

Chapter 2

Who Performs Appearance Work, and Who Believes Appearance Works? Gendered Appearance Beliefs and Practices in Finland

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Introduction


Previous research shows that norms, consumption and practices related to physical appearance are thoroughly gendered and have a very different significance in the daily lives of women than in those of men. In particular, women face strict appearance norms and are expected to engage in various appearance-related practices.

Practices related to physical appearance may be considered as ‘work that individuals perform on themselves to elicit certain benefits within a specific social hierarchy’ (Kwan & Trautner, 2009, p. 50) – labour which I hereon will call *appearance work*. Through the metaphor of aesthetic capital, practices aimed at the maintenance and/or enhancement of aesthetic capital constitute practices where capital accumulates (see Kukkonen, Chapter 1). Hence, appearance work may be regarded as an accumulation of aesthetic capital (Sarpila et al., 2020) for fields or markets in which capital exchange happens (Bourdieu, 1984). In increasingly visual consumer societies, such work is increasingly in demand, and there are assumedly benefits for engaging in such work. Nevertheless, such work has rarely been empirically addressed.

While a rich scholarship details the social and economic benefits of physical appearance (for reviews, see, e.g., Hosoda et al., 2003; Maestripieri et al., 2017), less attention has been paid to the ideologies, beliefs and practices related to appearance as capital or currency. However, philosopher Heather Widdows has recently argued that the belief that being beautiful is a route to the good life is meaningful far beyond the question of whether beauty actually confers benefits

Appearance as Capital, 39–55

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(see also [Requena, 2017](#)). For beauty to be a dominant ideal that structures social life, it is crucial that individuals believe work on the body matters and are willing to work for beauty ([Widdows, 2018](#)). Similarly, [Sarpila and Erola \(2016\)](#) claim that the belief in the importance of physical attractiveness for success is important in itself, first because beliefs reflect the prevailing ideology of a society and second because beliefs are linked with behaviour through attitudes ([Sarpila & Erola, 2016](#), pp. 5–6).

This study takes these suggestions into further scrutiny by drawing on feminist scholarship and studies on appearance and inequality to propose that the belief in appearance as currency may be a driver of daily appearance work. I propose that women as compared with men engage in a disproportionate amount of appearance work and that the belief in appearance as currency works as part of an ideology that keeps women engaged in appearance work.

Belief in Appearance as Currency

In a consumer culture, each individual is arguably invited to take responsibility over their body and appearance and called upon to invest in their looks (see [Ghigi & Sassatelli, 2018](#)). The invitation to work on one's looks comes with a promise of social and economic benefits; it entices people to believe in *appearance as currency*. Scholars of consumer culture, including [Featherstone \(2007\)](#) and [Bauman \(2007\)](#), have claimed that in an ever more widespread visual consumer culture, the body and particularly its surface become fluid and modifiable – a consumer object in their own right. Critics of neoliberalism such as [Rose \(1989\)](#) foresaw the rise of an entrepreneurial self who 'invests' in themselves. Consumer culture theorists such as [Bauman \(2007\)](#) took the thought further to describe the individual as akin to a well-branded and packaged product that is up for grabs on the market. In visual consumer culture, the packaging of a product may matter more than the content, or indeed, the packaging becomes the content. Physical appearance comes to be equated with the self (cf. [Featherstone, 2007](#)). As such, a rational individual living in a visual consumer culture will go to lengths to invest in an outer appearance that has market value.

Whereas everyone certainly is invited to modify their looks and 'invest' in their appearances, the invitation appears to be a euphemism when it comes to the realities that women face in front of the appearance-related norms of visual consumer societies. It can be argued that the ideology of appearance as currency does not just invite but compels women to work on their appearances.

According to such an argument, the belief in appearance as currency is inherently gendered. The analyses of consumer culture theorists fail to take into account that meticulous labour on the body and its appearance and movement is actually crucial for the production of femininity ([Bartky, 1990](#)). Feminist scholars including Sandra Lee Bartky claim femininity is an artifice that (re)produces a gendered social system ([Bartky, 1990](#)), wherein women's value lies in their dainty and beautiful looks whereas men's value is in their thoughts and deeds. Thus, while the ideology of physical appearance as currency may have appeared to scholars such as Bauman and Featherstone as a new social tendency, others

suggest women's bodies have been subject to capitalisation, at least since the birth of capitalism (cf. [Federici, 2004](#)).

Beauty is considered a distinctly feminine asset and is often portrayed as a feminine source of power and social mobility. The ideology of beauty as a woman's asset has been contested by strands of feminism throughout the history of feminism ([Kukkonen, 2019](#)). By stressing the physical, bodily and visual as feminine, such an ideology reproduces problematic bifurcations inherent in Western thought: masculinity, mind and spirit versus femininity, body and nature (cf. [Tseëlon, 1995](#)). Such a gendered ideology is also sexist: considering that women are of the 'fairer sex' and are to be celebrated for it constitutes what [Glick and Fiske \(2001\)](#) call *benevolent sexism*, as does claiming that women are more compassionate and so naturally better at care work. Benevolent sexism complements the more hostile forms of sexism but is much more socially acceptable. Further, as benevolent sexism works by placing women on a pedestal, women as well as men can easily endorse it, and, thus, it helps conciliate resistance to gender inequality ([Glick & Fiske, 2001](#)). [Calogero et al. \(2017\)](#) suggest on the basis of their study on college students' gender activism that the belief in beauty as currency is connected to greater self-objectification in women and may work against social change.

In the early 90s, feminist writer Naomi Wolf referred to the belief in beauty as a form of feminine currency as 'the beauty myth'. She claimed that when women gain more access to power in society, the pressures for them to adhere to ever stricter appearance-based norms increase. The beauty myth implies that female beauty is inherently and naturally valuable for biological, sexual and evolutionary reasons, and hence women should do the best they can to harness theirs ([Wolf, 2002/1990](#)). Such a feminine beauty ideology posits appearance work as a principal activity for women. The work is never done, though ([Calogero et al., 2017](#)).

The belief in, or ideology of, beauty as an investment strategy is arguably highlighted in the contemporary postfeminist media culture ([Gill, 2007, 2017](#)), where the imperative to constantly develop oneself and one's 'assets' is directed particularly at young women ([McRobbie, 2009](#)). Women have always had to be 'desirable, presentable, consumable' ([Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008](#), p. 230), but in neoliberal or postfeminist culture, the feminine is increasingly the object and subject of commodification and consumption. Femininity is, thus, constructed as a site for endless transformation, change and makeover, and according to the neoliberal mythology, subjects capable of constant self-invention will gain success and possibilities for upward social mobility. Thus, for women, appearance work emerges as key path for presenting a subject of constant reinvention and succeeding in life ([Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008](#)).

The Significance of Gendered Appearance Work

In the social sciences, labour on one's own body and its appearance has been discussed using terms such as grooming (e.g., [Das & De Loach, 2011](#); [Hamermesh, 2011](#)), beauty work ([Kwan & Trautner, 2009](#)), body work and appearance work (e.g. [Gimlin, 2007](#)). Aesthetic labour, or labour on one's looks,

particularly at or for waged labour, has also been a topic of increasing scholarly attention (e.g., [Boyle & De Keere, 2019](#); [Elias et al., 2017](#); [Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006](#); [Pettinger, 2008](#); [Williams & Connell, 2010](#); [Witz et al., 2003](#)). I use the term appearance work, as I wish to highlight the labour involved (cf. ‘grooming’) but do not focus only on labour conducted at or for work (cf. ‘aesthetic labour’). As I focus on daily routines in front of the mirror (in lieu of ‘body work’ which takes place beyond) and wish to refer to both masculine and feminine appearance-related labour, I find that the term appearance work functions best in this context.

In economics, appearance work may be designated as a ‘non-market activity’ (cf. [Das & De Loach, 2011](#)); it is an activity that happens outside formal economic markets. Other gendered non-market activities, notably housework and childcare, have been a focus of many studies (e.g. [Bianchi et al., 2012](#); [Treas & Tai, 2016](#)), and such forms of non-market labour remain a constant political issue even in the Nordic countries, which are commonly praised for paying attention to the gender imbalances in such forms of labour. Appearance work, however, remains a gendered ‘non-market’ activity that lacks scholarly and political attention ([Kukkonen & Sarpila, 2021](#)). In studies of time use, appearance work has mostly been neglected; in national time-use surveys, it is subsumed under the category of personal care (cf. [Eurostat, 2019](#)). However, appearance work certainly matters beyond the general and the personal.

Studies show appearance work is demanded for employment (e.g., [Warhurst & Nickson, 2007](#)). Aesthetic labour (i.e., appearance work done at or for work) is increasingly demanded even in industries where physical appearances have little to do with the job in question. For example, in Finland, [Kinnunen and Parviainen \(2016\)](#) have shown how recruiters are on the watch for a ‘certain look’ even as they recruit for the IT industry, which is not well-known for being appearance-centred.

The appearance of an employee is of particular economic importance because the aesthetic capital of an employee may bring profits to an employer (e.g. [Pettinger, 2008](#); [Williams & Connell, 2010](#)). Appearance-related capital is easily appropriated ([Mears, 2015a, 2015b](#); [Wacquant, 1995](#)). Personal investments in aesthetic capital in terms of consumption and appearance work, hence, do not necessarily pay off for the individual engaging in them. Instead, appearance work may benefit the individuals’ immediate social and economic surroundings ([Wacquant, 1995](#)).

Few studies have looked at how and to what extent appearance-related consumption or appearance work pays off for an individual. There are a few exceptions, though. [Hamermesh et al. \(2002\)](#) studied expenditure on appearances and found that money spent on appearance did slightly increase women’s earnings and it did not pay for itself. [Robins et al. \(2011\)](#) found that taking grooming into account helps explain the relationship between attractiveness and income. [Wong and Penner \(2016\)](#) suggest that taking grooming into account explains the relationship between attractiveness and income for women but not for men. That is, for women, the estimation of attractiveness was contingent on grooming, whereas for men it was not. It has to be noted that [Robins et al. \(2011\)](#) and [Wong and Penner \(2016\)](#) used data for which both attractiveness and extent of grooming were measured by one interviewer.

Das and De Loach took a different approach and investigated whether time spent on grooming affects earnings. They found that the only group for whom time spent on grooming had a positive effect on wages was men in ethnic minorities. For women in ethnic minorities and non-minority men, time spent on grooming had no effect, whereas for non-minority women, time spent on grooming actually had a small negative effect. The authors suggested their results may have owed to groomed looks alleviating negative stereotypes often attached to men in minorities yet also aggravating negative stereotypes pertaining to non-minority women (Das & De Loach, 2011).

Indeed, appearance work may constitute a double bind for women. At the same time that women working on and with their looks risk activating negative feminine stereotypes, including frivolity, vanity and sexual promiscuity (Balogun, 2020; Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Mears, 2015b), the sanctions involved in not adhering to gendered appearance norms are also tangible. Living up to appearance norms is laborious and demands not only money but also, importantly, time, and the labour of looking good falls mostly on the shoulders of women (Mears, 2014). While work on appearances is outsourced to bodily labourers, including beauty professionals (cf. Mears, 2014), a great deal of it is ongoing and repetitive routine labour.

Daily appearance work is like any routine in that it has different meanings for different people. For example, some may experience their morning make-up routines as a revered moment of self-indulgence and calm, whereas for others, these routines may feel like a stressful waste of time (Ehn & Löfgren, 2009). This complexity of meanings attributed to gendered appearance work is mirrored in some of the feminist scholarship on the topic. While radical feminist scholars have for decades perceived femininity as an artifice achieved by continuous and meticulous appearance work that ultimately serves women poorly (e.g., Bartky, 1990; Dworkin, 1974), so-called liberal feminism and postfeminism emphasises beauty work as a joyous pathway to personal empowerment (e.g., Davis, 2003) or even power (Hakim, 2010) (for distinguishing empowerment and power, see Brown, 1995).

Against this background, I will first descriptively explore the amount of daily appearance work conducted by Finnish men and women (RQ1) as well as look at potential gender differences in the belief that beauty matters for success in life – i.e., *belief in appearance as currency* (RQ2). I will then move on to ask whether the belief in appearance as currency is linked to daily appearance work for men and women (RQ3).

Who Performs Appearance Work, and Do Beliefs Matter?

Data and Variables

Finland is supposedly one of the havens of gender equality (Crotti et al., 2020). Finland urbanised late. The country is located at a safe distance from any major fashion metropolis (cf. Kuipers, 2015). Finnish beauty culture has been described as modest and utilitarian (see Introduction). Hence, Finland provides an intriguing point of view into the gendered nature of daily beauty practices

and ideologies. As more gender-equal countries are generally less sexist (concerning both benevolent and hostile sexism) (Glick & Fiske, 2001), gendered ideologies pertaining to social and economic attainment should matter less in countries such as Finland that are supposed to be relatively gender-equal. As highlighted by feminist scholars (Bartky, 1990; Dworkin, 1974; Federici, 2004) though, appearances and the (socio)economic significance of bodies are such profoundly or even inherently gendered issues that it is highly unlikely gender would not matter, even in comparatively gender-equal contexts. According to Wolf (2002/1990), appearance-related pressures on women actually pile up, particularly when and wherever women gain more power in society. Hence, my working hypothesis is that women compared to men engage in a disproportionate amount of appearance work and that the belief in appearance as currency works as part of an ideology that keeps women engaged in appearance work.

The data I use to explore my research questions come from a survey called ‘Appearance and Everyday Life’, which surveyed the everyday appearance-related norms, consumption and inequalities of the Finnish-speaking Finnish population. The survey was fielded in spring 2016 by the Unit of Economic Sociology at the University of Turku. Four thousand Finnish-speaking Finns were randomly sampled from the Finnish Population database and sent a postal survey with an option for online response. Six respondents could not be reached; hence, the final sample amounted to 3,994. The survey yielded 1,600 responses (1,320 postal, 280 online). The final response rate, thus, remained at 40%. While far from ideal, such a response rate is in line with current trends in survey research and may be considered sufficient (Koivula et al., 2016). Older women are somewhat overrepresented in the data, while younger men are underrepresented (Sarpila et al., 2016). However, these biases in the data are corrected for throughout the analyses by employment of weights designed to make the data correspond to the gender and age distribution of the Finnish population aged 15 to 74.

The main variable of interest in this study – and the dependent variable – is *daily time in front of the mirror*. It was measured by asking survey respondents to evaluate the number of minutes they spend in front of the mirror on a normal day, including during their morning and evening rituals. As such, the variable constitutes a subjective evaluation of time use rather than a more objective and orthodox time-use measurement (i.e., measurement by time-use diaries, such as in the Harmonised European Time Use Surveys). Nevertheless, I interpret this variable as a proxy for daily appearance work – as opposed to other related forms of everyday bodily labour, including body work (Gimlin, 2007) and dress work (van den Berg & Vonk, 2019). Time in front of the mirror is something respondents can easily grasp. Moreover, the measure is relatively gender-neutral, as it includes practices such as washing one’s face and brushing hair and teeth (Kukkonen & Sarpila, 2021).

Secondly, I am interested in *the belief in appearance as currency*. In the survey, this belief was measured by asking respondents to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement ‘I believe beauty and good looks are useful for succeeding in life’. This statement was part of a wider survey battery that explored respondents’ attitudes concerning physical appearance on a 5-point Likert scale

(1 = completely disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = completely agree). This measurement has been previously utilised by Sarpila and Erola (2016), and a very similar measurement has been used by Requena (2017). Other scholars (Calogero et al., 2017) have previously used multiple-item constructs to tap into the issue; however, they have measured the belief in beauty as currency only in terms of female beauty.

The following descriptive and explanatory results are presented separately for men and women. In the survey, *gender* was measured dichotomously.¹ In Fig. 2.1 and for the explanatory models in Table 2.1, I utilise *age group*. I refrain from utilising age as a continuous variable, as the connection for women between age and daily time in front of the mirror is not straightforwardly linear. In the explanatory models, I also control for *area of living* (dichotomous: urban versus rural), *partner status* (partnered versus single) and *subjective class position*. I utilise subjective class position instead of a class categorisation inferred by the researcher (on the basis of occupation, education, income or a combination thereof) because I am chiefly interested in controlling for class as a cultural categorisation experienced by respondents. Finns are relatively aware of their class position (cf. Erola, 2010). Descriptive statistics for all the utilised variables are presented in Appendix 1.

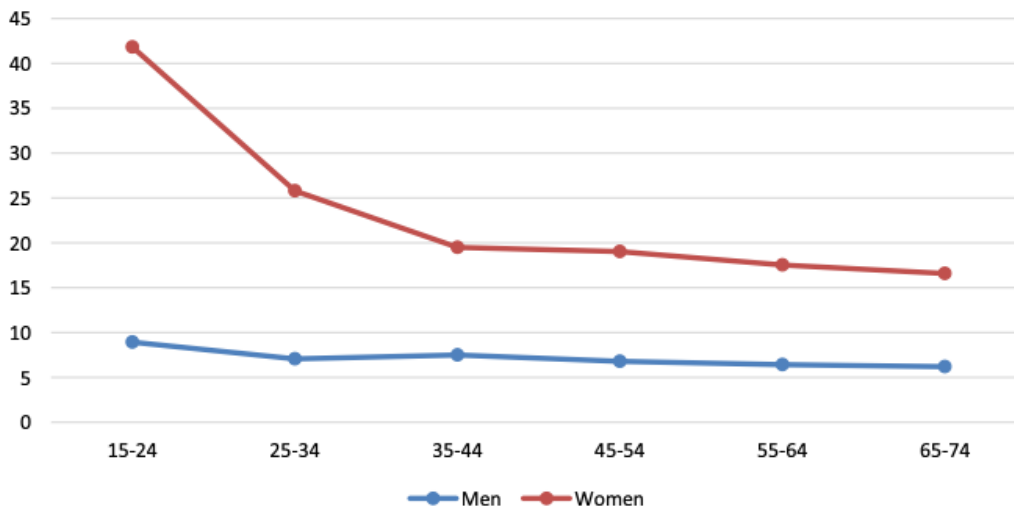


Fig. 2.1. Mean Daily Time (Minutes) Spent in Front of the Mirror by Age Group and Gender.

Results

As beauty work is still somewhat at odds with the Finnish culture, which stresses modesty, practicality and equality (see Introduction), I expected the item would be particularly prone to social desirability bias, whereby respondents would downplay their beauty work so as to refrain from the ‘vainness’ traditionally attributed to

beauty work in Finland. Yet despite the potential social desirability bias, we found Finns reported spending a significant amount of time in front of the mirror. Moreover, despite supposed ‘gender equality’, gender differences in time spent in front of the mirror are notable. Fig. 2.1 illustrates these gender differences by graphing the mean daily time spent in front of the mirror by gender and age group.

Indeed, Fig. 2.1 shows that differences in time spent on appearance work are notable not just in terms of gender but, particularly for women, in age as well. Women in the youngest age group (15–24) spend on average 42 minutes in front of the mirror on an average day. Women between the ages of 25 and 34 spend an average of 26 minutes in front of the mirror per day, and women in the age groups 35–44 and 45–54 spend an average of 19 minutes per day. In the older age groups, average time spent in front of the mirror daily is slightly lower (18 minutes for 55–64-year-olds, 17 minutes for 65–74-year-olds). In stark contrast, men in the youngest age group (15–24) spend on average nine minutes in front of the mirror on an average day. Men in older age groups spend slightly less time in front of the mirror: the average is between six and seven minutes in all age groups.

As Fig. 2.2 suggests, the belief in appearance as currency is equally common among men and women in Finland. The chi-squared for the cross tabulation is 0.96, and hence the minor differences in Fig. 2.2 are statistically insignificant.² This result differs from previous Finnish findings on belief in appearance as currency: a study by Sarpila and Erola (2016) which utilised data collected in 2011 – five years prior to the collection of this study’s data – found that belief in appearance as currency was more common among women than among men. It is, however, worth noting that the survey Sarpila and Erola used was different and did not focus on physical appearance alone.

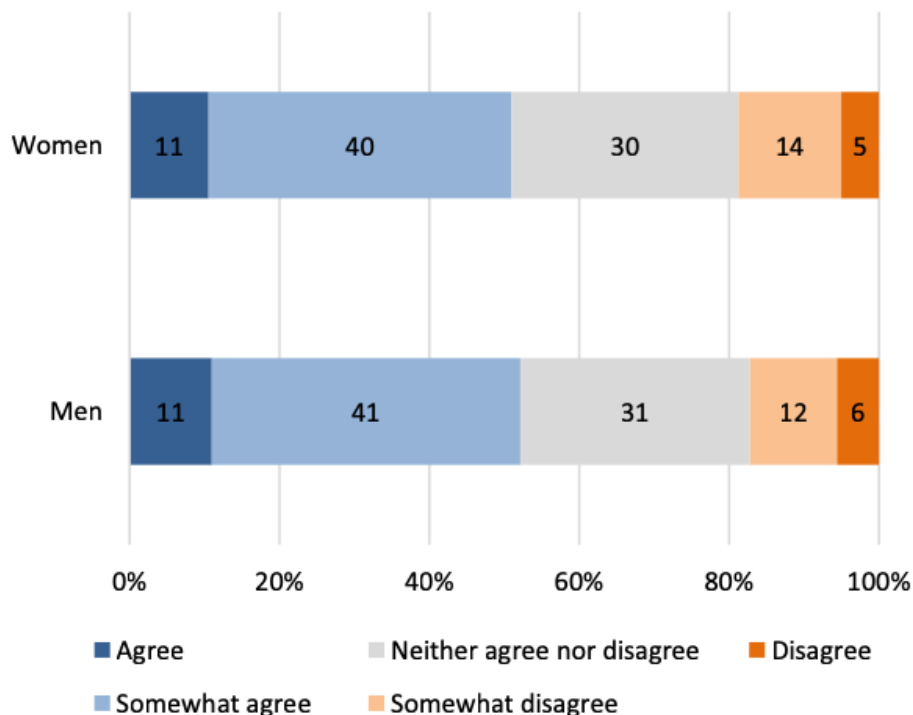


Fig. 2.2. Belief in Appearance as Currency for Men and Women.

But does holding such a belief actually shape daily appearance work? Fig. 2.3 displays the mean daily time spent in front of the mirror by belief in appearance as currency.

Fig. 2.3 shows that for men, the mean daily time spent in front of the mirror on an average day does not vary greatly according to belief in appearance as currency. That is, whether men believe appearance matters for success in life or not, they engage in similar amounts of appearance work. Very interestingly, men who disagree with the statement that beauty and good looks matter for succeeding in life spend an equal amount of time in front of the mirror to what men who agree with the statement spend – ten minutes. On average, men who are less certain in their belief spend 6–7 minutes in front of the mirror on an average day.

Fig. 2.3 distinctly illustrates a trend whereby women who believe in appearance as currency spend more of their daily time engaged in appearance work. Women who disagree with the statement that they believe beauty and good looks matter for succeeding in life report spending on average 13 minutes in front of the mirror on an average day. Women who somewhat disagree spend more time (20 minutes), and women who neither disagree nor agree as well as women who somewhat agree with the statement spend 23 minutes facing the mirror daily. Women who agree that beauty and good looks matter for succeeding in life spend on average as much as 28 minutes a day in front of the mirror. The differences in

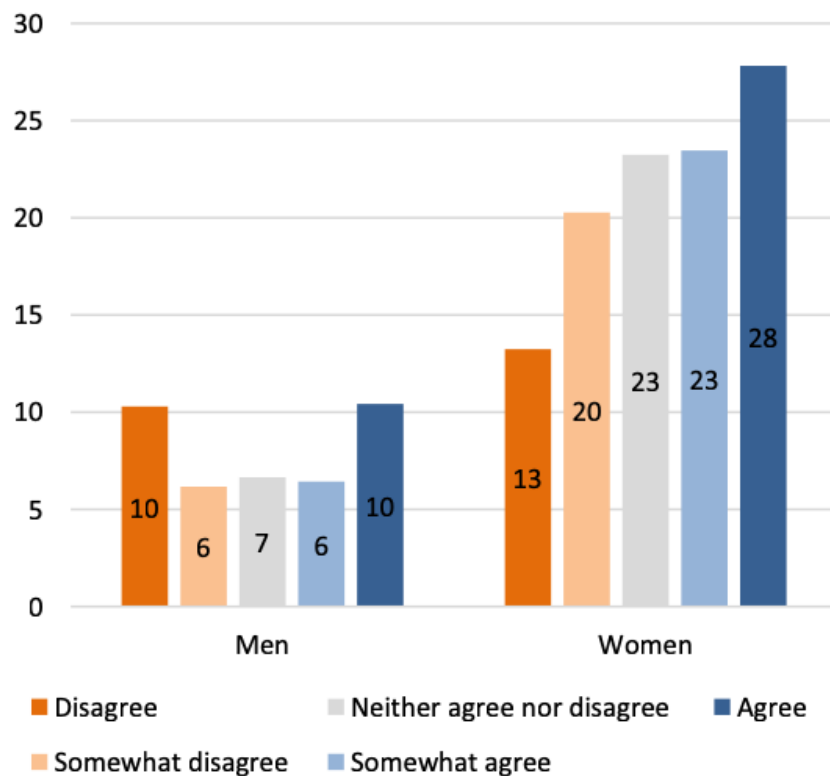


Fig. 2.3. Mean Daily Time (Minutes) Spent in Front of the Mirror by Belief in Appearance as Currency.

average time spent in front of the mirror, thus, differ significantly between women according to their belief in appearance as currency. Those who hold such a belief spend more than twice as much time in front of the mirror daily as those who do not hold such a belief.

To consider the statistical significance of these descriptive results, I ran two multinomial linear regressions – one for men and one for women – with daily time spent in front of the mirror as the dependent variable and belief in appearance as currency as the independent variable. Age group, area of living, partner status and subjective class position are controlled for in the models. The results of the regression models are presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Linear Regression of Daily Average Time (Min) Spent in Front of the Mirror. Separate Models for Men and Women.

	Model 1 Men	Model 2 Women
Belief in appearance as currency (ref. disagree)		
Somewhat disagree	-4.652** (1.532)	3.352 (3.145)
Neither agree nor disagree	-4.071** (1.358)	6.031** (2.896)
Somewhat agree	-4.591*** (1.341)	6.684* (2.857)
Agree	-1.215 (1.539)	11.46*** (3.271)
Age group (ref. 15–24)		
25–34	-2.668* (1.092)	-16.25*** (2.165)
35–44	-2.965* (1.163)	-21.40*** (2.230)
45–54	-2.212 (1.158)	-22.10*** (2.149)
55–64	-3.060** (1.122)	-23.08*** (2.117)
65–74	-3.125** (1.157)	-24.74*** (2.131)
Area of living (ref. urban)		
Rural	-1.665* (0.764)	-4.261** (1.462)
Partner status (ref. partnered)		
Single	-0.342 (0.777)	-0.0729 (1.419)
Subjective class position (ref. upper/lupper middle)		
Lower middle class	-0.424 (0.784)	-3.455* (1.650)
Working class	-2.004* (0.823)	-1.980 (1.694)
None/other	-1.731 (0.955)	-2.085 (1.711)
Constant	14.53*** (1.639)	37.81*** (3.534)
<i>N</i>	622	847
<i>R</i> ²	0.0701	0.217

Note: Standard errors in parentheses* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Focussing first on Model 1, which concerns Finnish men, we can see that the descriptive results presented in Fig. 2.3 hold even after controlling for age group, area of living, partner status and subjective class position. That is, men who do not believe in appearance as currency actually engage in as much appearance work as men who do believe in it. Men who are more undecided spend four to five minutes less in front of the mirror on an average day.

Model 1 shows that men in the older age groups spend two to three minutes less in front of the mirror than men in the youngest age group (18–25) do. The differences are statistically significant with the exception of those for men aged 45–54, whose daily time in front of the mirror does not statistically significantly differ from that of the youngest age group. Men living in rural areas spend slightly less time in front of the mirror than do men living in more urban areas, and working-class men spend slightly less time in front of the mirror than do men who identify with the upper or upper middle class. Partner status appears to have no effect in this model.

In Model 2, which concerns Finnish women, we can see that the difference in time spent in front of the mirror between women who do not believe in appearance as currency and those who slightly disagree with the same view is not statistically significant. However, women who neither disagree nor agree with the statement identifying appearance as a currency spend six minutes more in front of the mirror than do women who disagree with the statement. Women who somewhat agree with the belief in appearance as currency spend on average seven minutes more in front of the mirror daily than women who do not agree with the belief do, and finally, the difference in time use between women who believe in appearance as currency and women who do not is 11 minutes, other factors being controlled for.

The differences in average daily time spent in front of the mirror definitely appear age-contingent, even when other factors are controlled for. The difference in time spent in front of the mirror between the age groups 15–24 and 25–34 is 16 minutes. As we proceed to consider the results from older age groups, time spent in front of the mirror shortens for each age group yet retains a difference of 21–25 minutes with comparison to the youngest age group. Women living in rural areas spend on average four minutes less time in front of the mirror than women living in urban areas do. There is no statistically significant difference in time spent in front of the mirror according to partner status. As compared to women who identify as upper class or upper middle class, women of the lower middle class spend three minutes more in front of the mirror on an average day. However, there are no statistically significant differences between women who identify as upper or upper middle class and women who identify with the working class, do not identify with any of the class options given in the survey, or do not view themselves as belonging to a class overall.

Discussion

While the belief in appearance as currency is held equally by men and women in Finland, its practical daily implications are different between those groups.

Women who believe appearance matters for success in life engage in appearance work significantly more than women who do not. However, men who believe in appearance as currency overall do not work much more on their appearance than men who do not hold such a belief.

This result certainly mirrors the normative outlook whereby appearance work is considered a means of capital accumulation for women and men who engage in appearance work may be disapproved of for paying too much attention to their appearance. [Sarpila et al. \(2020\)](#) found, however, that daily appearance work is equally acceptable for Finnish women and men; a man who does not want to leave the house without being well-groomed is no more disapproved of than a woman who feels daily grooming is necessary for leaving the house. Hence, it appears that the reason men do not engage in further daily grooming does not necessarily have to do with normative societal disapproval of men who do appearance work. Instead, it is possible that men never even consider further appearance work a possibility, as they are not socialised to engage in appearance work (just as they are not socialised to engage in care work). Perhaps this is the reason why the belief in appearance as currency does not imply lengthy daily investment in aesthetic capital in terms of daily appearance work for men.

However, it has to be noted that men who believe in appearance as currency appear to spend an equal time in front of the mirror to that spent by men who do not believe in it, and it is men who have more moderate beliefs about appearance as currency who invest more time in their looks. Could it be that certain men acknowledge that their appearances matter but do not feel the need to enhance their looks, as they already benefit from their looks and thus do not feel a need to enhance their looks by further grooming? As results from previous studies such as ones by [Robins et al. \(2011\)](#) and [Wong and Penner \(2016\)](#) would suggest, women's attractiveness is evaluated on the basis of their level of grooming, whereas the attractiveness of men is evaluated more independently of grooming.

Relatedly, the result can be read as a sign that the belief in appearance as a currency is in itself gendered; that is, people believe it matters more for women than for men. Read as such, the result suggests that Finnish men and women both believe appearances matter for success in life, but they also believe that they matter mostly for women and that it is women who can gain benefits from their appearances. As scholars have pointed out, the ideology of appearance as an asset worthy of investment is an extremely gendered ideology ([Gill, 2007](#); [Wolf, 2002/1990](#)). One of the problems of this ideology (for more, see, e.g., [Green, 2013](#)) is that, in reality, the socioeconomic gains to be had on the basis of appearance appear to be equally prevalent among men and women. The overall status quo of social stratification research suggests women do not necessarily gain any more profits from their looks than men do (for reviews, see, e.g., [Hosoda et al., 2003](#); [Maestripieri et al., 2017](#)); that is, this form of capital is not more convertible into other forms of capital for women than for men. Further, appearance-related gains (e.g., in the labour market) are more disapproved of for women than for men ([Sarpila et al., 2020](#)). Hence, women are stuck in a limbo where they are told their appearance matters and are bombarded with the idea that investing in

appearances is a good deal, but if they ever actually profit from their appearances economically, they may well be scorned at (Sarpila et al., 2020; see also Balogun, 2020; Mears, 2015a, 2015b). The profits of female investment in beauty mainly accrue to the beauty industrial complex (Wolf, 2002/1990). As for the labour market, scholarship on aesthetic labour shows that the appearance of an employee truly matters, but it also suggests it is the employer who has the power to benefit from employees' appearance work. However, many women expected to do appearance work actually enjoy it, notwithstanding its few tangible perks.

Indeed, problematising the gendered nature of appearance work always comes with questions of female agency. Certainly, many women enjoy spending time in front of the mirror, and doing so is an individual's choice and pleasure. Many women also enjoy taking care of children, but childcare is nevertheless considered a political issue, and in many welfare states, including Finland, societal arrangements are made so that men as well as women can enjoy taking care of their children. Appearance work appears radically gendered, just as care for children is, but it is never even considered as a political issue; similarly to other forms of 'feminine' labour, appearance work is not considered work. Meanwhile, consumer societies including Finland are becoming increasingly visual and service-based, thus requiring an increasing amount of appearance work – by women in particular – in 'real life' as much as on social media.

Future studies could approach appearance-related work in a more holistic sense by also taking into account other forms of appearance-related labour and aesthetic capital accumulation, including body work and dress work. Comparative time-use data from different European countries could be used to garner a better understanding of appearance-related work among other forms of daily 'non-market' labour. The most recent release of the Harmonised European Time Use Studies (HETUS) is from 2010. While a new survey round was scheduled for 2020, the collection of data appears to have stalled (Eurostat, 2020). Data on time use are, however, crucial for researching daily lives and particularly for keeping track of gendered 'non-market' labour, which may include appearance work.

The main limitation of this study is that the belief in appearance as currency was measured as a non-gendered item, while, as the results show, this belief clearly has gendered dimensions. It is quite possible that some people believe beauty and good looks are useful for succeeding in life for women but not for men. Future studies with a survey methodology should use a split-ballot design (cf. Kukkonen et al., 2018; Rijken & Liefbroer, 2016; Sarpila et al., 2020) to further investigate the extent to which the belief in appearance as a currency is gendered.

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Notes

1. I acknowledge that measuring and treating gender as a binary is highly problematic and encourage all future survey designs to take into account non-binary people.
2. In the test, data are unweighted.

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