

Chapter 4

Seeking Age-appropriate Appearance among Ageing Men

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Introduction

Ageing is risky in contemporary Western societies. The ageing body and its physical manifestations of older age (e.g. wrinkles, grey hair, changing body composition and skin elasticity) are socially recognised as signs of less valued personhood. As [Hurd Clarke, Repta, and Griffin \(2007, p. 71\)](#) put it, in appearance-obsessed Western societies, ‘individuals are constantly bombarded with the ageist message that youth is attractive, healthy, and desirable, whereas old age is unattractive and synonymous with poor health.’ Bodies that appear to be old are not socially valued and may draw rejection and rebuke, which exemplifies widespread appearance-based ageism in many contemporary societies ([Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008, p. 670](#)).

Although ageing cannot be prevented, it can be controlled, or so the present thinking goes. In his classical text, [Mike Featherstone \(1982, pp. 21–22\)](#) states that consumer cultures emphasise the individual’s responsibility to ‘adopt instrumental strategies to combat deterioration and decay’ of the body, and that the consumer culture relies on the ‘idealised images of youth, health, fitness and beauty’. Both mid- and later-life bodies are characterised by decline in terms of youthful energy, vitality, virility and physical attractiveness ([Lodge & Umberson, 2013, p. 225](#)). As a result, people are expected to engage in appearance work to distance themselves from ageist stereotypes and maintain one’s own aesthetic capital through beauty work, physical activity, diet and clothing. Technologies aimed at enhancing youth and beauty have become increasingly normalised and a natural requirement of especially feminine body work ([Hurd Clarke & Griffin 2007, p. 190](#)).

Managing an ageing body is based on maintaining (youthful) aesthetic capital through various bodily techniques to protect the self’s social value and ensure ageing in a socially ‘respectable’ way ([Skeggs, 2004](#)). However, social demands for

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preserving youthful appearance, ideals of an ageing body and forms of appearance work are different for women and men, and thus body management practices are gendered (Calasanti et al., 2018; Sarpila & Erola, 2016; Sarpila et al., 2020). Interest in appearance has primarily been regarded as a woman's concern. Several studies (e.g. Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2008, pp. 668–669) have shown that 'the social fixation on youthful bodies' leads particularly older women to lose self-esteem, experience insecurity in relationships, employment-related discrimination and perceived social invisibility.

Although research has largely focused on women's anti-ageing practices, it is important to bear in mind that men live in the same ageist culture as women, and are thus not immune to the dictate of fighting the visible signs of growing old. Therefore, in this chapter we explore ageing men's appearance work and consumption for managing their (masculine) aesthetic capital. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of the body and capital, and Shilling's (2011) ideas of producing physical capital, we approach aesthetic capital as a combination of given features and achieved qualities by appearance work, which can be used as an individual resource to act appearance-wise in 'appearance-obsessed Western society'. Our primary interest is in how men relate their appearance-related practices to gendered and age-based appearance norms, and deal with potential cultural conflicts between masculinity and appearance work. In our analysis, we focus on an appearance work related to skin care, hair, physical exercise, diet and clothing.

In this chapter, we first aim to show that men are indeed interested in physical appearance, work for their appearance and are engaged in appearance-related consumption. However, we argue the ideals and norms that guide body management practices are shaped by intersectional differences, such as social class and generation. Age-based collective consciousness, or generational habitus as Simpson (2015) calls it, has a major effect on men's possibilities to grow older in a socially 'respectable' way (Skeggs, 2004) in terms of appearance. We conclude that appearance is a crucial factor in people's attempts to avoid a marginalised position of old age in contemporary societies.

Ageing, Gender and Appearance-related Consumption

Body management and appearance-related consumption include notably gendered features. Previous research (e.g. Hurd & Mahal, 2019; Hurd Clarke & Korotchenko, 2011; Hurd Clarke, Currie, & Bennett, 2020; Lodge & Umberson, 2013; Twigg, 2020) suggests that older men tend to be more positive about their bodies and are less concerned about their appearance compared to younger men and older women. Twigg (2020) interviewed older men and concluded that men's clothing choices were marked by continuity both with men's younger selves and with mainstream masculinity. Thus, men did not report any experiences of the *changing room moment*, by which Twigg (2013, p. 62) referred to women's consciousness that, by ageing, their clothes or styles were starting to look 'too young', which is why they had to abandon those clothes. Men did not see dress through the

lens of age in such a direct way that most women did (Twigg, 2020, p. 113). There were men in the Twigg's study who tried to avoid the 'too old' look. This was about keeping upbeat or not allowing oneself to slip into negativity and dullness.

Despite this, men experience pressures related to taking care of their appearance when they grow older, but instead of attractiveness, which they relate to femininity, men think about their bodies more in terms of activity and performance (Calasanti et al., 2018; Hurd Clarke, Currie, & Bennett, 2020; Ojala et al., 2016). Therefore, body shape is a particular subject causing dissatisfaction for men as many of them wish to stay muscular and toned and maintain an athletic figure when they grow older (Hurd & Mahal, 2019, p. 13). For men in middle and later life, control over the ageing body and maintaining aesthetic capital revolve around able-bodiedness and preserving an athletic figure (Calasanti et al., 2018; Hurd Clarke & Korotchenko, 2011), alongside holding on to an active sexual life (Hurd Clarke & Lefkovich, 2018). Therefore, body management practices and appearance-related consumption are primarily based on exercise and diet. Physical exercise enables men to grow older in desirable ways (Hurd Clarke, Currie, & Bennett, 2020, p. 133) and manifests in three ways of men's understanding of physical activity: maintaining health, feeling good and getting tougher. Physical activity is positioned as an essential practice for demonstrating the 'will to health' (Higgs et al., 2009, p. 687).

Despite gender differences, there are also similarities in women's and men's body management practices and appearance-related consumption. For both ageing women and men, an essential issue in maintaining physical appearance is to keep the balance between means that are thought of as either natural or unnatural (Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2007; Ojala et al., 2016). Keeping a natural body image is important to both women and men. However, as Hurd Clarke and Griffin (2007, p. 198) suggest, 'rather than being natural per se, the natural look entailed passing for a normal, unmodified, and youthful body even as it was the product of skilful artifice and covert technological interventions'. (Non)-surgical cosmetic interventions are currently viewed as normative and required aspects of especially female beauty work (Hurd Clarke & Griffin, 2007), but also increasingly of male's (Atkinson, 2008). The cultural demand for maintaining natural body images affects people's appearance-related choices, as looking unnatural may be socially more stigmatising than looking old.

A central feature in people's attempts to maintain natural body images and 'authenticity' (Simpson, 2015) is to avoid falling 'into the trap of denying their ageing' (Tulle, 2007). Based on Bourdieun-derived theory of capitals (cf. Kukkonen, Chapter 1), Simpson (2015, 2016) calls this sort of *cultural logic* as an ageing capital. Ageing capital 'consists of the emotional, cognitive and political resources developed over time through experience in various realms of existence' (Simpson, 2016, pp. 370–371). It indicates an increasing awareness of self and a sense of self-acceptance as one grows older (Simpson, 2015, p. 33). Ageing capital can be deployed as a resource to negotiate with cultural and social demands for maintaining a naturally ageing body. It also offers discursive resources through which middle-aged and older men can verbalise their accounts for physical appearance and appearance-related consumption.

Material and Methods

The empirical analysis of this chapter is based on 22 face-to-face open-ended interviews with Finnish men aged 56–77 years in 2017. Ten of the interviewed men had a middle-class background and 12 a working-class one. Thirteen men were retired and nine were working. All men were Caucasian, heterosexual and partnered, and lived economically stable lives when interviewed.

The data come from a larger qualitative longitudinal study on men's ageing (*MANage* study). The original interviews (three personal interviews and two focus groups for each man) were made in 2010 and 2011, and the follow-up interviews (one personal interview for each man) were in 2017. The interviews covered several themes that ranged from ageing employees' position in the labour market, retirement as a period of change in a man's life, health-related behaviours and psycho-social well-being to impacts of ageing on appearance, age-related consumption and anti-ageing practices. All interviews were digitally recorded with signed informed consent from the interviewees, transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service and validated by the study investigators to ensure accurate and complete transcription. All names used in the data excerpts are pseudonyms.

The preliminary analyses led us to note that men primarily approached appearance-related issues from the perspective of bodily functionality and instrumentality that they attached to the masculine performative body and distanced from feminine aesthetic values – a divide reported in many previous studies (Calasanti & King, 2018; Calasanti et al., 2018; Gill et al., 2005; Hurd Clarke, Currie, & Bennett, 2020; Lodge & Umberson, 2013). A recurrent feature in the interaction was that the word *appearance* in the interviewer's questions systematically activated a traditional masculine discourse among the interviewees resulting in responses, in which they underscored their disinterest in aesthetics that they attached to feminine vanity (cf. Sarpila, Chapter 3). Lodge and Umberson (2013, p. 230) have called this a distancing strategy. Distancing from femininity especially may be seen as a response to a culturally mediated fear that ageing leads to men's de-masculinisation.

However, this does not mean that men have no interest in their appearance or appearance-related consumption. In their study on young British men's talk about their bodies and bodily practices, Gill et al. (2005, p. 43) noted that men's appearance talk was drawn on by a very limited range of discourses, independently of their age, class, race and sexuality. The same applies to the older men of our studies. Therefore, we focused on discursive practices that the men utilised for justifying their attempts to control their bodily ageing and balancing the potentially 'effeminate' effects of appearance consumption. In other words, our primary interest was in how men discursively manage the contradictory cultural demands of maintaining a 'not old' look while avoiding any practices or their verbalisations that could be considered feminine. Alongside this, we analyse the ways in which men from different occupational groups construct their versions of (masculine) aesthetic capital; while previous research has concluded that 'able-bodiedness' is a

key element of this capital for ageing men, class-based and generation-related values and norms may have an effect on both the interpretations of able-bodiedness and which kind of role consumption plays in preserving it. Therefore, we analyse our male interviewees' descriptions of their body management practices from the perspectives of gender, class and generation.

Analysis

Taking Distance to Femininity: Skin Care and Hair

Our previous study (Ojala et al., 2016) on men's use of and thoughts about anti-ageing products, which was based on interviews with the same men in 2010/2011, showed that while men considered it important to maintain a youthful appearance, they opposed any means that they considered to belong to women and thus have 'effeminate' effects on them. At its core, their thinking was to maintain good looks in 'natural ways' and thus avoid any cosmetics or commercial anti-ageing products and services that they attached to multinational companies that they thought were cheating people. As reviewed above, men also often deny having any ambition to care about their appearance in an aesthetic sense, but underscore healthy and performative looks.

While in the earlier study none of our interviewees had dyed their hair and most expressed negative stands towards it, in the 2017 interviews, the attitudes were not as strict. Although in the earlier study the working-class men had the strongest negative views about using anti-ageing products, including hair dyeing, in the 2017 interviews, one of them said he had dyed his hair a few times. Quite interestingly, his main reason for doing so was because 'other men have started to dye their hair', which both underlines the importance of the norms shaping men's appearance-related consumption and seems to indicate a certain change in them. Despite this potential change, most of our interviewees did not find hair dyeing as something they would do themselves. Particularly for the older participants, having grey hair was considered a sign of their age that should not be 'artificially' concealed. Younger interviewees subscribed to this idea, even though they did not feel that 'getting grey' was pleasant.

The working middle-class group of men had the most positive attitudes towards taking care of one's looks and appearance-related consumption. Their interviews echoed somewhat different perspectives to grey hair as it was also viewed to create some advantage instead of being an entirely bad thing. As Teppo (59 years) jokingly put it, 'Let the experience be seen'. For middle-class men working in expert positions, grey hair is not only a negative sign of ageing but also may be taken to display accumulated knowledge and skills.

As reviewed above, men justified their use of skin care products with functional reasons, such as preventing dry skin. From this perspective, an excerpt from Asko's interview includes interesting features when the interviewer points to these functional goals as a reason for Asko's use of skin care product.

Excerpt 1

Asko (72 years): When I shave, I've used for 10 years such a new gel, which contains vitamins. It's new on the market. First I used another shaving gel, such as white gel. And it always – I don't use aftershave, I use that gel a lot. And now when there's one with vitamins – I used to have barber's itch here [under his chin] every now and then, when it got dry. Now when I shave I always spread it here and a bit there too [pointing to his face]. And you know my skin has completely changed. You can notice it right away.

Interviewer: So it's not that dry?

Asko: Yeah, it's not dry and it's – it's like so bright and sort of, I'm not sure if even the wrinkles have [become smooth]. But there's not plenty of them yet anyway. I really recommend it, like if older men could be persuaded to use such [products]. But many [think] 'it's just such that women fuss about' when they use night creams and day creams [laughing].

Interviewer: So you indeed think about your *appearance*, and take a look at –.

Asko: No, no but – well of course I see myself from the mirror every morning. But anyway I've noticed that [the gel] helps with my skin, in principle. And when it includes vitamins; I can get those dry spots away. Therefore I've liked it.

After Asko's description of the gel he uses, the interviewer offers a functional explanation for his use of a skin care product ("So it's not that dry?"). At this point, Asko more or less ignores this interpretation and accentuates the 'brightness' of his skin and possible smoothing of wrinkles. This leads the interviewer to make another question: 'So you indeed think about your appearance?' It is striking that after this comment Asko gets back to the 'functional' explanation and praises the gel for helping him in getting rid of his dry skin. In our interpretation, the reference to thinking about appearance seems to refer to aesthetic motives for the use of skin care products in Asko's mind, which makes him get back to the functional argument. The exchange showcases the oscillating stands that the men express in interviews about appearance and consumption, and evince the existence of norms that regulate the ways in which men can talk about their appearance work.

Idealisation of Performative Masculinity: Physical Exercise and Diet

In our interviews, men accentuated the importance of physical exercise in controlling the effects of ageing on their bodies (see also Calasanti et al., 2018; Hurd Clarke, Currie, & Bennett, 2020). In describing their preferences of exercise, many

men said they considered everyday physical work to be the best way to keep themselves in good condition, referring to such daily tasks as gardening, chopping firewood or having walks with their dogs, instead of sports. Those who were engaged in sports type of exercise preferred traditional forms of sports, such as swimming, riding a bicycle or cross-country skiing. Only a few said they go to a gym. Another important feature of their thinking about exercise was that their motives for exercising were related to maintaining good health and functional ability, which was distanced from the motives relating to aesthetic control of an ageing body (see also Hurd Clarke, Currie, & Bennett, 2020). Men's descriptions of physical exercise thus largely followed the same logic as with skin care. For them, an ideal way of having physical exercise involves other functional purposes (such as moving from one place to another or making firewood), it is a 'natural' way to be physically active and does not cause extra costs and the goals of exercise are distanced from aesthetic purposes that are considered feminine.

Although the men underscored that they did not engage in physical exercise for aesthetic reasons, they acknowledged that their physical activeness was partly aimed at avoiding negative changes in their appearance. An ageing (or old) man's body was often described in terms of sagging and softness, with frequent references to a 'beer belly', that men wanted to avoid. A slim body was regarded as healthy and 'not aged'.

Excerpt 2

Interviewer: Last time [in 2011] we met, we talked about appearance. So how do you think about your *appearance* now?

Olli (57 years): That's a tough question. I don't know [laughs]. Like as such, I don't really – I don't [think about it] in such a way that I would pay particular attention to my looks. So I don't, no I don't really, I don't think about it very much. But of course there's – I certainly have a clear purpose to keep myself slim in the future. So I take care of it and I think I have such a strong self-discipline that I think I also can do it and keep it. So in a certain way that's such a thing to me that I want to stick to it.

A notable feature in Olli's description is his inability to first choose his perspective and discourse in responding to the interviewer's question, which includes the word 'appearance', which often provoked oscillating responses for our interviewees (cf. Excerpt 1). This is manifested in his frequent expressions of 'I don't' and difficulties to formulate coherent sentences. After these difficulties, his main argument is that his efforts to maintain a slim body requires strong self-discipline. Keeping the body slim through physical exercise and diet certainly requires willpower, as Olli points out. However, at the same time, bodily control of ageing is aimed at modifying the body to represent the self-discipline of its carrier; while a slim body signifies a controlled self with sufficient self-discipline to meet the goals, a soft and sagging body represents a lack of control and willpower.

Most of our interviewees did not consider appearance to be an important motive for doing exercise. Those who acknowledged the importance of looks, as Olli did, most often described the importance of appearance in general terms without a specific context with identifiable people who would assess their bodies. In this respect, 57-year-old Timo's case was an exception. When he was single, being physically fit related to more concrete aesthetic capital of (sexualized) attraction in the 'market' of coupling. For Timo, appearance was a modifiable element of the self that he felt increased his exchange value in embodied interaction in bars. Both examples above highlight that alongside symbolic value, aesthetic capital also yields more concrete exchange value both in the labour market and coupling.

Externalised Forming of Aesthetic Capital: Clothing

Most our interviewees did not buy their clothes themselves, but their partners either bought them or selected suitable clothes after which the couples went together to a shop to buy them. Some men said they go to shop only when their wives 'order' them to do so. The partners also controlled men's dress by judging what clothes men should wear in various situations, while the interviewees underlined that comfort and durability were the main, and often only, criteria for the clothes they wore.

The men expressed two different stances towards their wives' domineering behaviour regarding their clothing. Some of them attached this eagerness to buy new clothes to women's vanity and complained that their wives were constantly 'pressing' new clothes and new ideas regarding clothing to them, which the men regarded as completely dispensable. This stand was based on an idea that the interviewees were still satisfied with their old clothes and buying new clothes 'just for fun' was simply a waste of money. These interviewees often accompanied their descriptions with notably critical views on any form of consumption in regards to their looks, which they thought was unnecessary. On the other hand, several men's descriptions included features of a certain pride they felt in having wives who took care of their dress. These men praised their wives' good taste and sense of colour, and thought that their wives knew exactly what kinds of clothes the men themselves wanted to wear.

While the majority of our interviewees actively expressed various levels of disinterest in clothing, the working-aged engineers were clearly the only group of men who showed both interest and knowledge regarding clothes, even fashion, which was a pet peeve for most other interviewees. When asked which kind of an effect clothing has on how people assess a person's age, Teppo gives a rather detailed answer.

Excerpt 3

Teppo (59 years): It has a major effect if you're wearing braces and baggy trousers. [...] I've switched to mainly using these slim cut B shirts because I sort of noticed that, hey, I can wear these and they

look a lot better. I used to have such baggy shirts, I had those C cut shirts for some reason. [...] And then tighter jeans or tighter trousers, they look better than those that are comfortable. And well, then you should have good shoes, nice-looking shoes, so I've started to pay a little bit attention to such issues. [...] For example, I bought these slacks. They're my favourites, and then I bought this coat. And then I bought such outdoor jacket made of polyester, which has been really comfortable, I've used it at work and travel, it's nice-looking, blue, such a basic stuff. I've bought jeans. I mainly go [to clothes shop] abroad because there I sometimes have time to do it and then, for instance in Germany, they are a lot cheaper. I never buy designer clothes, unless they just pop up and are good-looking and inexpensive.

Teppo's account includes elements of both fashion-conscious consideration of clothes and a slightly resistant attitude towards clothing-related consumption. He expresses his awareness of how tighter clothes have become trendy and that he has modernised his clothing so as not to look outdated. He even says that he buys tighter jeans that are not comfortable but look better. On the other hand, he underscores that he never buys designer clothes, prefers inexpensive clothes and does shopping only when he has spare time to do that. All these effectively communicate that while Teppo is a modern man with awareness of clothing trends, he is not overly fussy about the clothes, does not spend a lot of time and money for clothes and, accordingly, has a reasonable and manly attitude towards dress. Although Teppo expresses his awareness of clothing trends, his ideas regarding clothing come close to what [van der Laan and Velthuis \(2016, p. 28\)](#) found in interviewing 20–30-year-old Dutch urban men. For these men, getting dressed was not determined by their attempts to highlight their individuality but by routine and practical considerations, such as weather conditions, accompanied with an aim to maintain 'authenticity' and coherence in their clothing styles.

The working-aged middle-class men's relative interest in and knowledge of clothing trends is largely explained by their work. As they work in business and expert organisations, they are aware of the importance of physical appearance in their work, particularly in contacts with customers (cf. Pajunen, Chapter 5). On a more abstract level, knowledge of trends is also an important sign of a person's ability to keep up with the times ([Twigg, 2020](#)). Most middle-class men (both retired and those still working) expressed ideas of certain clothing styles required at work and that these styles have to be followed, even if they were not in line with a person's own taste. For example, 56-year-old Tero says that he doesn't 'like to wear a suit at all, but there is no other choice' in his work. In a similar vein, Ilmari (retired, 74 years) concluded that, 'I don't wear a tie unless I really have to because I wore it enough at one time'.

As discussed above, working-class and older interviewees often expressed active disinterest in clothing, appearance-related consumption and fashion as they had often interpreted this as the feminine life spheres. However, sometimes men's inexperience in buying clothes was not dependent on cultural norms, but rather

caused by the gendered division of reproduction within families. Hannes's wife suffers from memory disorders. As her illness has progressed, she has become increasingly possessive of Hannes, and would not let him leave the house. Therefore, Hannes has started two new hobbies that provide him with regular opportunities to spend a few hours away from home. His wife's inability to buy him clothes has opened up new opportunities for Hannes.

Excerpt 4

Interviewer: Well, when you go to a clothing store so what do you usually buy there?

Hannes (72 years): Yes, that's a good question because for me-, when I lived at home [in adolescence] my mother bought my clothes and when I got married the wife bought the clothes. I could really say that, was it half a year ago when I decided to start buying my own clothes. And I've bought these jeans. And then I bought blue corduroys because they were on sale. And then, when I was leaving for Lapland, I bought [mentioning trademark] hiking trousers. These are the clothes [laughing] that I have bought myself.

Interviewer: OK, how was that experience [to buy the clothes]?

Hannes: Listen, it was very nice, very nice. And I certainly decided that from now on I buy all the clothes I need, though there's not much I really need. But in my whole life I've not – I was 72 when I started to buy clothes [short laughter].

Hannes's interview was an exception among the older participants in that he expressed sharp-eyed and nuanced comments on his peers' clothing and appearance. However, in line with his generation's gendered practices, he has not bought his own clothes as that task has belonged to his mother and wife. Quite ironically, his wife's illness has introduced him to new opportunities to feel himself agentic in a manner that gendered norms and generational habitus have blocked earlier in his life. This highlights that while norms related to age, gender, generation and normative life courses may prevent men from getting engaged in certain activities for most of their lives, sudden life changes may provide an individual with access to new life spheres.

Conclusion

A running thread in research on appearance-related consumption is that by consuming products and services, people engage in appearance work aimed at making distinctions. In particular, men are thought to base their consumption, and generally their appearance work, on attempts to distance themselves from women and practices considered feminine, a notion highlighted in several

previous studies (Calasanti et al., 2018; Hurd Clarke, Currie, & Bennett, 2020; Ojala et al., 2016). Our analysis additionally shows how hesitant men are to attach any aesthetic motives to their choices, independently of whether the appearance work relates to skin care, hair, physical exercise, diet or clothing. However, it is important to bear in mind that alongside gender-based distinctions, appearance work also includes age and class-based distinction makings.

In an ageist society, being old is a marginalised position. Therefore, a crucial element of appearance work for middle-aged and older people is to avoid being seen as old by other people. On the other hand, Simpson (2015, p. 40) has pointed out that people more generally aim to avoid 'age-inappropriate' forms of self-presentation. While maintaining youthful looks is essential not to be seen as old, one also should not look 'too youthful', for instance by wearing clothes that young people wear, as that might signal a denial of one's inevitable ageing. As van der Laan and Velthuis (2016) pointed out, an important norm in terms of clothing is to maintain 'authenticity'. We argue that an important constituent of this authenticity is people's awareness of 'generational habitus' (Simpson, 2015) that embodies the codes of appropriate clothing and other aspects of appearance for each generation. While wearing blue jeans is a daily practice for middle-aged and older people today, this was not so in the 1970s when jeans were strongly associated with younger generations' clothing styles. Generations similarly have different views on other dimensions of appearance work regarding, among others, use of cosmetics or dyeing of hair. Consequently, what in any historical moment appears to be age-appropriate appearance has more to do with generation rather than chronological age.

Despite generations having their own 'collective consciousness' regarding appearance (Simpson, 2015), it would be an oversimplification to interpret generational habitus to be a coherent set of norms uniformly characterising preferences of various cohorts. Other intersecting differences, such as class, also play a role in people's appearance work. Generational habitus intersects with class-based habitus, by which various aspects of appearance (clothing, hair, etc.) are important factors for individuals in gaining class-based 'respectability' (Skeggs, 2004). Our analysis also shows that occupational status sets rules for appropriate appearance as various jobs demand certain looks (cf. Pajunen, Chapter 5). In our interviews, the middle-class men were particularly aware of these demands and articulated the rules for clothing in their work. Gaining appearance-related capital, as one form of cultural capital, certainly yields symbolic value for people in various life spheres. However, it is important to note that aesthetic capital and respectable appearance also bear more concrete exchange value, such as (sexualised) attraction in the coupling market. This demonstrates that even for aged men, appearance may be viewed as a distinct form of capital.

In discussions of 'appearance-obsessed Western society', it is often assumed that the increasing valuation of appearance primarily concerns younger and working-aged people, whereas it has minor effects on older people's lives. We argue that appearance has a vital importance for ageing people in fighting against marginalisation caused by old age. Therefore, even men, who often are considered less receptive of appearance-related cultural demands than women, recognise the

'rules' of how appearance signals successful ageing. Awareness of appearance as a sign of a person's moral worth and gendered limits of bodywork are central elements of ageing capital in contemporary Western societies.

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