

Introduction

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Sara Sieppi is a former Miss Finland and current social media influencer. Despite the fact that Sieppi's posts are in Finnish and Finland is a small linguistic region, Sieppi has nearly 200,000 followers and her company makes a significant profit. In her Instagram account, she performs as an 'ambassador' of different beauty care brands, renting her beautiful looks to companies to enhance the sales of multifarious products and services. Therefore, Sieppi can be considered an example of today's aesthetic labourers, who have turned their physical appearance into cash flow. Young beautiful women around the world are nowadays using social media to exchange their aesthetic capital to economic capital. However, this does not please everyone. In December 2020, Sieppi was used as an example in a political column which tried to justify the monthly salary of the members of the parliament by comparing the salaries to Sieppi's monthly salary. The latter one was according to columnist, earned by presenting 'sponsored underwear and mint lemon chocolate muffins', whereas the former one by hard work (Parkkonen, 2020). The column was widely deemed misogynist and sexist. More generally speaking, it however shows how physical appearance as a form of capital, i.e. aesthetic capital, is normatively regulated and highlights the paradoxes related to the pivotal role of physical appearance in contemporary society.

Expectations to look good are increasing, and many people are under more pressure to look good and attend to their looks. In tandem with this, endeavours towards good looks and taking advantage of it are under strict normative regulation. In addition, this does not seem to apply only to female social media influencers, but people more generally. In fact, the salience of physical appearance as a form of capital is not just a novel trend generated by social media. On the contrary, the pervasiveness of the emphasis on physical appearance has increased steadily for a long period of time, making it an increasingly important, but normatively regulated, form of capital and hence a source of inequality.

Appearance as Capital, 1–19



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doi:10.1108/978-1-80043-708-120210001

The Increasing Importance of Physical Appearance

Several cultural, economic, political and technological changes are contributing to the increasing institutional and individual focus on physical appearance.

First, scholars studying consumer culture have argued for decades that the physical appearance of the body serves as a source of individual pleasure and as a means of self-expression and identity formation. Desired bodily properties are produced through body modification; with the help of appearance-related commodities and services, consumers push their bodies towards the best version of themselves, constantly ready for new transformations (e.g. [Bauman, 2007](#); [Featherstone, 1982, 2007](#); [Klesse, 1999](#)). According to [Euromonitor \(2020\)](#), the global retail value of ‘beauty and personal care’ products increased by 28 percent, and ‘clothing and footwear’ by 40 percent, between 2009 and 2019. The power of consumer culture as a fuel for consumption related to appearance has been explained particularly with regards to the visual and performative character of consumer culture (e.g. [Featherstone, 1982](#); [Shilling, 2012](#); [Turner, 2008](#)). A central element of performing is the enhancement of the physical appearance, at least to some extent to gratify ‘the audience’. The idea of the performing self is much the same as the concept presented by [Goffman \(1959\)](#). However, consumer culture emphasises ‘onstage performances’ in relation to ‘backstage performances’.

Second, it can be argued that social media increases the amount of ‘onstage performances’ and has changed many individuals’ relationships to physical appearance and self-presentations. Although social media is not just about selfies, it offers constant possibilities for photographing oneself and others (e.g. [Featherstone, 2010](#)). People are expected to be ‘camera ready’ everywhere they go, and virtual audiences are always ready to judge the ‘appearance competence’ of any person in a picture or video. Social media users are exposed to a constant flux of physical appearances, and they may be expected to present a variety of physical appearances. While social media has the potential for inclusion and widening the norms of physical appearance, on a global scale, it can also intensify and narrow appearance norms (e.g. [Widdows, 2018](#)). According to the logic of consumer capitalism, the majority of bodies that ‘sell’ are still mostly white, thin, young and able. Nevertheless, at an individual level, the possibility of empowerment on social media cannot be neglected (e.g. [Barnard, 2016](#); [Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015](#)). According to some interpretations, social media self(ie)-expression comes with a (dis)empowerment paradox: taking selfies may feel individually empowering while conforming and reifying existing oppressive and hegemonic beauty norms ([Barnard, 2016](#)).

Third, in recent interpretations, the cultivation of physical appearance has been associated with consumer-oriented wellness culture; physical appearance is seen as the embodiment of individuals’ capabilities to make ‘the right’ lifestyle and self-care choices, including such practices as maintaining ‘proper’ sleeping and eating habits and engaging in physical and mental exercise (e.g., [Grénman, 2019](#); [Koskinen, 2020](#)). Social media, with its army of influencers, amplifies trends, including the quest for ‘wellness’. Also outside social media, people are

encouraged to engage in various practices related to fitness, well-being and anti-ageing in order to enhance their physical appearance, productivity and status.

Fourth, individuals' physical appearance has become politicised, thus affecting the norms of proper looks. This also relates to the wellness discourse in a sense that taking care of one's physical appearance is no longer simply considered each individual's choice but a responsibility; as physical appearance is intertwined with health, physical appearance -related practices become increasingly considered necessary for everyone (cf. [Sassatelli, 2010](#); [Smith Maguire, 2008](#)). This can be most clearly seen in discourses of body size. Individuals are nowadays expected to follow official eating and exercise recommendations, and the failure to do so is presumed based on external characteristics ([Lupton, 1995](#); [Shilling, 2007](#); [Smith Maguire, 2008](#)). A responsible citizen does not get fat and strain hard or public health care.

Fifth, the increasing importance of physical appearance and intensification of normative regulation relates to changes in labour market. According to several scholars, the expansion of the service sector and the emergence of new high-skilled and low-skilled performative occupations has, among other things, made good looks an occupational necessity. 'The right looks' play a pivotal role, facilitating individuals' entry into certain occupations ([Smith Maguire, 2008](#); [van den Berg & Arts, 2019](#)). However, the institutionalised requirements to look 'right' do not apply only to those working in traditional services or new service sector occupations but to more or less all workers, regardless of their job titles ([McDowell, 2009](#)). Scholars view this as part of a broader post-Fordist development, where the service sector per se has expanded, but the so-called service logic has also spread throughout the labour market to all sectors and hierarchical levels ([Parviainen et al., 2016](#)). Simultaneously, precarity is becoming normalised in post-Fordist labour markets. As subsistence becomes increasingly uncertain and discontinuous, it necessitates continuous aesthetic adjustment and labour on 'looking right' and keeping up employable appearances ([van den Berg & Arts, 2019](#)). The precarisation of work blurs the lines between work and private life ([van den Berg, 2019](#)), and worker and consumer – proper workers also know how to consume 'properly' to maximise their own and their employers' competitive edge. Working on one's physical appearance may not only become more of an occupational necessity as competition for jobs increases (e.g., [Sarpila & Erola, 2016](#)), but it may also more generally serve as a means of appearing and feeling in control ([Giddens, 1991](#); [Shilling, 2012](#)) and valuable under circumstances that are increasingly precarious for many (e.g., [Hakim, 2018](#)).

Capitalisation of Physical Appearance

The above-mentioned economic, cultural, political and technological changes have made physical appearance increasingly a normatively regulated form of capital and source of inequality. Numerous studies report that physical appearance, which is often conceptualised as attractiveness, is linked to various economic and social rewards including higher income (e.g., [Brunello & d'Hombres,](#)

2007; Cawley, 2004; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Johnston, 2010), better employment opportunities and career advancements (e.g., Hamermesh, 2011; Hosoda et al., 2003), political success (e.g. Berggren et al., 2010), advantages in partner selection (e.g., Mathes & Kozak, 2008; McClintock, 2014) and increased socioeconomic status (Jæger, 2011). However, in economics and sociology, as well as in policymaking, the inequalities considered have been primarily socio-economic factors, while the role physical appearance has been largely neglected in ‘serious’ analyses of inequalities (Kuipers, 2019).

In this book, we develop the understanding of physical appearance as a form of capital and appearance-related inequalities by paying particular attention to normative regulations of the accumulation and conversion of this type of capital. We build on interdisciplinary research in the intersections of cultural sociology, economic sociology, sociology of consumption and everyday life, working life studies, gender studies and media studies.

The idea of physical appearance as form of capital stems particularly from recent sociological discussion on physical appearance and beauty and the role they play in formation of social divisions. During the past decade, sociologists have developed Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas on capital further, incorporating physical appearance as an independent form of capital, or more specifically, as aesthetic capital (Anderson et al., 2010; Holla & Kuipers, 2015), erotic capital (Hakim, 2010) or physical capital (Shilling, 2004). Physical appearance as a form of capital can be understood as a combination of different resources or assets related to physical appearance including facial beauty and body shape, size and physique, as well as styles of grooming and clothing (Anderson et al., 2010). In this book, the idea of physical appearance as a form of capital is based on an assumption that physical appearance is, at least partly, an inherited quality, which does not fully conform to other social hierarchies (e.g. Edmonds & Mears, 2017). Furthermore, we assume that physical appearance as capital is convertible into other forms of capitals and that the value of these appearance-related assets varies from one field to another.

The perspective differs from the general approach adopted in the majority of other disciplines. Traditionally, beauty is considered a good thing, the consequences of which are mainly positive and the evaluation of which is based on shared ideals of beauty (for a review, see Anderson et al., 2010; Maestriperi et al., 2017). Thus, there seems to be a somewhat shared understanding of the logic of good looks, although the explanatory mechanisms differ. In economics, the principal mechanism through which beauty confers benefits is related to preferences: employers, customers and co-workers alike prefer beautiful people (Hamermesh, 2011). In social psychology, on the other hand, beauty is considered advantageous because people associate it with other desirable traits. This mechanism is often referred to as the physical attractiveness stereotype or ‘what is beautiful is good’ stereotype (e.g. Eagly et al., 1991; Langlois et al., 2000). Furthermore, evolutionary psychologists propose that it is the central role of physical appearance as a criterion for mate selection that accounts for the economic and social outcomes of beauty (Buss et al., 1990), whereas in sociology, Webster and Driskell (1983) regard physical attractiveness as similar to status

characteristic as gender and race, and propose a mechanism they call ‘beauty as status’. This approach, combined with Bourdieusian tradition, has recently been developed further in studies that consider physical appearance as a form of capital (Anderson et al., 2010). Feminists and theorists of aesthetic labour, who situate (dis)advantages of beauty in gendered status hierarchies (Elias et al., 2017; Wolf, 1990/2002), as well as more intersectional feminists, who highlight beauty as a site of struggle over class, race, colour, ethnicity, sexuality and able-bodiedness (e.g. Jha, 2016) have also made valuable contributions to these discussions.

In addition, certain recent studies in sociology and social psychology and organisational studies have questioned the universal logic related to beauty and its positive outcomes, particularly with regard to economic outcomes for women. Kuipers (2015) suggests that beauty standards are not universally shared, but instead multiple taste repertoires exist. Furthermore, men are less easily evaluated by strictly aesthetic standards than are women (Kuipers, 2015). In addition, strict social norms regulate the accumulation of economic advantage from one’s physical appearance, particularly for women (Kukkonen et al., 2018; Sarpila et al., 2010). Indeed, it seems that the value of physical appearance in social exchange is not universal, but malleable, relational and contextual: always shaped in multiple, intersecting power relations. Furthermore, it is not just beauty or attractiveness that matters, but the logic of physical appearance in generating inequalities seems to be more complex than previously thought (see also van der Laan & Kuipers, 2016, p. 66).

To gain a better understanding of physical appearance-related inequality, it is crucial to pay particular attention to norms that regulate the accumulation and conversion of physical appearance as a capital. Norms are a core concept for sociologists, as they are relevant for understanding two fundamental issues of sociological thinking: order and inequality (e.g., Horne & Mollborn, 2020). Norms are ‘the grammar of society’ (Bicchieri, 2006). They guide people’s actions by telling them what behaviour is normal, desirable or avoidable in particular contexts. They provide a map of how to value the social world. Yet norms are not predetermined and objectively ‘out there’ but are enacted, challenged and interpreted by people; hence, they are in a constant flux (Horne & Mollborn, 2020; Xenitidou & Edmonds, 2014). Norms actualise through action, usually in the form of sanctions that may appear as penalisation or praise (Coleman, 1990). They, thus, operate and appear at both individual and collective levels (if that distinction is to be made in the first place).

At the level of the individual, norms appear as expectations of how others would evaluate behaviours (Hechter & Opp, 2001; Horne & Mollborn, 2020). They may appear as different emotions, like shame, admiration or disgust, which guide one’s own behaviour and affect how one sanctions others. Thinking of physical appearance, norms also function as a moral obligation to, for example, aspire to having a fit body (e.g. Dworkin & Wachs, 2009) or invest in ‘healthy ageing’ (e.g. Lenneis & Pfister, 2017). Thus, the power of norms is internalised rather than always imposed by an identifiable other (see also Foucault, 1977). However, norms vary in their scale as well. Some norms are more long-standing, while others change. Certain norms may apply only in certain groups, while

others may apply across a whole society or even the globe. While norms are the bread and butter of sociology, norms are often used as sociological explanations of actions and phenomena instead of taken as a subject of study. Yet, we argue, it is worth studying the forms and content of appearance norms and asking how they are created, applied, maintained, interpreted, negotiated and challenged in different contexts, by and for different people.

This Book's Approach

In this book, we ask in what kind of ways, to whom and in what types of context it is possible to accumulate and convert capital based on physical appearance. We call this capital aesthetic capital. We examine how norms of accumulating and converting aesthetic capital intertwine with gender, age and other forms of capital and play a role in shaping inequalities. The majority of the data analysed come from Finland. At the end of this introductory part, we present 'case Finland' and explain why Finland offers an interesting case to study physical appearance and inequalities. In addition, some chapters in this book use social media data, which is not bounded in any certain nation state context. The data include surveys, individual and group interviews and life stories, as well as visual and textual social media data. In this book, we employ a wide range of methodologies. We argue that the diversity of approaches and methodologies is beneficial for understanding the emergence, manifestation and reverberations of the social norms that regulate aesthetic capital.

This book examines the capitalisation of physical appearance and related normative regulations from two perspectives, accumulation and convertibility, and is divided into two main sections based on these perspectives. The first section deals with the logics of beauty and body work as, first and foremost, gendered ways to 'enhance' one's physical appearance -related assets. The second explores the social rules around the convertibility of these assets into social and economic resources.

Accumulating a Gendered Form of Capital

As does any form of capital, appearance-related capital accumulates. In an increasingly visual consumer culture, individuals are invited to engage in various aesthetic practices to accumulate, enhance and maintain their aesthetic assets. These practices range from mundane rituals such as washing, teeth cleansing, make-up application and hair removal and shaping to projects such as dieting and working out and interventions like aesthetic surgery or bodily implants. Social scientists have referred to the plethora of different aesthetic practices using various terms such as body modification (Featherstone, 1999) and dress work (van den Berg & Vonk, 2020), as well as beauty work, body work and appearance work (for reviews, see Gimlin, 2007; Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Mears, 2014). As the terminology suggests, many scholars have viewed these practices primarily as work rather than leisure. In the literature, a key distinction is often made between

work performed on one's own body and work performed on the bodies of others (Gimlin, 2007; Mears, 2014). Further distinctions include the extent to which a practice happens slowly or whether it transforms the body directly, for instance, through cutting or inscribing (Featherstone, 1999). Gimlin argued in 2007 that sociology has in the past particularly ignored both the relevance of body work to experiences of working life and the more mundane forms of body work (Gimlin, 2007). Since then, the social sciences have seen a surge in interest in the importance of aesthetic labour: the labour of looking good and right at and for work (e.g., Boyle & De Keere, 2019; Mears, 2011; van den Berg & Arts, 2019; Williams & Connell, 2010). However, mundane forms of appearance work outside the labour market context remains a neglected field of study (although see Elias et al., 2017). As the research presented in the first section of this book show, mundane appearance work matters in social life beyond the labour market and is a highly gendered form of work.

The first section of this book, thus, situates physical appearance -related capital as a gendered form of capital in Finland from the perspective of appearance work as capital accumulation. In Chapter 1 of the book, Iida Kukkonen reviews the contributions of sociological research on appearance-related capital for the study of physical appearance and inequality. She highlights the Bourdieusian origins of the sociological conceptualisation of capital and shows how Bourdieusian thinking has, particularly in the past decade, inspired scholars to think about appearance-related inequalities. Crucially, however, the scholarship is highly variable in the extent to which it is faithful to Bourdieu's scholarship on culture and in the extent to which it incorporates (socio-)economics or extends or develops Bourdieusian thinking to consider feminist issues such as gendered labour and capital. Kukkonen teases out the tensions between capital as, on the one hand, a societal concept laden with economic value, and concomitantly, societal economic inequality, and as, on the other hand, a field-specific concept that is always implied in contextual and unequal power relationships, including those related to ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, gender, age and so forth. The chapter suggests the accumulation and conversion of appearance-related capital intertwine in shaping inequalities.

Chapter 2, also authored by Kukkonen, illustrates how appearance-related practices are not just driven by gendered norms but also by gendered beliefs about appearance as capital. While Finnish men and women equally hold the belief that appearances matter for success, the belief in appearance as capital does not seem to incite men to look into the mirror. And Finnish women who believe appearances matter for success engage in accumulating aesthetic capital more than women who do not.

Chapter 3, written by Outi Sarpila, further illustrates the gendered dimensions of aesthetic capital in the Finnish context by engaging with the figure of the metrosexual and by putting aesthetic consumption in a temporal context. The concept of the metrosexual arose in media culture to celebrate men who recognise their bodies and looks as capital worthy of investment and who take a step to engage in the pleasures offered by a consumerist appearance society. This trope, much adored and highlighted by the media, advertisement and commerce, is

nowhere to be seen in the attitudinal and official statistics Sarpila delves into. In the light of these data, commercial masculinity appears an Anglo-Saxon phenomenon that is completely detached from the everyday lives of Finnish men. Despite all the talk of ‘new masculinities’, appearance-related capital accumulation still appears highly gendered in the Finnish context.

The problematic genderedness of appearance in society is further highlighted in Chapter 4, in which Hanna Ojala and Ilkka Pietilä interview elderly Finnish men regarding their appearance-related consumption. Their study shows how the contradictory norms regarding ‘successful aging’ and gendered norms of appearance work are brought together in the appearance-related practices of ageing men in Finland. They highlight how appearance work is not just aimed at gendered distinctions but also concerns class and, importantly, age. While elderly Finnish men may not buy into the idea of appearance as capital, they nevertheless employ appearance-related consumption as a way of fighting the marginalisation and invisibility that comes with old age.

Contested Conversions – Everyday (Re)workings of Aesthetic Capital

Like other forms of capital, aesthetic capital is convertible. Economics-inspired social scientific research on the outcomes of physical appearance commonly approaches conversions of aesthetic capital as ‘beauty perks and penalties’. The assumption is that possessing aesthetic capital brings perks to individuals, while a lack of it brings penalties (see [Anderson et al., 2010](#)). This line of literature has largely focused on mapping the socio-economic outcomes of appearance (see, e.g., [Hamermesh, 2011](#); [Hosoda et al., 2003](#); [Jæger, 2011](#)), while also acknowledging that aesthetic capital is convertible to forms of capital beyond economic capital. While this research on socio-economic outcomes has focused on the overall quantitative regularities in the conversion of aesthetic capital to economic capital, other social scientists have investigated how the conversion of aesthetic capital happens on a particular social field, such as the modelling industry ([Mears, 2011](#)), the global party circuit ([Mears, 2020](#)) or beauty pageants ([Balogun, 2020](#)). This line of research has often used qualitative methods, including ethnography, to uncover a field’s specific logics of valuation and exchange and to understand how these are navigated and negotiated in contexts where power is unevenly distributed. The second part of this book draws on both lines of scholarship and stresses the role of social norms for understanding capital conversion. This section considers both the workings and reworkings of aesthetic capital: how aesthetic capital structures and affects online and offline lives and what kind of struggles are involved in the evaluation and conversion of aesthetic capital. The chapters focus on mundane norms and mundane acts of resistance in everyday lives offline (Chapters 5 and 6) as well as on social media (Chapters 7, 8 and 9).

Working life is a crucial arena for capital conversion because labour is a field in which appearances may be, quite straightforwardly, economically rewarded or punished. In Chapter 5, Tero Pajunen brings out a Goffmanian lens and focuses it on Finnish working life, to look at how appearance norms are scripted in various

fields of work. His study highlights how employees have to manage different field-specific appearance expectations in their everyday job. The look which works best with customers or clients is not necessarily the one employers recognise or reward. Pajunen, thus, shows that field-specific aesthetic capital may be misrecognised. This further complicates negotiations of appropriate appearances and the conversion of aesthetic capital in working life.

Chapter 6, also authored by Pajunen, shifts the outlook from working life to a wider perspective to investigate how individuals narrate the subjective benefits and penalties they have experienced in life from their appearance. The sanctions related in Finns' appearance-related autobiographies relate to making impressions as well as being included and excluded. Many of the 'objective' and tangible outcomes that are often the focus of research on physical appearance are missing in the narratives, which focus instead on the effects physical appearance has on one's life, conveyed in psychological terms. Pajunen's study elucidates the differences between research on the socioeconomic (dis)advantages of aesthetic capital and subjective (mis)recognition and remembrance of the effects looks have on lives. It highlights how researchers looking at society-level data see very different effects than individuals looking at the world from their spot in the data.

This tendency is further highlighted in Chapter 7, where Erica Åberg and Aki Koivula use population-level data from Finland to look at how satisfaction with one's appearance relates to creating content on social media. Åberg and Koivula suggest that especially for young females, social media in general, and Instagram in particular, may work as a never-ending cycle, in which lowered appearance satisfaction prompts the creation of more social media content, which in turn leads to lower appearance satisfaction. They illustrate how prevailing norms of aesthetic capital, value-seeking and content creation through self-presentation are gendered. They also suggest the value creation of aesthetic capital follows different normative logics on Instagram and Facebook. Chapter 8 of this book, thus, shows how visual social media may work as an amplifier of appearance society. In the social media context, where visibility is the marker of success, the need to be seen is urgent. Yet the need to present aesthetic capital online may drive behaviour that is not beneficial at the individual level.

Because social media is not restricted by national borders, Chapters 9 and 10 are not limited to Finnish social media phenomena but look international social media movements. As Chapters 9 and 10 of this book illustrate, social media are platforms where appearance norms can be contested and overthrown. Yet as both chapters show, contesting appearance-related norms is not an easy task, and it is not a task for which everyone is equally rewarded. In Chapter 8, Anna Puhakka explains how for Danish fat activist, Sofie Hagen, offensive resistance, doing fatness wrong and ambivalence are strategies that not only challenge prevailing norms but also allow for the valuation of non-normative bodies in a particular social field.

Finally, in Chapter 9, Erica Åberg and Laura Salonen look at a social media movement that contests the so-called 'last taboo' of female appearance: body hair. The movement's invitation to grow out one's body hair during January and post pictures and experiences of the process using the tag #januhairy can be likened to

a breaching experiment à la Harold Garfinkel (Heritage, 2013). In breaching experiments, people break norms in order to examine the resulting reactions and sanctions. Åberg and Salonen elucidate how the reception of #januhairy posts is directly related to aesthetic capital: breaking an aesthetic norm is allowed for a person who already possesses significant amounts of capital.

Physical Appearance in the Finnish Context

Most articles in this book use data that are collected in Finland. Why particularly Finland, one may ask. Besides the fact that all the contributors of this book are Finns and experienced experts on the Finnish appearance culture, there are special characteristics in Finland's history that make it a unique and interesting laboratory in which to study the role of appearances. Because of its assumed egalitarian history, the differences in gender, age, class and context-dependent norms presented and discussed in this book are likely to be stronger in other national contexts. Thus, Finland can act as a 'baseline' for evaluating the importance of physical appearance in contemporary societies.

The Modest and Egalitarian Finns

Certain modesty has stereotypically highlighted appearance norms of the Finns. Finnish people have a tendency to downplay the significance of appearance to them, emphasising thriftiness and practicality as the cornerstones of their apparel (Autio, 2006; Wilska, 2002). According to several Finnish consumer culture researchers, frugality, caution and rationality have been the virtues traditionally cherished by Finnish consumers (e.g., Autio, 2006; Heinonen, 1998; Wilska, 2002). Compared to more-established consumer societies, such as the United Kingdom and United States, the history of Finnish consumer culture is somewhat shorter. It was not until the post-war period in the 1950s that Finnish consumer society began to flourish; prior to the 1950s and early 1960s, Finland was considered an agriculture-based society, which urbanised in the 1960s and 1970s (Heinonen, 2000; Heinonen & Pantzar, 2002). From the 1960s onwards, attitudes stressing the significance of saving money and self-sufficiency started to give way to more hedonistic consumer attitudes (Heinonen, 1998; Heinonen & Pantzar, 2002). According to empirical studies, modest attitudes towards consumption are still typical, particularly among representatives of the older generations (Huttunen & Autio, 2010; Räsänen, 2003; Wilska, 2002).

In terms of physical appearance, this downplay is also present in traditional Finnish sayings, emphasising the importance of modesty: 'modesty becomes you', as well as simple clothing: 'only ugly people parade with clothing' and 'a cake may look beautiful, but taste foul on the inside'. Finnish people are also known for their casual attitudes towards sporting outfits, calling themselves 'the nation of shell suits' (Vehkaoja, 2015). When looking at the streetscape on a typical cold and rainy autumn day, the mindset and the 'safety colours' of Finns seem

impossible to miss. Various shades of grey and black coats are interwoven in the dull scenery under black umbrellas. Black is often said to be the favourite colour of the Finns. It is a safe choice as it is versatile and timeless, as well as ecological, because it never goes out of style (Viljanen, 2015).

Some of these stereotypes have their roots in Finnish history. When Finland was a part of the Kingdom of Sweden until 1809, the laws of Swedish estate society, which separated civics by their social status, were applied to Finland as well. One of those laws is the so-called ‘luxury-act’, which forbade lower estates from using certain luxurious clothing materials (such as silk, furs, tinsels). That law remained until 1816, seven years after the beginning of Finnish autonomy under the Russian Empire. In short, the official law controlled the appearances of the Finns to some extent at this point in history. The law enforced the idea that each person should look true to his or her social estate. At the same time, the church encouraged people to use simple and plain clothes that were preferably self-made. The Finns’ appearance norms were explicitly regulated from above in the 1800s, although different local variations and sub-cultures with their unique appearance norms existed at the same time in different parts of Finland (Lempiäinen, 2016; Uotila, 2019, pp. 119–120).

Nowadays, the Finnish law does not divide people into groups by social status and define appearance norms for them, but the same spirit of being modest and ‘not more than one is’ still exists in the cultural heritage of Finns. Moreover, Finland’s class structure is also more subtle and porous than that of the United Kingdom, for example. The elites have not developed class cultures to distinguish themselves from lower classes (Purhonen et al., 2010, p. 269). Rather, the elites generally avoid making conspicuous class distinctions, as this is seen as arrogant in Finland.

Another driving factor behind appearance norms underlining modesty is Finland’s position as a highly egalitarian culture. Like other Nordic welfare states, Finland ranks high on gender equality indices (e.g. Crotti et al., 2020). Moreover, during discussions on the specific features of Nordic welfare states, their ‘women-friendly’ (Hernes, 1987) welfare policies are often brought up. These policies involve referring women to public care services, freeing women to enter the labour market and providing women with economic autonomy. The services also include universal social security system services and extensive public social care for reducing social inequality among Finnish women (e.g. Kangas & Palme, 2009; Virokannas et al., 2020). These aspects impact the general norms and moralities of the Finns, which probably also affect how appearance is seen and treated among Finns. For example, the general idea promoted in egalitarian societies is to treat people equally, which should apply to their visual appearances as well.

Geographical and Socio-demographical Peculiarities

The importance of aesthetics is often linked to urban culture and fashionable metropolises. Meanwhile Finland is known for its rather low population density

(18 persons per km²), although it is slowly increasing as cities grow and rural areas wither (Worldometers, 2020). One could easily spot the differences in the appearances of Finns when one walks in the centre of Helsinki or Punkalaidun. Low population density seems to make a difference in terms of the appearance culture. For example, it means that fewer clothing shops are available for people living in rural areas. In addition, rural areas have fewer service occupations, in which the role of appearance is more pronounced, compared with urban areas. In urban areas with greater population density, more opportunities exist to consume appearance-related items. However, globalisation and the presence of online shops with free delivery have levelled the physical barriers of supply and created a wider spectrum of products available for Finns living in smaller regions in recent years. The Internet and mass media are significantly contributing to the global homogenisation of the conceptions of beauty. Moreover, today's appearance ideal is increasingly connected to social media (e.g. Tiggemann & Miller, 2010), especially for young people. Thus, the global range of acceptable appearances is becoming narrower, increasingly homogenised and globally aspirational (e.g. Jha, 2016; Widdows, 2018). Although the Finns previously emphasised their affinity for practicality and modesty, nowadays, they have also started to dress their children in expensive brands (e.g. Åberg & Huvila, 2019). In addition, some members of the younger generation like to distinguish themselves through the consumption of luxurious clothing (Blencowe, 2020).

In addition to possessing distinctive historical features, Finland has certain demographic peculiarities which play a role in shaping the normative landscape regarding physical appearance. Finland is a predominantly white country. A national myth about historic ethnic and cultural homogeneity exists but can be challenged (Tervonen, 2014). It is difficult to obtain reliable data on Finland's ethnic diversity, as the citizens' ethnicities are not registered in Finland (Niemi-nen, 2013). However, the lack of information on ethnicity can partly be supplemented with available information on first language and birth country. According to Statistics Finland, in 2019, only 8 percent of the Finnish population (by country of origin and language) has an origin other than a Finnish one (Statistics Finland, 2019). For example, in Sweden, about one-fifth of the population has a foreign origin (Statistics Sweden SCB, 2019). Although Finns' homogeneity is a myth, its population is ethnically less diverse compared with most European countries.

However, Finns' ethnic diversity is expected to increase in the future, as the fertility rate has been decreasing, and migration has been increasing in recent years. The discourse that highlights Finns' homogeneity and presents mainly white and otherwise normative appearances in the media has also been contested in recent years. For example, a nonprofit organisation, Ruskeat tytöt Ry ('brown girls registered association'), has successfully broadened the representations of 'brownness' in the field of culture, media and advertising, and it has advocated the diversity of the Finnish population. Moreover, the academic discussion regarding immigration and racism in Finland has been evolving since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Similarly, in recent years, Finnish universities have been encouraged to promote antiracist sensitivity in their curriculum content (Rastas, 2020).

Although Finland's streetscape is becoming less white, it is also becoming greyer. As in many other European countries, Finland's population is getting older. In 2019, Finland had one of the oldest populations in Europe with Germany, Italy, Portugal and Greece, which separates Finland from its Nordic neighbours, Sweden and Norway (Eurostat, 2019, p. 15). Younger people tend to pay more attention to appearance in general, and they face different types of appearance issues than older people do (Tiggemann & Slevec, 2012, p. 146). However, these differences do not necessarily reflect the more general appearance norms in society. Moreover, despite the fact that the population is growing older, the global consumer culture emphasises an ageless physical appearance, defining 'successful ageing' as ageing without giving the impression of doing so (Twigg, 2013). This discrepancy is also reflected in the anti-ageing industry, as older women especially respond to ageist social pressure to prevent the signs of ageing by investing in beauty interventions. These interventions include hair dye, make-up and surgical or non-surgical cosmetic procedures (Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2007). It has been stated that Finland hardly differs from other countries in its attitudes regarding ageing (Ojala et al., 2016), so investing in anti-ageing practices and hiding the signs of ageing is expected, especially from women (Kukkonen et al., 2018). The appearance issues and norms of older people may achieve dominance in the culture if they are in the majority, but not this is not necessarily the case if the public imagery and discourse still favour presenting younger appearances more often.

Although some indicators show that the perceived importance of appearance has increased in recent years among Finns, they still see that looking good is a considerably less important value in life compared with work, a comfortable living, world peace or independence, for example (Sarpila et al., 2017). It may be conjectured that even urbanisation, globalisation and the Internet have not entirely caused the Finns to abandon their modest appearance ideals. However, little non-anecdotal data exist on the role of appearance in contemporary Finland and on the appearance relations of Finns. This book addresses these questions from various perspectives.

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