

Appearance isn't only skin deep: embodiment, masculinity and everyday grooming practices in dementia care

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In dementia studies there is growing interest in embodiment, but to date there has been little exploration of how social and cultural difference impact upon the embodied experiences of people with dementia. This paper presents work from a PhD study which is exploring embodiment and the everyday lives of people with dementia with a particular focus on men's experiences. The research is concerned with what everyday life is like for men with dementia in care settings and includes questions of what it is like to be supported in grooming practices such as shaving and hair care. The study has explored the different ways in which men negotiate space for themselves in these highly feminised spaces and what these negotiations tell us about embodied masculinities in dementia care.

The project is an ethnographic study which sits within a wider investigation of the role of appearance in the lives of people with dementia. Fieldwork has been undertaken in a number of dementia care settings with different institutional structures from day centres to care home and hospital. Observations took place in communal areas, hair salons and on a number of occasions men were observed in bathrooms or bedrooms receiving grooming support. This paper will present some of the preliminary findings from the data and raise questions about the experiences of men. In particular, the discussion will explore how investigation of routine care practices may reveal insights into the gendered nature of embodied encounters in care.

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