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Double standards in the accumulation and utilisation of ‘aesthetic capital’

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ABSTRACT

Physical appearance as a form of capital has received increasing attention in sociology in recent years. The logic suggests that ‘aesthetic capital’, like other forms of capital, can be accumulated and utilised in economic and social exchange. However, previous research has not paid attention to societal norms that may regulate the accumulation and utilisation of ‘aesthetic capital’ differently for men and women. In this paper, we turn our attention to such gendered norms, that is, double standards, by analysing unique measures for both accumulation and utilisation based on a split-ballot survey design. Our study shows that there are double standards in certain norms regarding the accumulation and utilisation of ‘aesthetic capital’. This indicates the existence of double standards is context dependent. A double standard in accumulation means more approval of women's behaviour, whereas a double standard in utilisation implies more disapproval of women's conduct. We conclude that ‘aesthetic capital’ can be seen as not so much something that individuals accumulate and utilise but as something that context-dependent gendered norms regulate.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the expanding literature on sociology has begun to consider physical appearance as a form of capital, or more specifically, as ‘sexual capital’ (Martin & George, 2006), ‘physical capital’ (Shilling, 2012; Smith Maguire, 2008), ‘erotic capital’ (Hakim, 2010), and recently, ‘aesthetic capital’ (Anderson et al., 2010; Holla & Kuipers, 2015), as well as ‘bodily capital’ or ‘girl capital’ (Mears, 2015). Physical appearance as capital is assumed to have the same qualities as other forms of capital: it is exchangeable for other forms of capital. Here, we refer to it as ‘aesthetic capital’ and it can be understood as a combination of different resources or assets related to physical appearance including facial beauty, body shape, size, and physique, as well as styles of grooming and clothing (Anderson et al., 2010).

What has not been examined, however, are the possible societal-level rules, namely, norms that may give different individuals different and unequal possibilities to *accumulate*¹ and *utilise*² their ‘aesthetic capital’ in the first place. Thus, in this paper, we turn our attention to the normative regulation of ‘aesthetic capital’. We argue that studying societal norms is important, as it may help us understand to whom and in what ways it is acceptable to accumulate and utilise this type of capital. We are interested in whether

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¹ By accumulation we refer both to the conscious development of assets (e.g. through beauty practices and consumption) as well as the more unconscious ways in which capital accrues in bodies (in a Bourdieusian sense). Aesthetic capital is a labour-intensive form of capital, because assets developed and accrued must be maintained: i.e. semi-constantly accumulated just to have the same amount of capital. The same is true e.g. of social capital, which also has to be maintained.

² In this paper, we refer to ‘taking advantage’ and ‘utilising’ interchangeably.

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there are double standards in the accumulation and utilisation of ‘aesthetic capital’, and whether the existence of double standards is context dependent. With ‘context’ we refer to different ways of accumulating and utilising ‘aesthetic capital’.

Our data are drawn from a Finnish nationwide survey (N = 1,600). We use a unique dataset with a split-ballot design to study the possible double standards in the accumulation and exploitation of ‘aesthetic capital’. Similar research designs have been used previously by the European Social Survey to study double standards pertaining to family norms. As our interest lies in societal-level norms, this type of research design may be considered a suitable way to study double standards (Rijken & Mertz, 2014; Rijken & Liefbroer, 2016).

The rest of this article is structured as follows. We begin by presenting two key theoretical frameworks to review the very basics of discussion on the normative regulation of ‘aesthetic capital’. First, we discuss the role of physical appearance as a form of capital in consumer culture literature, and second, we engage with feminist approaches to beauty as resource. After discussing both frameworks, we examine previous studies on the accumulation and utilisation of physical appearance to understand the normative regulation of it in different contexts and build hypotheses concerning double standards in the accumulation and utilisation of ‘aesthetic capital’. We then present the data and the methodology on which our analysis is based. Finally, we present our results and end the article with a discussion and draw appropriate conclusions.

2. Literature review, theory, and hypotheses

2.1. The normative logic of ‘aesthetic capital’ exchange: Two frameworks

Norms have been in the interest of sociologists at least from the time of Durkheim. Norms are social rules that regulate individual behaviour. They are embedded in culture and its values, and adherence to them is based on sanctions (for a discussion see, e.g. Portes, 2010). Previous research on double standards has, however, shown that such rules can be different at a societal level for different population groups (e.g. Allison & Risman, 2013; Rijken & Liefbroer, 2016). As a concept, double standards refer to differences in how identical behaviour is evaluated and assigned morality differently based on group membership (Foschi, 2000). Most often, the concept is used to refer to differences in norms for men and women (Rijken & Mertz, 2014).

Previous literature on physical appearance-related norms is, however, inconsistent and relies, to some extent, on zeitgeist analysis rather than rigorous empirical study. Several consumer culture theorists argue that individuals are under normative pressure to take responsibility over their bodies and their appearance and to invest in their maintenance (Baudrillard, 1998; Bauman, 2007; Featherstone, 2007; 2010; Smith Maguire, 2008; Sassatelli, 2017). Consumer culture places a strong premium on meeting the normative standards of ‘beautiful looks’, which is predominantly having a fit body and a youthful and ‘healthy looking’ appearance (e.g. Sassatelli 2017). Drawing on Bourdieu’s ideas of body and capital, Smith Maguire (2008) analysed how in consumer culture, ‘physical capital’ is considered an individual convertible resource, particularly for middle class men and women. According to Smith Maguire, the body is not just a materialisation of class-based taste as Bourdieu (1984) posited, but rather something that also bears value in and by itself (for a discussion, see also Holla & Kuipers, 2015; Mears, 2015; Edmonds & Mears, 2017). Bauman (2007) took this idea even further and analysed how the objectifying propensities of consumer culture ‘for all bodies’ spreads to all spheres of life: individuals themselves become commodities that are expected to have up-to-date knowledge on what is demanded from them appearance-wise in different markets, that is, in different spheres of life (Bauman, 2007). However, these consumer culture perspectives do not pay particular attention to gender.

In sharp contrast to these consumer culture perspectives, in gender studies norms pertaining to physical appearance are thought to vary considerably by gender. According to influential feminist theorists, including Wolf (2002) and Bordo (1993), there is an unquestionable difference in how men and women are expected to cultivate their physical appearance. Women are supposed to express their worthiness by controlling their bodies and suppressing their feminine features in order to be treated equally. However, there is a paradox hidden in beauty and body practices. According to Bartky (1988), femininity is an artifice that is achieved through disciplinary practices that revolve around shaping the size, shape, comportment, and movement of the body and the ‘display of this body as an ornamental surface’ (Bartky, 1988: 132). These practices are considered trivial, shallow, unsubstantial and unimportant because of their association with femininity. Yet, for a woman, forgoing these practices is hardly an option, but rather a violation of norms (as it threatens the gender order) (Bartky 1988; Tseëlon, 1995).

According to Wolf (2002), there is a strong normative pressure for women to engage in what is called beauty work, which constitutes a ‘third shift’ in women’s lives, and which takes time from other more important activities. More recently, it has been argued that the influence of physical appearance -related norms has intensified and is so pervasive that women are expected to be ‘aesthetic entrepreneurs’, constantly managing their own physical appearance (Gill, 2007; Adamson & Salmenniemi, 2017; Gill, 2017; Elias et al., 2017) and to commit to so called aesthetic labour (Elias et al., 2017). What is crucial here, however, is that despite the normative expectations towards women and their physical appearance, women themselves are not necessarily considered the ones gaining the advantage of their physical appearance-related assets (e.g. Bartky, 1988; Wolf, 2002; Adamson & Salmenniemi, 2017). This body of research suggests that women are under stronger normative pressure to accumulate their ‘aesthetic capital’ but may not be normatively allowed to utilise ‘aesthetic capital’ in economic and social exchange.

All the analyses on contemporary culture presented above are certainly important, but call for systematic analyses on gendered double standards and their variations in different contexts. Our aim is to fill this gap. In order to formulate our hypotheses, we next take a closer look at previous considerations on gendered norms on physical appearance in different contexts, that is, different ways of accumulating and utilising ‘aesthetic capital’.

2.2. Double standards in the accumulation of 'aesthetic capital'

The ways to accumulate one's 'aesthetic capital' are vast. Simultaneously, it seems clear that means of attending to one's appearance differ in their societal acceptability. According to previous literature, the norms regarding different body work practices seem to be, above all, about the division between the 'natural' and the 'artificial' as well as the 'authentic' and the 'inauthentic'; everyday grooming practices that have to do with health and hygiene on one end of the continuum and transformative 'artificial' practices such as plastic surgery on the other end (Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Featherstone, 2010; Jones, 2010; Sassatelli, 2010; Widdows, 2018). In her empirical studies on women's hair salon practices, sports, slimming classes, and plastic surgery, Gimlin (2000; 2002) found that that deservingness and authenticity are key factors in establishing certain types of body work as legitimate. Similarly, Sassatelli (2010) showed how both male and female gym goers contrasted fitness training with more artificial and external practices (i.e. plastic surgery and daily practices like grooming). Exercising to enhance one's appearance involves hard work, commitment, and dedication, so the body gained by such practices is considered deserved and authentic. Appearance is seen as a mere side effect of living up to the moral obligation of taking care of oneself (Sassatelli, 2010; see also Smith Maguire, 2008).

Tseëlon (1995) traced the moral judgement of external, artificial beauty procedures to a cultural discomfort with 'feminine' artifice, and the seduction, deception, and threat that artifice signifies. Overall, men are traditionally socialised to perceive their bodies in terms of functionality, and women in terms of looks (e.g. Slevin, 2010; Wearing, 2010), which gives certain practices more masculine connotations and others more feminine ones. This not only affects the value given to these practices, but also their normative approval as practices engaged in by men and women. This may manifest in different normative expectations for men and women, that is, double standards.

In previous literature, such double standards have been discussed particularly in the context of physical appearance and ageing. Previous studies on double standards of ageing suggest, for example, that women are deemed old at an earlier age than men (Barrett & von Rohr, 2008; see also Itzin & Phillipson, 1995), and that women are expected to maintain good and youthful looks throughout their lives (Clarke, 2002). The use of age concealment techniques is expected more from women, whereas men who attempt to conceal greying hair and wrinkles may be evaluated particularly harshly (Harris, 1994).

Even though individual men may respond to the stigma of engaging in 'feminine' beauty practices such as cosmetic surgery by tactically reframing the practice to signify power, authority, and strength (Atkinson, 2008), a particular discomfort with male cosmetic surgery prevails, as the practice indicates a violation of the dominant norms of masculinity (Davis, 2003). Instead, less 'passive' and more 'active' practices such as developing the body through masculine team sports and gym workout are more in line with contemporary norms of masculinity (Wearing, 2010; Riach & Cutcher, 2014; see also Mears, 2014).

Seeing that previous research has focused mainly on how individuals, especially women, experience and negotiate the social expectations concerning physical appearance and related practices, it is difficult to formulate explicit hypotheses concerning the gendered social norms that guide the accumulation of 'aesthetic capital'. Based on the literature presented here, we nevertheless hypothesise that the existence of double standard is dependent on the context, that is, the way of accumulating 'aesthetic capital' (hypothesis 1). Furthermore, we expect that where double standard in accumulation exists, women are the ones being more approved of than men (hypothesis 1a).

2.3. Double standards in the utilisation of 'aesthetic capital'

In the same manner as norms can regulate the possibilities for different individuals to accumulate their 'aesthetic capital', norms also regulate the contexts in which 'aesthetic capital' is exchanged. Applying the idea of capital and markets, which is common in economic sociology, to physical appearance suggests that there is no uniform logic driving markets where capital is exchanged; rather, various markets have unique rules and norms (e.g. Bourdieu, 2005; Zelizer, 2010). This way, the norms that limit the utilisation of 'aesthetic capital' can vary from one context to another at the societal level as well.

For example, Kuipers (2015) shows in her work on beauty standards and taste that not only are there significant differences in how female and male beauty is evaluated (i.e. double standards of beauty) but also that the standards vary by country. The context-specificity of beauty standards has regrettably been overlooked by many economics-based approaches to physical appearance (e.g. Hamermesh, 2011). Similarly, understanding double standards in norms concerning the utilisation of 'aesthetic capital' bears potential to explain some of the discrepancies in the outcomes of studies in the economics-based research tradition. This economics-based line of research tends to explain the preferences and rewards for attractiveness with reference to evolutionary and social psychological ideas of a 'natural' human tendency to favour attractive individuals (e.g. Jæger, 2011; for a detailed discussion, see also Kuipers, 2015; Mears, 2014). The results of such studies have been inconsistent with regard to the gendered nature of physical appearance-related economic outcomes (for reviews, see Hosoda et al., 2003, Hamermesh, 2011; Maestripieri et al., 2017).

Some recent studies suggest that explanation to the inconsistency may be explained by mechanism called 'lack of fit'. The explanation derives from gendered occupational stereotypes and is cognate with the double standards approach. For example, a study conducted by Johnson et al. (2010) suggests that attractive women may face penalties related to beauty while applying for a job traditionally considered masculine, whereas attractiveness was found beneficial for men in all types of jobs (both masculine and feminine). In addition, Paustian-Underdahl and Walker (2016) found that attractive women were considered less suited for male-oriented jobs than unattractive women and men in general. It is argued that whereas men are commonly considered more agentic than women, women's attractiveness is related to femininity and non-agentic behaviour and hence signifies the so called lack of fit for certain jobs or positions (Paustian-Underdahl & Walker, 2016; cf. Eagly & Karau, 2002). Applying this approach to utilisation of 'aesthetic capital' would suggest that women would be less expected to *utilise* something they physically represent in order to gain

economic rewards. That is, to act agentively also in respect of their physical appearance. Hence, in terms of societal-level double standards it would mean that women violating this norm would be particularly *disapproved of*.

The idea of cultural disapproval of women's use of their physical appearance is also proposed by Mears (2015) in her ethnographic study among VIP party circuits. Mears argues that men can take better advantage of women's 'aesthetic capital' than women, and this is because social or economic rewards gained by means of appearance are often culturally stigmatised. As rich men in the VIP field can appropriate the 'aesthetic capital' of attractive VIP girls and exchange it into economic, symbolic, and social capital, the VIP girls themselves are, in principle, offered a ticket to upward mobility in exchange. However, that ticket comes with a whore sticker on it.

In the same vein, Allison and Risman (2013) have found some evidence for double standards in sexual behaviour meaning stricter norms for women than for men. The existence and 'direction' of double standards in more private spheres of life are, however, likely to vary from context to another. This is shown e.g. by Rijken and Liefbroer (2016) in their comparative study on family norms. Double standards in utilisation of 'aesthetic capital' may indeed exist in private spheres of life as well, however it is difficult to formulate clear expectations for our hybrid case. The few sociological studies (Jæger, 2011; McClintock, 2014) that have systematically looked at the importance of physical appearance in partner selection, that is, the exchange of 'aesthetic capital' with other forms of capital outside the labour market, support the idea of no double standards. In these particular studies physical appearance was found to matter for both men and women. In their study on physical appearance in everyday exchange, Mulford et al. (1998) too, found appearances matter for men as well as women. However, it has to be noted that these results do not necessarily rule out the possibility of women being more disapproved of in utilising their 'aesthetic capital', as argued by Mears (2015) among other feminist scholars.

We argue that discrepancies in the previous research on the exchange of 'aesthetic capital' may be the product of gendered norms of capital exchange, which may differ in different social contexts. We hypothesise that the existence of double standards is dependent on the context, that is, the way to utilise 'aesthetic capital' (hypothesis 2). In addition, we expect that where a double standard in utilisation exists, women are the ones being more disapproved of than men (hypothesis 2a).

4. Data and methods

4.1. Sample

As suggested earlier, if physical appearance as capital is assumed to have the same qualities as other forms of capital, it can both be accumulated and utilised in economic and social exchange. To study the possible double standards in the accumulation and utilisation of 'aesthetic capital', survey data were collected in spring 2016. The more general purpose of the survey was to collect data on the aspects and meanings of physical appearance. The survey was eight pages long, and in this paper, we utilise only parts of it. The survey was distributed by mail to a simple random sample of 4000 Finns aged between 15 and 74 years. The sample was selected from the Central Register of Population. As an alternative to the paper questionnaire, the respondents were also given the opportunity to complete the survey online. The final sample included 3994 Finns, as those who could not be reached were omitted from the sample. A total of 1600 Finns responded, which amounted to a 40 per cent response rate. Of these, 280 responded online, and 1320 respondents delivered their responses by mail. As is typical in survey research, younger men were somewhat under-represented in our final data (1–3 percentage points when compared to the general population), whereas older women were over-represented to some extent (3–4 percentage points compared to the population). To correct the bias, the data were weighted to correspond to the age and gender distributions of the Finnish population aged between 15 and 74 years.

To study the double standards in the accumulation and utilisation of 'aesthetic capital', we used a similar research design as was applied in the 2006 European Social Survey (ESS). In the ESS, a split-ballot design was used to study double standards concerning family norms. Similar to the ESS, in our research design, the questions concerning men and women were randomised so that half the respondents answered questions regarding men and the other half answered questions regarding women. If the same respondents answered questions concerning both men and women, they could end up giving similar answers because of the social desirability bias and would thus not reveal the possible double standards in society (see Rijken & Merz, 2014; Rijken & Liefbroer, 2016).

4.2. Measures

We included eight dependent variables in our analysis. First, we operationalised norms concerning the accumulation of 'aesthetic capital' using four attitudinal questions: *How much do you approve or disapprove if a man/a woman* 1) does not want to leave the house without being well groomed, 2) participates in sports in order to modify his/her physical appearance, 3) uses plastic surgery to improve his/her physical appearance, and 4) wants to hide the physical signs of ageing? All dimensions (daily grooming, fitness, anti-ageing practices, and plastic surgery) have been discussed widely in relation to consumer culture and the 'perfect body' which is first and foremost young, fit, and beautiful (e.g. Gimlin, 2002; Featherstone, 2007; Sassatelli, 2010; Widdows, 2018). Although the list is not comprehensive, it includes ways to accumulate one's 'aesthetic capital' that are positioned differently on the natural–more extreme scale, in particular. Second, we operationalised the norms concerning the utilisation of 'aesthetic capital' using the following four attitudinal questions: *How much do you approve or disapprove if a man/a woman tries to take advantage of his/her physical appearance* to 1) get a job, 2) get a higher salary, 3) get friends, and 4) get a spouse? The answers were given on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 'Definitely disapprove'=1 to 'Definitely approve'=5. Descriptive statistics for dependent variables are seen in Table 1. As seen in Table 1, there were some missing values among the responses. According to a detailed missing analysis, they were mostly from the same respondents. We removed these respondents and focused only on those who had valid scores for all the dependent variables.

Table 1
Descriptive overview of the dependent variables

Variable	M (SD)	Missing %	Range
Approval of accumulating 'aesthetic capital'			
Grooming	3.32 (1.03)	4.0	1-5
Sports	3.62 (1.03)	4.4	1-5
Plastic surgery	2.32 (1.13)	4.4	1-5
Hiding signs of ageing	3.03 (1.11)	4.6	1-5
Approval of utilising 'aesthetic capital'			
To get a job	2.69 (1.19)	3.6	1-5
To get more salary	2.40 (1.20)	3.7	1-5
To get friends	2.80 (1.12)	3.6	1-5
To get a spouse	3.30 (1.18)	3.8	1-5

N = 1,600

Our independent variable was a dummy variable for the questionnaire version including categories 0 = female version (questions concerning only women) and 1 = male version (questions concerning only men). In addition to the effect of the questionnaire version, we were interested in the potential mediating and confounding effects of background variables. Accordingly, we controlled several demographic variables, which in previous studies, have been found to be associated with attitudes related to physical appearance.

Our control variables included gender, age, education, partner status, and personal income. Respondents' gender was included as a dummy variable: 0 = female and 1 = male. Age was measured in years and included as a continuous variable in the analysis. We also conducted models with a categorised age variable (seven-year cohorts) but did not find significant differences when they were compared to the estimates that were yielded from the models with a continuous age variable. Education was recoded as 'under tertiary', 'tertiary', and 'master' from the original six-point education variable. Partner status was recoded as a dummy variable, with 1 for those who were single and 0 otherwise. Though we tested the effect of personal income, we removed it from the final analysis as it had an insignificant effect on the models and almost 10 per cent of the observations concerning personal income were missing. A descriptive overview of the variables applied is seen in [Table 2](#) according to the questionnaire.

As mentioned above, half the respondents answered questions concerning only women, while the other half answered questions concerning only men. In this kind of survey design, the questionnaire version that respondents received was based on randomisation and thus the samples should essentially be similar in terms of demographic composition. As [Table 2](#) illustrates, this was true except for a few exceptions. These exceptions are likely to be completely random variations because of the relatively small sample size, as the sampling method was the same for each version and only the two questions that concerned norms were different in the two questionnaire versions. We also controlled for these slight differences by considering the effect of background variables in regression models.

4.3. Analysis strategy

We constructed our analysis in two different sections that were each divided into two stages. We began both sections by presenting direct distributions of four attitudinal variables. In the first section, we focused on variables measuring double standards in

Table 2
Distribution of control variables according to the questionnaire version, unweighted frequencies

Variable	Female version %	Male version %	Total N (%)
Women	58.2	56.0	856 (57.1)
Men	41.2	44.0	638 (42.6)
Missing	0.5	0.0	5 (0.3)
Under 30 years	20.2	20.6	326 (20.3)
30-39 years	12.9	13.7	213 (13.3)
40-49 years	12.8	11.6	193 (12.3)
50-59 years	18.3	19.2	294 (18.7)
60-74 years	35.3	34.1	551 (35.1)
Missing	0.5	0.9	11 (0.7)
Under tertiary	50.7	56.0	851 (53.3)
Tertiary	34.0	30.0	490 (32.0)
Master	14.4	12.7	203 (13.6)
Missing	0.9	1.2	16 (1.75)
Single	27.5	25.0	394 (26.3)
In a relationship	68.9	70.0	1040 (69.4)
Missing	3.6	5.0	64 (4.3)

N = 1498 (Only respondents who had valid scores on dependent variables)

the accumulation of 'aesthetic capital'. In the second section, we analysed the variables concerning the utilisation of physical appearance as a form of capital.

After the analyses of the direct distributions, we conducted multivariable analyses by using ordered logistic regression (OLR). OLR is suitable for analysing ordinal variables without the need for an arbitrary choice in defining the cut-point to use in the dichotomisation of the data for logistic regression. Unlike linear models, ordinal regression analysis only makes assumptions concerning the order of the dependent variable values rather than the distance between the variables. This being so, it is not assumed that the distance between the values is constant across the scale. The precise order in the value levels makes OLR a more effective method for modelling group differences when compared to multinomial logistic regression as it considers the different levels of variables (Harrel, 2015).

OLR assumes that the relationship between each group is the same, which is known as the parallel regression assumption or proportional odds assumption. In other words, the size of coefficients between the two versions are assumed to be the same, irrespective of the categories that are examined, that is, comparing definitely approving with other responses on the scale (i.e. 5 vs. 4+3+2+1) or comparing definitely disapproving with other responses on the scale (i.e. 5+4+3+2 vs. 1). (E.g. Long, 1997.) We tested the parallel regression assumption for each dependent variable according to the independent variable by using the Brant test, in which the rejected hypothesis ($p < 0.05$) means that the assumption of proportional odds is not satisfied³.

While comparing the questionnaire version effects between dependent and confounding variables, we used the *KHB-method* developed by Karlson, Holm, and Breen (2012) by employing the *khb-command* in Stata (Kohler et al., 2011). The KHB-method decomposes the total effect of the questionnaire version and confounders into direct and indirect effects, while being immune to the rescaling bias in OLR models (Karlson et al., 2012). We present three estimates for each model: the direct effect and the total effect of the questionnaire version with confounding variables, and the indirect effect of the version via confounding variables. A direct effect may be found if the version affects the dependent variable by itself, without that effect occurring through some intermediary variable.

5. Results

Figure 1 presents the proportion of responses for each category in the questionnaire version. In general, it appears that double standards do exist, but their strength or even existence seems to be dependent on the context, i.e. way of accumulation. It was somewhat more acceptable for women than for men to develop their appearance-related assets through practices prevailing in consumer culture. In contrast, it was typically disapproved of for men to develop their physical assets.

However, the strength of the double standards varied according to the type of accumulation behaviour. The behaviour that was most disapproved of was using plastic surgery to improve appearance. Over a third of the respondents definitely disapproved of men engaging in such behaviour. Plastic surgery was highly unacceptable for women as well, but the respondents' attitudes were not as definite. When compared to women, men were more likely to be definitely disapproved of (12 percentage points difference), and less likely to be definitely approved of (3 percentage points difference) if they relied on plastic surgery to look better.

Gender differences were even clearer in the double standards pertaining to ageing: a total of 36 per cent expressed their definite disapproval or disapproval of men's efforts to hide signs of ageing. It is noteworthy that a nearly similar distribution of respondents approved (40) of women engaging in such behaviour. Doing sports to improve one's appearance was, to some extent, equally approved and disapproved by both men and women. Only a tenth of the respondents expressed disapproval of this behaviour, while over 60 per cent approved of it. It was quite acceptable to only present oneself as groomed outside the home, and the attitudes and behaviour of men and women were fairly similar in this regard.

Next, we tested the statistical differences between the question versions while considering differences in demographic compositions. We present the results of the OLR according to the questionnaire version (norms regarding men versus norms regarding women) in Table 2. The table shows direct effects for norms regarding women and total effects of the version with confounders, namely gender, age, education, and partner status. It also shows potential indirect effects of the female version via confounding variables.

First, our analysis confirmed that the gender differences in the first two attitudinal variables suggested by the descriptive analysis are statistically significant, whereas the two latter ones are not, supporting hypothesis 1. As compared to women, men are less likely to be approved of ($b = -0.42$; $p < 0.001$) for using plastic surgery to look better. Men hiding the signs of ageing were more likely to be disapproved of than women engaging in the same behaviour ($b = -0.58$; $p < 0.001$). However, we did not find a statistically significant difference between the attitudes towards men and women in terms of everyday grooming behaviour or doing sports in order to improve one's physical appearance. These behaviours were equally approved and disapproved of for men and women. The results support hypothesis 1a. The indirect effects as seen in Table 3, indicate that the effects of the version were not explained by confounding variables.

Next, we turn to the attitudinal questions concerning the utilisation of physical appearance. The descriptive analysis in Figure 2 shows that double standards exist but, again, their strength or even existence seem to depend on the context. However, contrary to accumulation-related norms, norms pertaining to utilisation seem stricter for women. Here, the most unaccepted ways of utilising

³ The results of the Brant Test of the Parallel Regression Assumption for each dependent variable according to the independent variable (questionnaire version). Chi squared values with statistical significances in parentheses: Grooming 4.1 ($p = 0.25$); Sports 7.49 ($p = 0.06$); Plastic surgery 3.65 ($p = 0.30$), Hiding signs of ageing 4.34 ($p = 0.23$); To get a job 0.53 ($p = 0.91$); To get more salary 0.50 ($p = 0.92$); To get friends 1.74 ($p = 0.63$); To get a spouse 0.62 ($p = 0.89$)

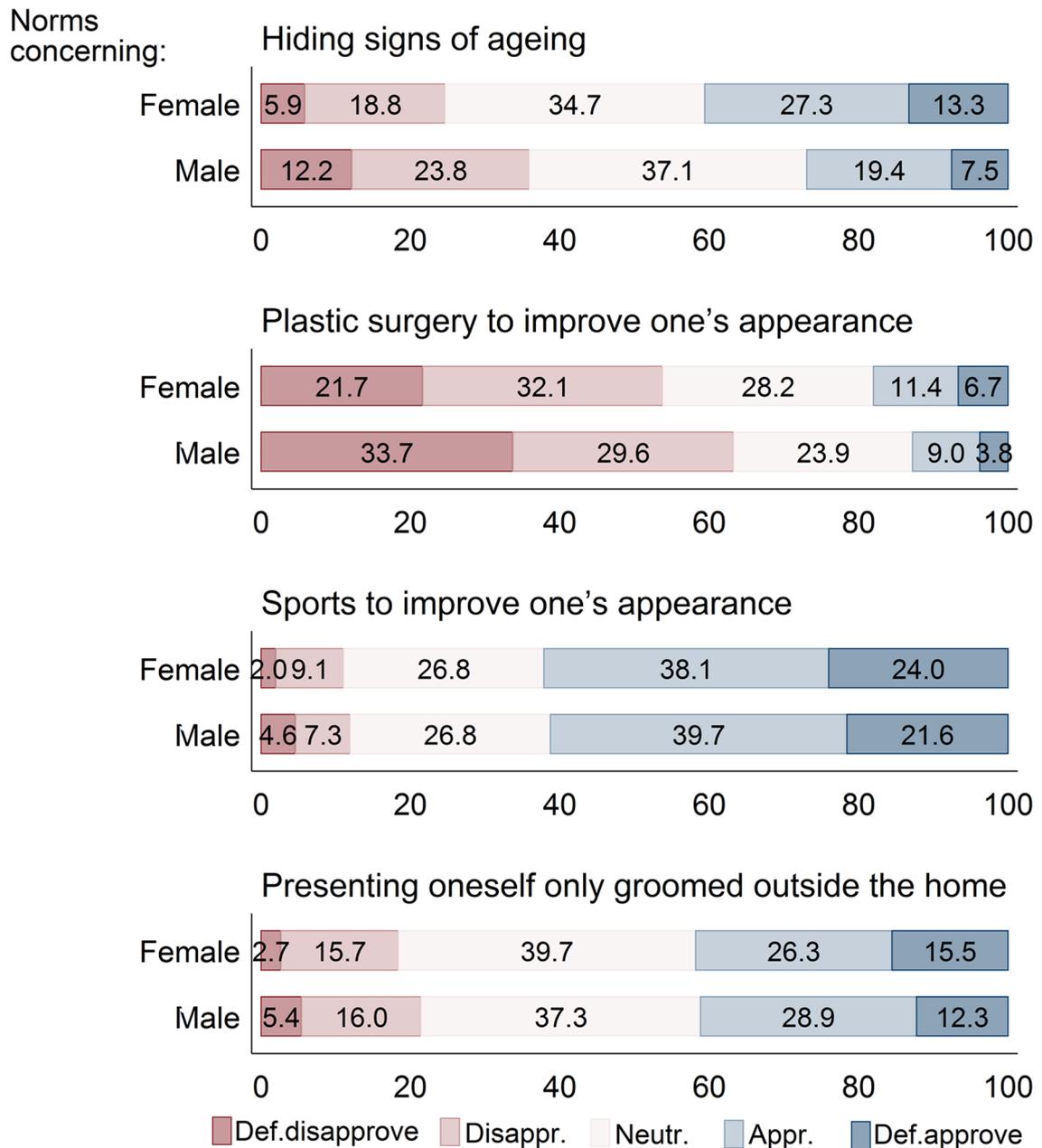


Figure 1. Accumulation of 'aesthetic capital': Distribution of responses for five categories in the questionnaire version (%)

one's physical appearance relate to the context of work life. As many as 31 per cent of the respondents reported that they would definitely disapprove if a woman tried to take advantage of her physical appearance to have her salary increased. Even though this type of behaviour is highly unaccepted for men as well, there is a clear difference between genders (5 percentage points in terms of definite disapproval).

The figure shows that there is an even clearer double standard pertaining to the utilisation of physical appearance in a recruitment situation as women face stricter norms. The sphere of life in which taking advantage of, that is utilising, one's physical appearance was most approved of was intimate relationships, yet it seems to be more approved for men (54 % approved) to utilise their physical assets than it is for women (46 % approved). Finally, the analysis of norms regarding the utilisation of physical appearance in getting friends indicated that the direction of the double standards is the same as it is for other spheres of life: women are more likely to be disapproved of. However, gender differences are somewhat modest when compared to previous variables.

We conducted OLR to analyse statistical differences between versions in the norms concerning utilisation, while also taking account differences in demographic compositions. The models presented in Table 4 confirmed that there was a clear double standard

Table 3
Predicting disapproving attitudes towards the accumulation of 'aesthetic capital'.

	Plastic surgery	Hiding signs of ageing	Sports	Grooming
Direct effects of the male version	0.45 (0.11) ***	0.61 (0.11) ***	0.07 (0.11)	0.13 (0.11)
Total effects of the version with confounders	0.42 (0.11) ***	0.58 (0.11) ***	0.07 (0.11)	0.13 (0.11)
Indirect effects of the version via confounders	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	0 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.01)
<i>via man</i>	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
<i>via bachelor</i>	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.00)
<i>via master</i>	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.00)
<i>via age</i>	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
<i>via single status</i>	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.03)	0.00 (0.00)

Note: KHB decomposed ologit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

regarding the utilisation of physical appearance in a recruitment situation: the norms for women were significantly stricter ($b = 0.31$; $p < 0.01$) than those for men. Gender differences were also statistically significant in salary negotiations as women were more likely to be disapproved of ($b = 0.22$; $p < 0.05$). Norms were also significantly stricter for women regarding the marriage market ($b = 0.34$; $p < 0.01$). These results are in line with hypothesis 2a. However, we did not find significant differences between genders in terms of the utilisation of 'aesthetic capital' in getting friends. According to the decomposition, there were no indirect effects via confounders, and thus, estimations concerning the effect of the questionnaire version were not affected by the demographic factors of respondents.

6. Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we analysed the gendered norms, that is, the double standards pertaining to the accumulation and utilisation of 'aesthetic capital' at a societal level. Thus, we paid attention to the role of normative regulation of 'aesthetic capital'. We were interested in whether there are double standards in accumulation and utilisation of 'aesthetic capital' and whether the existence of double standards is context-dependent. Using a unique and nationally representative survey with a split-ballot design, we were able to analyse the possible double standards in norms at a societal level. First, we found that there are double standards in certain norms pertaining to the accumulation and utilisation of 'aesthetic capital'. Thus, our results showed that the existence of double standards varies by context (hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2). Second, our results showed that double standards pertaining to accumulation implied more approval of women (hypothesis 1a), whereas double standards pertaining to utilisation implied less approval of women (hypothesis 2a).

As double standards do not follow the same gendered normative logic in the spheres of accumulation and utilisation of capital, what they prescribe appears paradoxical in terms of gender. Women are generally more approved of in accumulating their 'aesthetic capital' but are less approved of in exploiting it. This is in line with a rich feminist scholarship (e.g. Bartky, 1988; Wolf 2002; Mears 2015; Adamson & Salmenniemi, 2017). Men, however, face stricter norms if they try to accumulate their 'aesthetic capital', but are less disapproved of trying to exploit it. The paradox that men face is perhaps not as detrimental as the one that women face. Nevertheless, these double standards also put men in a contradictory position where they might have lesser freedom to engage in appearance-related practices to enhance their capital than women, but face less social constraints to benefit from the 'aesthetic capital' that is already ascribed to them.

It seems clear that the field of scholarship on physical appearance in consumer culture (e.g. Bauman, 2007; Featherstone, 2007) fails to note that individuals have to deal with societal-level social rules and that these rules are not the same for everyone. These rules may actually be in conflict with an individual's interest and the general message of global physical appearance-centred consumer culture.

In addition, the whole picture of normative regulation of accumulation and utilisation is more nuanced than some feminist scholars argue. The ways of accumulating 'aesthetic capital' that can be considered more 'natural' and less artificial (i.e. sports and daily grooming) are generally more approved of, whereas potentially more artificial practices (e.g. plastic surgery and hiding the sign of ageing) are more disapproved of. Our results thus echo previous scholarship, which has suggested practices that aim at developing one's appearance may be conceived on a spectrum that has naturalness on one end and artifice on the other, and a spectrum that extends from mundaneness to extremity and rarity (e.g. Sassatelli, 2010; Gimlin, 2002). The more 'artificial' ways of accumulating 'aesthetic capital' are also those pertaining to which we find a double standard: it is more acceptable for women to hide signs of ageing and to undergo plastic surgery than it is for men. On the other hand, we found no double standards in everyday grooming practices and doing sports to look better. This is in line with previous considerations according to which certain means of attending to one's appearance are condemned as more 'external', vain, and hence also more feminine (e.g. Bartky, 1988). A similar division between what is natural and what is not seems to apply to the general acceptance of different ways to utilise 'aesthetic capital'. Utilising one's physical appearance is more widely accepted in the private sphere (i.e. romantic relationships and getting friends) than it is in working life context. Thus, there seem to be strong societal-level social rules that try to prevent individuals, and women in

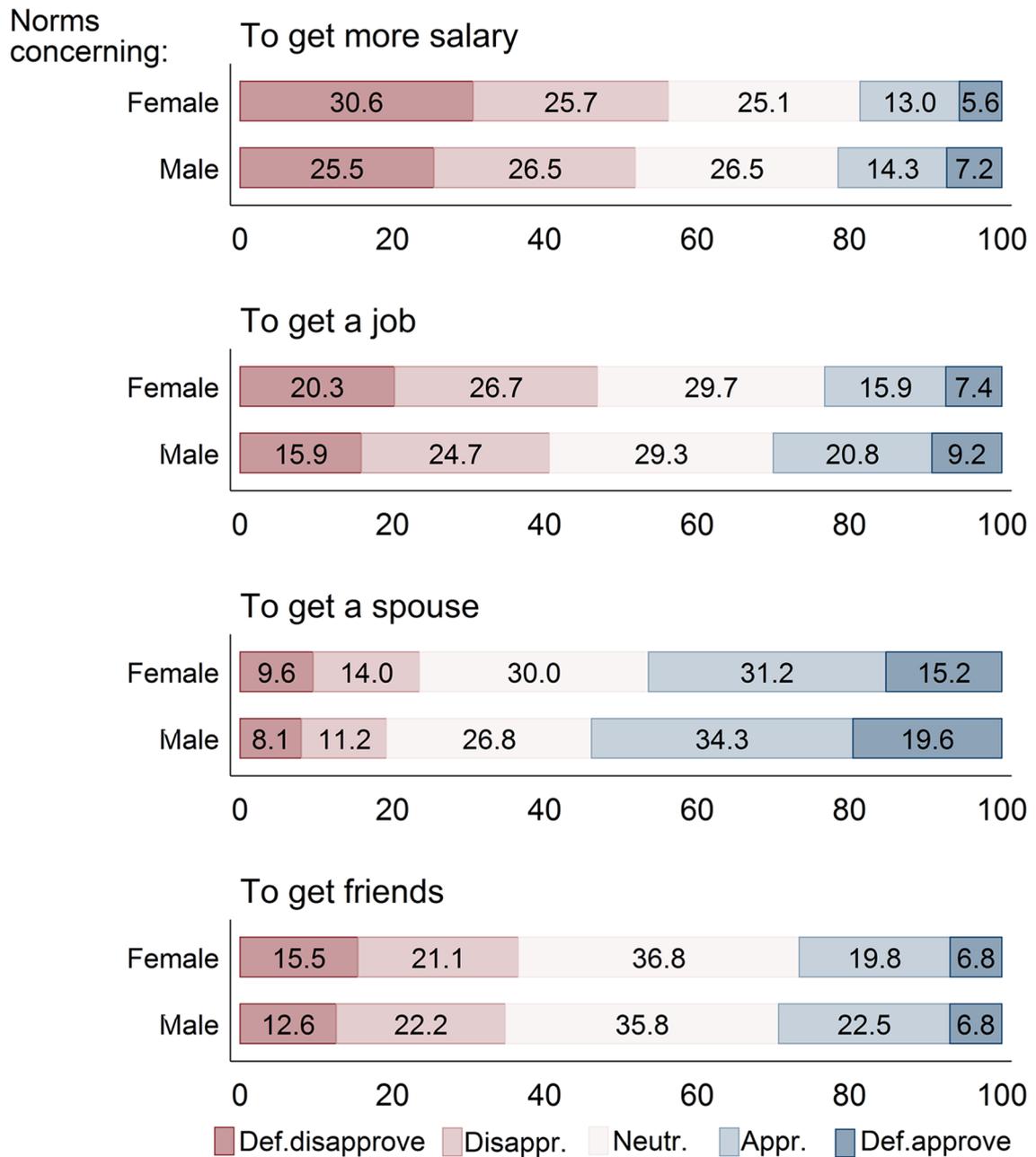


Figure 2. Utilisation of 'aesthetic capital': Distribution of responses for five categories by questionnaire version (%)

particular, from using 'aesthetic capital' in economic exchange.

There are still many unanswered questions on physical appearance as a form of capital and its normative regulation. How do norms restrict people from utilising their aesthetic assets? What are the sanctions for not adhering to norms? The repertoire of survey questions could arguably be more diverse: how would norms around the common practice of dieting, for example, or the practice of tattooing, compare to the 'aesthetic capital'-accumulating practices researched in this paper? Future research can focus on these questions.

Our paper also has some methodological limitations. While survey designs like the one at hand certainly add to our understanding of gendered double standards, a potential problem relates to the interpretation of the survey items. Survey designs like this ask respondents to respond to a hypothetical situation. However, it is hard to tell what aspects of the situation provoked respondents to respond in a particular manner. Nevertheless, even if our results depend on respondents projecting different things onto the scenario, depending on the gender of the person in the mini vignette, it still proves our point about the existence of double standards (cf. Finch, 1987). Furthermore, as our study was conducted in Finland, it may not reflect the strictness of norms or the existence of double

Table 4
Predicting disapproving attitudes towards the utilisation of 'aesthetic capital'.

	To get a job	To get more salary	To get a spouse	To get friends
Direct effect of the female version	0.30 (0.10) **	0.22 (0.10) *	0.34 (0.11)**	0.15 (0.10)
Total effects of version with confounders	0.31 (0.10) **	0.22 (0.10) *	0.33 (0.11) **	0.14 (0.10)
Indirect effects of version via confounders	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
via man	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)
via bachelor	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
via master	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
via age	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
via single status	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)

Note: KHB decomposed ologit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

standards in other countries. Previous cross-country comparisons utilising the same type of research design have shown that certain double standards vary significantly across European countries, however the direction and strength of the previously studied double standards have been similar within the Nordic countries (Rijken & Mertz, 2014; Rijken & Liefbroer, 2016). Thus, it is likely that our results are generalisable to other Nordic countries. The same type of research design used in other countries can add valuable information on physical appearance-related double standards and, hence, gendered social stratification.

Our study contributes to the vast body of literature on physical appearance as a form of capital by reconciling previous discrepancies in the literature. We argue that future scholarship on physical appearance as a form of capital in the fields of stratification studies, cultural sociology, economic sociology as well as gender studies, can benefit from the norm perspective presented in this study. It helps sociologists grasp the fundamentally unequal and context-dependent processes in which 'aesthetic capital' is assigned value, and in which its accumulation and utilisation is encouraged or dissuaded differently for people based on group membership. It is in these processes that attempts to regulate the utilisation of 'aesthetic capital' are made: who is allowed to benefit from looks, and where? We conclude that instead of considering 'aesthetic capital' as something individuals simply exchange and utilise, we ought to conceive of it as always regulated by gendered and context-dependent norms.

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Supplementary materials

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