural and economic capital to invest in their children's appearance.

From the results, it seems safe to say that the individuals who successfully manifested appropriate appearances, that is, appearances appreciated in the broader society, share middle-class backgrounds. These individuals are also more capable of contesting norms because they have enough resources complementing their needs to resist their peremptory nature by concentrating on other assets. As physical appearance is an asset usually considered to benefit women, the process of misrecognition may also dissolve how men gain benefits from their appearance in social interactions.

5.2 Methodological considerations and limitations

Although public interest in issues related to physical appearance has been around for ages and social norms have been an area of academic interest since Durkheim (2014[1893]), academic approaches to the subject of norms around physical appearance continue to remain rather rare. This study's most important contribution is that it sheds light on contexts that have not been explored previously in terms of social norms and appropriate appearance. It also brings age and gender into the discussion. Studies thus far have elaborated on social norms and physical appearance by approaching physical appearance as a non-gendered factor or vice versa, solely from the viewpoint of gender and occasionally including age, while ruling out other demographic and contextual factors. Moreover, the data used in this dissertation are fundamentally different from data relied on in earlier studies on physical appearance, which mostly used college student samples (e.g. Agthe, Spörrle & Maner, 2010; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Nicklin & Roch, 2008; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). This study employed two nationally representative datasets in three of its articles.

Despite its strengths, this dissertation also has its limitations. As is typical in survey research, some groups are over-represented and some under-represented. To correct these biases, the data have been weighted to correspond to the Finnish population's age and gender distribution. Compared to international studies, one considerable limitation in this study is that Finland does not publish information on its citizens' ethnic origin in its vital statistics (Nieminen, 2013). Against this background, it is hardly surprising that asking questions regarding the respondent's ethnic origin seems intrusive in surveys items. Therefore, it is not possible to gather information on how appearance matters intersect within different ethnicities. Another limitation was that the data used was limited in terms of treating gender as a binary, as well as not including sexuality in its question battery of background information. This narrows the empirical contribution towards intersectionality to solely gender and class in different contexts. Thus, further research should pay more attention to the experiences of people outside gender and sexual binaries, as well as include ethnic origin in its categorisations for a more refined contribution for intersectionality in the realm of physical appearance-induced inequalities.

Furthermore, this study concentrated only on one country. Finland has specific characteristics, for example, comparatively high levels of gender equality in terms of educational attainment, political empowerment and health (Hausmann et al., 2012), and terms of paid work, money, decision making, power and time (Plantenga et al., 2009). The distinctive nature of the Finnish context thus offers a specific frame for interpreting the results. Little can be said about the differences concerning physical appearance-related norms when compared to other countries. Therefore, international comparisons are urgently necessary.

This dissertation focuses on examining social norms in specific contexts, namely motherhood, social media platforms and ageing. This means that other settings were excluded. Concentrating on gender was well-founded in the previous literature that stated physical appearance-related assets were more critical for women. Some of the chosen contexts are somewhat more 'feminine' than others, such as for instance, motherhood. However, including this context in the dissertation is justified as the previous literature portrayed these factors as having a notable impact on a woman's sense of self and her priorities. Other social settings and contexts should be also be examined and frameworks with a more masculine connotation to them, such as appearance norms regarding fatherhood, young men's interest in high-end fashion or the army, should be included to approach norms concerning physical appearance more profoundly.

Men's relationships with their appearance should also be studied, as boys and men's opinions about their appearances or clothing are often either neglected in research or are surreptitiously appropriated by their mothers, or later on, their wives. Similarly, it would be interesting to concentrate on contesting established appearance norms in different contexts to see who is willing and able to disobey them. Finally, future research should be carried out to establish the triple standards of ageing, especially among upper-middle-class men and see if, for example, their origin or purpose is different from that of women with a similar class background.

Theoretically, this dissertation draws from economic and cultural sociology and the sociology of consumption and consumer culture, but it touches on some concepts of feminist media and gender studies, as well as psychology and marketing, to build a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The main contribution of this dissertation to these research fields is studying the normative regulation of physical appearance in a cultural context that is considered a 'woman-friendly gender-equal welfare state,' and concluding that strict appearance norms apply here as well. Thus, it can be assumed that similar norms apply elsewhere. In addition, the quantitative data engages in dialogue with the ongoing discussions in sociological feminist research as well as offers nationally representative interpretations of appearance norms.

However, in concentrating on these approaches, some theories were left out, although they have been used elsewhere to explain the importance of appearance in specific contexts. As the focus of this dissertation was on sociocultural explanations, one intentionally excluded explanation is that of evolutionary or biological theory to help understand how appearance norms in human interactions are formed and implemented.

5.3 Conclusions

This dissertation focused on examining how physical appearance is normatively governed in Finland. It was interested in the variations of appearance norms between different people in different contexts, and at different ages and life stages. This study focuses on women. The central inferences made in the empirical part of this dissertation center on how the norms concerning physical appearance are generally more intense for women. However, the norm of appropriate appearance is in a state of flux throughout women's lives; age, life stage, context and class shape the conception of successfully managing one's looks. This study also shows that the norms regarding appearance are not fixed, but rather they vary across different groups of people and intersect with other axes of inequality, and not just gender alone. However, women, regardless of being encouraged continuously to focus on their appearances and to accumulate their aesthetic capital, face disapproval for utilising their appearances for personal benefit in their social interactions. The most significant areas of disapproval are those that yield financial benefits.

First, social norms shape our perceptions of those who are expected to accumulate aesthetic capital. Second, those very norms dictate the kind of assets that can act as capital in social interactions and the kind that is disapproved. Finally, norms also determine the social spheres in which this capital can be utilised. While assessing the findings from the perspective of inequality, it seems clear that being able to recognise the appropriate appearance that accrues exchange value, let alone invest in such, is not accessible for everyone. Individuals meet the aesthetic requirements of consumer society with their economic, social and cultural capital. Successfully meeting social norms regarding physical appearance in a modern consumer society is more accessible to and easily attained for those who already have other assets to prove their worth. Moreover, appearance norms penalise those who are more vulnerable in the first place, as they do not have similar opportunities to accumulate legitimate aesthetic capital. At the same time, consumer culture encourages individuals to make the best version of themselves through consumption and treats beauty as a civic duty.

When physical appearance is considered an independent form of capital, but beauty standards that people wish to appeal to reflect middle-class ideals, appearance-related inequality is evident. Simultaneously, the appearances of the less advantaged class are misrecognised as inappropriate and do not accrue exchange value within society. Similar value creation and construction of worth are present in digitally networked societies, where images and other visual objects aim to attract attention and seek approval from others. Moreover, as the aesthetics defined by the upper or middle classes are necessary to perform appropriateness in more formal contexts, it is evident that appearance-related assets are misinterpreted for

competence or other valuable assets in that exchange. Such settings are, for example, the labour market and education system, where more subtle, middle-class values and appearances are appreciated. In these social settings, the very similar forms that are called forth and appreciated in other contexts, are regulated and pathologised as excessive behaviour when they differ from the culturally dominant, restrained middle-class manners and ideals.

This dissertation's results can have different interpretations when seen from the perspectives of individuals, communities and society. From an individual perspective, the results imply that appropriately investing in one's appearance eventually leads to a happier, fuller life and results in women especially being more satisfied with themselves. However, this promise cannot be fulfilled. It upholds the logic of a capitalist consumer society and probably results in appearance anxieties. The alleged importance of investing in this asset is passed on to future generations by socialising them since their childhood to focus on constructing the right appearance as well as investing in 'successful ageing.' From the perspective of communities and organisations, appropriate looks are considered as symbols of other things such as proper motherhood and appropriate ageing, and something that can be capitalised both in offline and online environments. In the context of organisations and work, the results are twofold. In the expanding service sector, women's appearances are used to gain profit for the company. Simultaneously, women themselves face disapproval for using their appearances for economic purposes.

Concentrating on one specific country raises the question of whether these norms actually are specific to the Finnish cultural context, or whether they reflect global norms, and thus women are similarly sanctioned everywhere. Finland ranks high in gender equality, and also is considered as a woman-friendly welfare state, but still the results indicate gendered differences in appearance norms on a societal level. Moreover, despite these assumedly accomplished equity ideals, double and triple standards regarding physical appearance, gender and age still structure people's everyday experiences in Finland. Moreover, the results cannot be solely reduced to the alleged ethos of unpretentiousness, practicality and modesty, as women are expected to accumulate their aesthetic capital, but they are not allowed to use their appearance for personal benefit. Similarly, this dissertation's result imply that these presumptions of gender equality, practicality and modesty, as well as the ethos of emphasising 'natural' beauty, might actually be part of the problem by overriding how physical appearance is normatively sanctioned here as well, not just in other, more appearance-centred and less gender-equal countries.

From the perspective of society at large, this dissertation's results indicate that we live in an 'appearance society' (Kukkonen et al., 2019), where a person's capability is construed in the way they look. Those who can successfully attend to their appearances may gain benefits in different life spheres that are unrelated to their

appearance, such as getting better grades, having more friends or finding jobs. When appropriate appearance is equal to middle-class appearance, and those who usually make decisions in society share similar appearance ideals, the benefits gained from suitable looks may be misrecognised. Other modes of attending to one's looks are evaluated as inappropriate or are even penalised in places such as social security systems, schools and workplaces.

In sum, this means that despite individual-level positive outcomes, it seems unfair to approach aesthetic capital merely as an independent form of capital that can be used in social exchanges. Instead, it should be approached as something that at least partly is returned to other forms of capital. Being able to identify and accumulate one's aesthetic assets and being able to convert them into other capital requires knowledge of the appropriate ways of attending to one's appearance in different contexts. The cultural emphasis on the importance of appearance and agency encourages women especially to believe that investing in their (or their loved one's) appearance is worthwhile. However, despite the promise for social mobility, agency and gaining recognition, utilising this asset is normatively governed in social exchanges against their gain, preventing them from exploiting the asset they are made to believe advances them most in life. Furthermore, investing in one's aesthetic capital rarely benefits the women themselves, but is appropriated for other actors' advantages, such as company sales promotion.

Acknowledging these norms concerning physical appearance and seeing the centrality of physical appearance as a source of gendered inequality is the first step in preventing the processes that characterise the spreading of an appearance society. Challenging gendered norms is the next step.

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