The Importance of Appearance

A study of the importance of appearance when attending a job interview

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Abstract

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We have noticed the increased importance appearance and looks seem to have in Western society today. These new tendencies are all pointing at the same thing; image is everything. The widespread obsession with a beautiful surface now seems to be entering the professional arena as well. Hence, our aim with this report is to try to investigate what role physical appearance actually plays when it comes to our careers. We wish to emphasise that we do not take it for granted that this is necessarily problem, we just want to investigate *if* it is.
Our main question in this report is as follows:
Is the appearance of a job applicant important when going through the recruitment process and if so, which criteria matter most?
We have chosen to focus on the recruitment process in general terms, and more specifically on the moment when the employer meets and sees the applicant for the first time - the interview.
We have chosen to divide the theoretical framework into three sections; one part dealing with beauty, a second part discussing clothing as communication, and a third part with focus on the construction of identities; performativity. All of these three fields are related to what we call appearance and will together compose a solid theoretical ground that hopefully will help us understand whether there are certain criteria of appearance that are more important than others when applying for a job. Finally, we present some of the findings from previous studies, enabling a profound comprehension for the topic. In addition, we have carried out comprehensive interviews with recruiters as well sending out questionnaires.
Our conclusion is that appearance indeed *is* important when it comes to job-related matters, but exactly *how* important is very hard to say. We mean that the importance of appearance varies depending on occupation, the recruiter's personal preferences and the applicant's formal qualifications. The opinions of what is seen as appropriate and inappropriate differ a great deal, almost everyone has a wide spectrum of opinions, but certain resemblances can be ferreted out.
We have identified a common idea among the recruiters of what is normal and what ideals you need to live up to. People who do not measure up to the norm will probably always be found. To a certain extent it is probably possible to identify this standard, and adapt oneself to what is accepted by playing a role temporarily. As we see it, the fixation for beauty and superficiality has probably not yet reached its peak; it will most likely continue to be seen as important. Nonetheless, we think the boundaries of these standards and norms will be shifted gradually. We noted that the recruiters found it difficult to express what they really regarded as the best ways of looking and dressing. The norms and standards are difficult to describe since they are so vague. We have understood that it is all about a well-balanced entirety that is quite difficult to define since many people take it for granted and see it as obvious.

Introduction

On the surface

Over a century ago, the famous Irish poet William Butler Yeats wrote the poem "To A Young Beauty". One of the sentences in this poem caught our attention: Yeats wrote, "I know what wages beauty gives."[1] Although Yeats probably did not mean this in its literal way, we feel that today his statement is as striking as ever. One needs only make a quick observation of our immediate environment. We have noticed the increased importance appearance and looks seem to have in Western society today. Every day the media feed us with images of "beautiful" people, i.e. beautiful according to the norm. Our society seems to focus more on our physical appearance than our qualities and personal traits. Actors, singers and celebrities in general, acquire their star status to a great extent because of their looks. Plastic surgery is also more popular than ever today; according to studies 22% of girls aged 15-19 in Sweden would consider plastic surgery, for non-medical reasons[2]. Furthermore, over the last few years a number of new expressions have emerged, such as "personal branding" and even "aesthetic competence"[3]. The latter term is defined as being able to fit in and dress smartly; to understand when one thing is appropriate and when another is not[4]. It is nowadays common that celebrities, politicians for example, hire PR-consultants to help them market themselves the best possible way by creating an impeccable image. These new tendencies in the Western world today are all pointing at the same thing; image is everything. The fixation and endeavour for a perfect façade has resulted in an incessant supply of new arenas, such as home styling, garden design, plastic surgery, exclusive Spas and even beauty care for pets. The obsession with the superficial and beautiful is, as we see it, becoming more and more widespread, indicating that the corporate world is next to be influenced – if it has not already happened.

The process of recruiting new employees has nowadays become much more extensive, due to an increased competition in the labour market. All companies demand different things of their future employees; depending on which sector they are in, their corporate policy, concept and culture. In certain sectors it is of greater importance that the employees have an appearance

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[1] Yeats, William B., 1919
[2] Expressen
[3] Dagens Industri
[4] Göteborgs-Posten

that is representative for the company and the dress code might be more strict or formal. In other sectors, especially where the employees do not have much contact with customers or clients, appearance is less important and the workers may decide themselves what to wear (Warhurst et al. 2000).

So what?

Since the already widespread obsession with a beautiful surface now seems to be entering the professional arena as well, we think the aesthetic demands on the labour market is an interesting topic for many reasons. Mainly because we feel that society may be discriminating some groups of individuals. In the world of today, there are already countless forms of discrimination, and persons subjected to discrimination. In today's Sweden it is not easy to get a job, especially if you do not have much work experience[5]. In this essay we want to investigate if such a seemingly trivial thing as your physical appearance is something that employers consider important. Within the term appearance we include a variety of qualities; everything from facial features, height and weight to clothing, accent and posture. It is not just *how* you look- it is the essence of your being.

However, we wish to emphasise that we do not take it for granted that this is necessarily problem, we just want to investigate *if* it is. When applying for a job, you are often thoroughly scrutinised, the interviewer wants to know about your experiences and qualifications as well as your persona – who you are and how you behave and act in certain situations. It might therefore be plausible that a person's appearance is a factor that the interviewer takes into consideration – either consciously or unconsciously. We also wish to examine which factors recruiters in general consider most important when assessing applicants. The answers we will collect will be the basis of our analysis and help us judge whether this, in fact, is a problem or not. **Hence, our aim with this report is to try to investigate what role physical appearance actually plays when it comes to our careers.**

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[5] Norrländska Socialdemokraten, Arbetsförmedlingen

Research questions

To be able to perform qualitative research of our chosen topic we will focus on a few, carefully selected questions in order to attain a focus manageable in size. Our main question in this report is as follows:

● *Is the appearance of a job applicant important when going through the recruitment process and if so, which criteria matter most?*

As mentioned earlier, there is a wide range of different qualities (or criteria) that constitutes a person's appearance. If we are to find out that appearance is indeed important, it is plausible that some criteria matter more than others do. To facilitate our aspiration to answer this question we will examine the following sub-questions:

● *What is considered as important qualities and what is considered as off- putting?*
● *Are there higher demands on the employee's appearance in certain occupations?*

We find this first sub-question interesting since it is of great importance to understand which factors the recruiters focus on when assessing a candidate. If some of the qualities regarded as the most important and/or most off-putting by the recruiters have to do with appearance, it will be easier for us to understand the connections between people's appearance and their chances to get a job. Even if none of the most important qualities have to do with a person's appearance, it would still help us to draw conclusions about our main question.

The second question is interesting since it could help us understand why different recruiters give different answers (*if* that turns out to be the case!). In several of the scientific studies we have found, the authors point out that there is indeed a difference in demands depending on occupation. For example, some of the studies we will mention later on indicate that in more service-orientated jobs where face-to-face interaction between employees and customers is of great importance, firms seek employees with specific characteristics. Employers within this sector do not primarily want to hire people with technical skills; instead there is greater emphasis on physical appearance and aesthetic competence. The firms are looking for people who can represent the firm's image and attract customers. We wish to investigate if this

assumption is correct in order to draw a more balanced conclusion when answering our main question.

Frame of Reference

To find theories that could help us answering our research questions, we first had to define the term 'appearance' to ourselves. After thorough consideration, we chose to include a variety of qualities within this term, such as facial features, weight, clothing, posture and behaviour. Since this is a rather broad definition, we needed a wide enough theory that still was not too generalising or diffuse. Neither did we want to leave out aspects that seemed trivial and obvious since we think that the most remarkable findings often emerge while describing and taking a closer look at the seemingly plain. Thus, we have chosen a theoretical framework that explains different aspects of appearance, to pass on the comprehensive meaning of the term to our conclusions.

To facilitate for our readers, we have chosen to divide the theoretical framework into three sections; one part dealing with beauty, a second part discussing clothing as communication, and a third part with focus on the construction of identities; performativity. All of these three fields are related to what we call appearance and will together compose a solid theoretical ground that hopefully will help us understand whether there are certain criteria of appearance that are more important than others when applying for a job. Finally, we present some of the findings from previous studies, enabling a profound comprehension for the topic.

The ugly truth about attractiveness

In this part we will present the concept of beauty and try to establish what beauty really is. What is deemed to be beautiful often seems to be a matter of taste. Research however proves that certain homogenous beauty standards do exist within cultures. Thereafter we will try to unearth what impact beauty has on life; how a person's appearance brings about preconceived notions about their persona.

Beauty

According to the old saying, beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. It may seem difficult to make objective conclusions about what is regarded as beautiful and what is not. Surely, we have all been astounded by the difference in opinion, of what is attractive and what is not, between our friends and ourselves. Sometimes, it seems as if the views of which physical attributes are most appealing are as many as there are persons. Beauty often strikes you as a highly subjective matter. The ancient Greek philosophers were convinced that The Golden Mean was the benchmark for beauty, whereas the African Ubangi tribe do not care at all about the proportions of the body – as long as pieces of wood as large as plates are inserted behind the lips a tribe member is considered very attractive (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986). The difference in beauty standards of different cultures make it tempting to reach the conclusion that what someone considers attractive is highly personal and depending on the individual. However, there is evidence demonstrating considerable agreement on what is regarded as appealing and unappealing within a culture, and ratings of beauty even evince some constancy across cultures, indicating that a general yardstick for beauty really exists. Research by anthropologists, sociologists and social psychologists conclude that even though beauty and physical attractiveness are inexact terms, people have no trouble recognising or agreeing on who is beautiful and who is not (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986; Hamermesh & Biddle 1994; Bell & McLaughlin 2006).

In Western Society, the media continually promote a specific beauty ideal. Europeans as well as Americans agree with the media's presentation of what is beautiful and what is not. The Western standard of good looks does not allow for exceptional deviations from the norm. The fact that divergence from the multitude is not appreciated is not extraordinary for the Western Society of today; even the ancient Greeks considered that to be extreme was to be imperfect (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986). A number of scientists have come to the conclusion that "Research indicates that persons whose appearance or attributes differ from expectations for typical or 'normal' others in a context might be stigmatised and experience negative employment outcomes" (Bell & McLaughlin 2006: 466). One concern about the ideals of beauty may be that they are rapidly changing. Even though the standards, indeed, are never static and fashions in beauty come and go there is still significant concordance between people of different generations about what is appealing and what is not (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986). Still, there appears to be no Darwinistic explanation for the different fashions of

beauty; "its ideals change at a pace far more rapid than that of the evolution of species…" (Wolf 1991: 12).

Conceptions of Appearance and Beauty

In order to answer our main research question, if appearance is important to get a job, we need to establish if there is a difference in how beautiful versus homely job applicants are being conceived by recruiters and if a certain physical appearance brings about advantages or disadvantages. We will also try to investigate this further when carrying out our interviews. To deepen our knowledge about the impact looks have on career-related matters we will first need to investigate the conceptions of different appearances.

Naturally, how you perceive another person does not only depend on their looks. However, when it comes to people you have never met before and know nothing about, you do not have other information than their looks to base your first impression on. Your appearance is the one thing that is obvious on all social occasions. "Other information may be more meaningful but far harder to ferret out." (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986: 43). Hence, stereotyping on the basis of a person's physical attributes occurs quickly and easily (Bell & McLaughlin 2006).

What kind of preconceived notions about beautiful versus ugly people exist, then? A large quantity of experimental studies and research has been carried out while trying to shed light upon this subject. It appears that, in general, most people's reactions to and expectations of beautiful people are much higher and more favourably biased. Attractive persons are deemed to be warmer, stronger, more honest, kind, sociable, sensitive, interesting, outgoing, and popular, to have better self-esteem and better character, and to be more desirable as life partners and dates than less appealing persons (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986; Bell & McLaughlin 2006). They are also seen as leading more fulfilling lives and having better personalities, as well as being perceived as creators of their own destinies (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986). Slim and attractive persons are also seen as more able and motivated than overweight or unattractive ones (Bell & McLaughlin: 1986 refer this to Veblen, 1899 and to Weber, 1911). This is nothing exclusive for only a few countries; there is evidence of similar types of preconceived notions about the beautiful in non-western cultures as well (Bell & McLaughlin 2006).

Generally, women's appearances evoke stronger reactions – both positive and negative. Beautiful women are also easier to remember than homely-looking Plain Janes (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986). However, according to one study, women emphasising their sexuality are perceived as less competent and less intelligent than women dressed more formally when applying for high-status jobs, whereas when applying for low-status jobs a sexy appearance did not create any negative reactions (Glick et al. 2005).

One of the oldest preconceived notions is that what is beautiful is good, sane and natural and what is ugly is mad, bad or stupid. Good looks are often associated with a higher intellect, and it has been proved that parents, teachers and employers are positively biased by attractive persons even though there is no general, obvious link between attractiveness and competence (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986). Teachers and parents treat pretty children more encouragingly and give them more attention, and teachers give attractive students better grades. This positive bias works both ways. Experimental studies, where students had to grade teacher's performances, state the same thing; the more attractive teachers were perceived as much more interesting to listen to, more friendly, more encouraging, better as teachers and gave the impression of having tried harder, even though the appealing and the unappealing teachers behaved identically. Nonetheless, when the students were tested on their comprehension of the lecture, they had learned just as much –or little– independent of the teacher's looks (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986, refer this to Chaikin et al. 1978; Goebel & Cashen 1979). One explanation for this preference of the pretty might be that of the expectations involved, people expect more from more attractive persons – and get more. This is also known as the Pygmalion effect; a person turns into the person others expect them to become, the expectations of others turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Another common prejudice based on looks is that people in general assume that appealing and unappealing people are different (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986). It is perhaps not surprising that this way of stereotyping people result in preferential treatment towards those regarded as appealing and discrimination against those regarded as unappealing and/or overweight. This occurs even when job requirements and performance are not linked to the physical attractiveness or slenderness of a person (Hamermesh & Biddle 1994).

Preferences for the Pretty – Discrimination of the Homely

A number of scientists have come to the conclusion that people with an appearance that in some way differs from the norm, often get treated more negatively when it comes to work-related matters (Hamermesh & Biddle 1994; McEvoy 1994; Harper 1999; Chiu & Babcock 2002; French 2002; Saporta & Halpern 2002, Morris 2005). In order to prevent this kind of discrimination, there are a number of different laws against discrimination in the world. In Sweden, the law of prohibition of discrimination (2003:307) only states the explicit prohibition of discrimination of a person on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or functional disability. According to this law what constitutes discrimination is; direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and instructions to discriminate[6]. Hence, in Sweden, appearance discrimination is not illegal. In the US, however, a number of states and cities have laws and regulations against discriminating unattractive people. For example, the city of Washington DC and Madison, Wisconsin, prohibit discrimination on 'personal appearance'. Even though this type of regulations exists in some parts of the country, a great number of US employers have been sued for discrimination (Bell and McLaughlin 2006). For example, one American woman with a lack of teeth in her upper jaw filed a lawsuit against her place of work when her employer would not let her return to work unless she started to wear dentures. Other conspicuous examples include one woman who was fired for having a hair colour not of her "own ethnic origin" and another woman who was fired for wearing a moustache (McEvoy 1994; Bell & McLaughlin 2006).

Although many aspects of a person's physical appearance come into play, weight seems to be an especially feared factor; people stated that they would more willingly be mean, stupid, getting run over by a truck, losing limbs or even die (!) than being fat (Bell & McLaughlin 2006). In the US a great number of people have a weight problem, this fact might lead you to think that since it is that common, people would feel compassionately about others with the same condition. Evidently, they do not (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986). Most of the time, unappealing and overweight people are not as likely to get a job as appealing and slim people, and when they do, they are more likely to get non-visible jobs, earn less, receive more disciplinary actions and have their performance evaluated more negatively, although for most jobs no connection exists between work performance and weight and physical attractiveness (Bell & McLaughlin 2006). Weight is one physical characteristic that is particularly tightly

linked with prejudice. The most common preconceived notions about overweight people have to do with their general health, motivation, competence, discipline, stress level and preferences for physical exercise (Saporta & Halpern 2002; Bell & McLaughlin 2006).

Communication, Symbolism and Clothing

"Carelessness in clothing is moral suicide" Honoré de Balzac.[7]

With the intention of understanding if looks and clothing may play an important role in the recruitment process, we will first discuss in what ways clothing may have a symbolic function and how certain garments are related to a certain status or a specific social worth. This will help us get a better understanding of what is seen as appropriate and correct when applying for a job and what is not. Further, when analysing our gathered material, this theory will be a guide for us to make a suitable and hopefully interesting study of the importance of appearance in recruitment processes.

Semiotics, the science of symbols, points out that humans do not only communicate directly and this science is a tool in understanding how we communicate through symbols. We sometimes use an object to stand for or represent something else. Here the terms signifier and signified are used; a symbol represents something else, it is a signifier for something and that 'something' is the signified (Jackson & Carter, 2002). In clothing a businessman's suit may be a signifier for high status and power and a shirt worn open and without a tie may signify informality or casualness. A symbol conveys information about values, beliefs and emotions and clothing as a metaphor can only be understood within an institutional or social context (Barnard 1996).

The appearance including clothing, body language and other psychical features is a way of expressing yourself and can be used to make a statement or show the environment who you are. Fashion and clothing are ways of non-verbal communication, a non-spoken language, and is understood in relation to others (Crane 2000).
Clothing can thus be used as a medium in which one person sends a message to another person. The message is the sender's intention and it is transferred through clothing and then

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[6] Jämo
[7] Quotegarden.

translated by the receiver (Barnard 1996). Depending on the receiver's own cultural experience and expectations the message is translated and produced into a meaning that, consequently, is subjective and may be diverse. Clothing can also be used to create identities, as a way of self-presentation and to categorise others. Different aspects of people, like their gender, age and profession, can be visualised through clothing, and you learn to interpret, understand and use colours and special features in order to be able to distinguish between young and old, male and female, formal and casual, modern and old fashioned etc (Jacobsson 1998).

Different clothes may represent different meanings for people depending on their beliefs and experiences. Sometimes, symbols or garments that from the beginning were intended to represent a special ideology or a certain meaning are later on given another significance that represents something completely different. This is quite often the case with fashion; the symbol of Che Guevara or the Palestinian scarf are used as fashion rather than a statement and people sometimes do not know about their origin. However, there are certain common rules in the way people interpret clothing and looks which over time have been transformed into common knowledge; for example, a clean and tidy look is equivalent with a person who takes care of him- or herself.

Fashion and clothing may be seen as "artefacts, practices and institutions that constitute a society's beliefs, values, ideas and experiences" (Barnard 1996:36). A person's way of dressing is not merely a method to stand out and differentiate him- or herself from the majority. It is also a way to make a statement about your identity, values and beliefs, as well as signalling your social group affiliation – not only to other groups, but to your own group too. Punk rockers and Mods are examples of groups that express their membership of a distinct social group or class through looks and attributes. Barnard argues that it is the social interaction arisen from a person's clothing that makes them a member of a group He exemplifies this with skinheads; it is the cropped hair, the Doctor Marten shoes et cetera that signals being a skinhead – if a person does not have these attributes he or she is not thought of as a skinhead. In other words, clothing and fashion are means by which you communicate who you are, and your membership is settled and created through this communication (Barnard 1996).

The presentation of oneself, including clothing, is also an indicator of social worth or status. Depending on how you look, expectations of how you are supposed to behave and your position in society follow. People make judgements about who you are based on your clothing. These preconceived notions enables social interaction to take place more smoothly and helps to avoid embarrassment since a person's appearance often gives you a hint about their personality and background. The knowledge about who a person is, is necessary in order to behave appropriately towards him or her (Barnard 1996).

There are also expectations and preconceived notions about how you should look when you have a certain occupation. The differences in occupational status may be visualized through clothing; a doctor's uniform is dissimilar from a nurse's outfit, which justifies treating them differently. You may also have different expectations of their behaviour (Barnard, 1996). Another example is within the military or police departments were a shift in the colour of the costume or its ornaments also marks a shift in authority. Well-defined rules state how clothing items such as men's suits, women's suits or uniforms for certain occupations are to be worn. The dress within the economic sector is also quite clear; here a more formal dress code is preferable. Clothing behaviour in the workplace can consequently be said to communicate the hierarchical style of organisation, matched well with divisions in social classes (Joseph 1986; Crane 2000).

Furthermore, clothing does not only communicate expected service or what sort of job people have, it may also show or indicate at which level in an economy people work. There is, for example, an old-fashioned but very familiar terminology that divides people into two groups; white-collar dressed and blue-collar dressed, with the first mentioned meaning people working in offices, and the latter meaning people with professions connected with manual labour (Barnard 1996). In other words; a division between high- and low-status jobs that is marked through what people wear.

In the nineteenth century, clothing was an important way of showing social status and class (Barnard 1996; Crane 2000). Among the French working class, the use of different hats was a way of claiming one's status. Today, in the western world, differences in class are not very easy to discern when fashion has become more available for everyone, and copies of the more exclusive clothing brands are easy to buy. There has been "a gradual democratization of clothes" (Crane 2000:240). Instead there is a pretty sharp contrast between what people wear

at work and their leisure wear. There are two clothing cultures; one signifying the world of work and the other signifying the world of leisure. Clothes worn in the workplace demonstrate hierarchy rather clearly, whereas leisure clothing does not necessarily show social class. Leisure clothing is often used to express one's personal identity and that includes a wide range of alternatives and styles, which may derive from popular culture and other influences (Crane 2000).

The business suit

In order to describe how clothing may function as communication and symbolise something else, we will here exemplify with the business suit, and make a short description of it and its meaning. Further, the business suit is a garment that is universally strongly associated with work, and is therefore a good example of how a person may enter a role.

The business suit originated in England at the end of the nineteenth century, when upper class men had to enter the labour market and work for their living. The suit was rather quickly spread among white-collar workers, and in the nineteen-thirties it had become a standardised garment in offices around the world. Since then, there have been strict rules about exactly how a business suit is to be made and worn. Very precise, detailed descriptions about the shape and size of collars and the length and width of trousers, as well as which colours are correct, still govern (Crane 2000; Mörck & Tullberg 2004). A rather restricted range of colours is appropriate; preferably black, navy blue, grey or sometimes brown. The business suit was originally designed for men, when women wear business clothes they are quite similar; dark suits with shirts or jumpers in light colours and moreover discrete jewellery and make-up (Mörck & Tullberg 2004).

In its role as a standardised dress, the suit has facilitated communication between businessmen around the world. People from different countries can more easily get together when they dress the same; there are no cultural differences in status or prestige – the business suit creates a social community (Mörck &Tullberg 2004). Moreover, the suit can be seen as suppressing individuality; it clearly demonstrates a person's membership of a certain group or powerful institution where everyone dress the same. Simultaneously, it also emphasises the status and power of the individual (Joseph 1986; Mörck & Tullberg 2004). The suit is often seen as the businessman's uniform, and with its simplicity and conservative colours it is

perfect for anyone who does not want to diverge from the multitude. Instead, by wearing different kinds of suits, from ordinary and casual suits to more fashionable and strict ones, there is a possibility to distinguish oneself from the others. It is through the shape and quality of the suit that differences in rank and status become visible.

Performance and performativity

"Being natural is simply a pose" Oscar Wilde[8].

So far, we have looked upon what beauty really is and how you may communicate and relate yourself to others through clothing. Considering this, we wonder if there also exist preconceived notions about how you are supposed to act and behave in certain occupations and if there are possibilities to play with identity. This will be important for us later on, when examining our gathered material.

Within *Social Constructivism,* the belief is that the social world is created[9]. People do not have any genuine or authentic characteristics; much is created and we are all actors in a sort of drama. *Performativity* is inspired by social constructivism and this viewpoint is used to describe that gender is created through role-playing; 'gender is a stylized repetition of acts' (Butler 1990:140). The constant repetition produces gender and states what is natural and what is typical feminine or masculine. People are producing these identities themselves and behave and act like a woman or man is supposed to do, in order to fulfil the environment's expectations. One way to dissolve gender identities is to overact or parodying. Butler means that the performativity of gender is easiest revealed when, for example, a man dresses like a woman; drag or cross-dressing clearly shows what we think is typically feminine or masculine and that there are certain attributes, which produce gender (Butler 2005). Moreover, other categories of identity but gender may also be produced by acting and role-playing; for example colour, ethnicity and class. The identity is a social construction, an act consisting of manipulated codes, where image and behaviour is part of the acting. Through preconceived notions about how people within different categories should be or behave, there are constructed identities. These identities become stable because of the constant repetition and are made visible through clothing and other attributes that function as symbols.

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[8] Wilde, O. "The Picture of Dorian Gray" page 8.

In social rituals, like funerals or weddings etc, you are supposed to wear something special or act in a certain way. Everyone knows about the unwritten rules and you do probably not wear what you wear everyday. An employee within a certain occupation, with its adherent routines and assignments, may also be seen as a type of a drama. The role of the employee can be seen as a daily performance of work where 'embodied dispositions', i.e. appearance, gesture, manners and so on, are all part of the drama (Hochschild 1983; Witz et al. 2003). These embodied dispositions are especially important when talking about people with more visible jobs[10], where face-to-face interaction is of great importance in a kind of performative play (Witz et al. 2003). Due to the interaction between employees and customers, firms seek workers with personal characteristics that match the customers' demands and which make the 'face-to-face' contact more spontaneous and effective. Employers within these sectors do not primarily want to hire people with technical skills; instead there is greater emphasis on physical appearance and aesthetic competence and they are looking for people who can represent the firm's image and attract customers (Nickson et al. 2003, Warhurst et al. 2000). Moreover Warhurst et al. discuss that there is a selection in the recruitment process where firms are looking for the 'right' sort of appearance that often is more important than any technical skills. Employees within these jobs are frequently on display themselves and therefore also a product of and representative for the organisation's image (Nickson et al. 2003, Witz et al 2003). As an example of this, Witz et al. mention a training programme in Glasgow, which aimed to help unemployed persons to better understand the demands in the labour market. The unemployed were given courses of acting and role-playing and the courses were said to help them to understand how some occupations is more about performing a role and presenting a different version of one self.

Other authors are also describing some professions as playing a role or performing a drama. When working, you may change into another identity that is related to your job and that often is more professional or that demands another personality (Hochschild 1983; Mörck & Tullberg 2004). After studying shareholders' meetings, Mörck & Tullberg (2004) perceived those meetings as performances where the management is giving a performative play. The management behaves and dresses in a certain way; they do not act really relaxed or natural and they are wearing business suits of a typical cut. The acting is stylised and dissociated and

[9]Rosenberg, T. "Könet Brinner"

[10] With visible jobs we mean occupations that includes a lot of interpersonal contact; for example working as a salesman, consultant, sales associate, or waitress.

rang or status among the participants becomes visible through how relaxed or stiff they are supposed to act. Among those participating as presenters or speakers in the meetings, the business suit is an obligation and is seen as a kind of uniform. Those representing smaller companies do also have less conventional dresses, showing their status as members of the public society.

Working as a flight attendant may also be seen as performing a role (Hochschild 1983). Friendliness, positive attitude and a warm personality are qualities that a flight attendant is supposed to have in order to perform well at work. When studying the recruitment process and initial training for the attendants, Hochschild noted how the recruiters had special preferences when it came to the attendants' looks and their ability to act well and have a friendly personality. She calls this *emotional labour,* and the attendants that were most talented in taking stage directions about how to present the image of the flight company, were selected. One of the recruiters did also mention that "the secret to get a job is to imagine the kind of person the company wants to hire and then becoming that person during the interview" (Hochschild 1983: 96).

The ideas about performativity thus explain that identity can to some point be created, and depending on ones abilities to play a role and perform a drama, the environments' expectations will be fulfilled. Moreover, it seems to be more important in certain occupations to be able to perform a role. When later relating our gathered material, we may see if the kind of acting described above, can be useful when applying for a job and whether it is more important in certain occupations.

Attractiveness and chances to get a job

"Many are ashamed to admit that such trivial concerns –to do with physical appearance, bodies, faces, hair, clothes –matter so much" Naomi Wolf[11].

In our intention to understand and examine if there is a connection between how you look and your chances to succeed in the workplace, we look at previous research and studies within this field. A multitude of studies within the fields of psychology and sociology, have been carried out with results showing links between attractiveness and labour market success.

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[11] The Beauty Myth, page 9.

These studies will function as a part of our theoretical frame of reference, as we believe a solid and a well examined background will help us to easier understand our own gathered material and moreover find possible connections.

Some of the studies mentioned in the previous chapter do also confirm the existence of connections between physical appearance and the probability to be employed (See Hamermesh & Biddle 1994; Harper 1999). Even though the employer is aware of the fact that there is no actual difference in competence and skills between an appealing and an unappealing worker (with the same qualifications, of course), there might be a variation in the public's or client's perceptions of the employee, which could result in a difference in revenue (Hatfield & Sprecher 1986). To be physically attractive has also proved to be an advantage when it comes to performance ratings and promotions (Bell & McLaughlin 2006).

Attractiveness may also affect other dimensions of one's professional life, for example; below average-looking women are not participating in the labour market as often as more attractive women (Hamermesh & Biddle 1994). Other results point out that attractive women are more likely to be working in professional or clerical occupations than less attractive women. Furthermore, relatively short or overweight men are less likely to be employed in professional occupations and short or overweight women are less likely to be employed in clerical occupations (Harper 1999).

Other studies discuss that when job applicants' qualifications are similar, the appearance becomes the determining factor in hiring decisions and that attractive applicants are perceived to be more qualified than unattractive applicants (Drogosz & Levy 1996; Jackson et al 1995)

More recent studies do also lend credibility to the assumption that attractive people have better chances in the selection process when applying for a job. One study, examining the selection process of candidates for a trainee program in Hong Kong, declares that the human resources management specialists, who were evaluating and selecting the candidates, were influenced by attractiveness. When evaluating the candidates' resumes, they were also shown photographs of the candidates' faces. Other things equal, good-looking candidates were preferred (Chiu & Babcock 2002). A number of other researchers have come to the same conclusion (see for example Hamermesh & Biddle 1994; Bell & McLaughlin 2006).

Most of the studies mentioned have gathered their material in somewhat complex ways, for example by anonymous surveys of considerable proportions. Moreover, all of these studies

mentioned have been performed abroad and little on this topic has been investigated in Sweden so far. Thus, we wish to investigate in our interviews whether the same assumption of an attractiveness bias may be plausible here as well. Naturally, the proportions of our investigation will not be as extensive.

Now we have learned that beauty may be seen in many different ways, yet common standards that people recognise and agree upon exist. There are several preconceived notions that probably affect us more than we think. We have also learned that what we wear sends out different signals about our identities that is interpreted differently depending on the receiver. Some things convey stronger messages than other things do. Not least, we have learned that we can look upon our identity as something constructed through constant repetition. Previous studies have come to the conclusion that our way of looking does affect different aspects of our careers. Now it is time for us to find out ourselves what recruiters really think. Eventually, we will connect the theories with the gathered material in our analysis in order to draw our own conclusion.

Method

Getting started: The Preliminaries

When choosing subject and research question for this essay, we started with a wide perspective and looked at the world around us. We had both noticed a seemingly never-ending fascination for the shallow and superficial. This has, as we see it, escalated over the last decades with a constantly expanding beauty industry. Our aim is to try to investigate what role physical appearance plays when it comes to our careers; thus, our method is of the exploring kind. Initially, we did not have much knowledge about this issue and we were not sure whether it was a problem or not. Consequently, our essay is an investigation of a matter rather than a problem-solving study.

Since the 'labour market' is a rather broad term we chose to focus on the recruitment process in general terms, and more specifically on the moment when the employer meets and sees the applicant for the first time - the interview. We chose to focus on this particular occasion since we believe that *if* the employer has any kind of demands concerning the applicant's

appearance, the interview is the crucial moment when these demands would be most concrete. The interview is the juncture when the final elimination or selection takes place.

To get a general view about what had been written on this subject, and to see whether it had been paid attention to at all, we first used the Internet to search for articles and news concerning attractiveness and beauty. Using the search engines *Google* and *Mediearkivet,* we came across an abundance of articles concerning beauty published in daily press and magazines in Sweden, but a link between beauty or attractiveness and job outcomes was not that easily found. The material concerning beauty and attractiveness was used as an introduction to the subject for us and to find data about issues concerning beauty to use in the introductory part.

To extend our search for articles concerning beauty and the labour market, we turned to the electronic databases in the library of Gothenburg University. We used the search engine *Gunda* to search for articles and studies of our topic in international scientific journals. This resulted in several findings of articles about beauty and attractiveness related to job outcomes. Most of these studies concerned attractiveness and earnings and did not put attractiveness in relation to the prospects of obtaining a job. However, we found some studies taking at least some aspects into consideration and focused on them. Moreover, when reading the studies we looked at the referred sources, which provided us with further information about our topic. One problem with the studies was that there were not so many of them that concentrated on exactly the same aspects that we wanted to concentrate on. Thus, we had to study and compare the results from many different articles to gather enough information about our specific subject. The articles were used partly in our theoretical frame of reference and partly as a means to get a better insight of the chosen subject. We also wanted to give the reader a chance to see what had been written before on the subject.

Interviewing

In order for us to answer our research question, we wanted to combine studying previous articles and studies with meeting recruiters and making interviews. We considered the interviews as very important since the personal contact and conversation with a recruiter would make it easier for us to extend our research. When interviewing, we were able to ask more precise questions that would help us to better answer our main question. In addition, the

material from the interviews would also help us to compare the information and conclusions in the articles to the opinions of professional recruiters and assess the credibility of the studies.

By making qualitative interviews we tried to bring to light what the recruiters considered to be the most important qualities of a future employee. We wanted to interview recruiters with different backgrounds and work assignments in order to cover a broad spectrum of sectors and to see if they had different attitudes or opinions about which traits and qualities an applicant should have. Therefore, we chose to interview recruiters both in recruitment agencies and recruiters working in regular companies. The recruitment agencies were chosen since they, on behalf of their clients, recruit people in various sectors. The recruiters working in other companies (a large manufacturing company and a fashionable clothing store) were chosen to complement the other sectors. In addition, we wanted to interview both female and male recruiters, to see if the answers differed depending on gender. At the beginning of the chapter with empirical research, we will present the recruiters further.

The time for us to gather material for this essay was rather restricted. Bearing this in mind, we chose to make comprehensive interviews with six recruiters, which were performed at their offices. To amplify our material, we also sent out questionnaires to five other recruiters via e-mail.

Before interviewing, we had a discussion about how the interviews should be carried out and what kind of information we wanted to find. We had a slight notion that our subject and the research questions might be delicate to talk about and we were aware of the possible prudence of the recruiters. Consequently, we tried to create a comfortable atmosphere and make the interviewees feel relaxed in order to make them speak freely. Moreover, we reminded them of the confidentiality of their answers. This confidentiality is reflected in the disposition of the empirical material – we have deliberately chosen not mention any of the interviewees' names or the names of the companies where they work. We also thought that it would be more appropriate for our specific topic to perform qualitative interviews than quantitative, since it would probably be difficult to obtain useful information otherwise. We believed that it would be more difficult for us to find out what our interviewees *really* thought about the connections between people's appearance and their chances to get a job unless we had a thorough

conversation with them that allowed for follow up-questions – we assumed that the answers would be less honest and more politically correct under other circumstances.

We agreed on dividing our questions into different themes related to our theoretical frame of reference as well as our main and sub-questions (see Appendix 1 to review the questions). This gave the interviews more structure but, at the same time, allowed space for further sub-questions or other associations. However, to prevent them from becoming biased of our definition of the term 'appearance', we tried not to steer our interviewed by stating different criterion as important. At the beginning of the interview, we let them speak and associate freely about what they considered as the most important qualities of an applicant. After that we asked them to assess the importance of those criterion selected by us as pivotal. The comprehensive interviews were performed at the recruiters' offices respectively, and we both asked questions. We taped all of the interviews and wrote them down word by word afterwards.

The questionnaires we sent out consisted of two open questions and one question asking to grade the importance of nine selected factors (see Appendix 2 for the questionnaire in its entirety). We wanted the first two questions to be open so that the interviewees could associate freely; we did not want to influence them by introducing our selected factors too early on in the questionnaire. The reason we asked them to grade different factors was that we wanted to get answers that were easy to compare and draw conclusions from. If all the answers from the open questions would turn out to be different, we would at least be able to make out some sort of pattern from the answers from the last question.

Theoretically speaking

Since our main research question is about attractiveness, we agreed that we had to back our essay up with theories about beauty and looks to establish whether it was at all sensible to talk about this kind of terms objectively. Now we know it is, even if it includes subjectivity to a certain extent. We also know now that there is an abundance of preconceived notions and prejudice based on a person's appearance that shows a surprising constancy between individuals. If we had not performed thorough research about beauty, the shape of this essay would probably have been different, and if we had not included theoretic material about beauty in this essay, the reader would probably have got a different impression altogether.

Further, our intention was to focus on the employment interview – a somewhat rare phenomenon. Most people have probably attended one of these interviews, but certainly not on a daily basis. Since this occasion often is associated with formality, nervousness and demands for performing well, we see this as a kind of performance or role-playing. Moreover, we assume that certain personality types are preferred for certain jobs, especially in those occupations where it is important to be service minded and reflect the company's image. That is the reason why we thought performativity was an interesting theory to add to this essay. When performing a role, the actor often uses properties to strengthen the message he tries to convey. Different properties signal different things, and are conceived differently. Clothes are an indirect way of communicating and letting people know who you are. When trying to make a good first impression this is especially important – do not we all dress up a little more than normally when attending an interview? Communication, symbolism and clothing are therefore interesting topics of discussion when analysing a person's appearance.

In this essay we have used the theories about beauty, performativity and symbolism as a means to make the intangible tangible and the subjective objective. It would have been very difficult and meaningless for us to try to investigate something that we did not even *think* was possible to draw general conclusions about. Still, we are aware of the fact that there are no absolute or eternal truths. Change is the one continuous thing.

In our analysis, we have connected our theories with the gathered material in order to find possible connections or contradictions. The analysis is divided into three parts that follow the division of the theories, in order to facilitate the reading. Firstly, we wanted to get a general view of all the different aspects of our theory and our gathered material to see if we could get a general impression and find any obvious connections. After doing this, we sorted out and categorised all the parts and pieces with the aim of making an analysis that, together with our own thoughts and reflections, would help us to draw conclusions about our research questions. Hence, our method of analysing can be compared to doing a jigsaw puzzle; we arranged all the different pieces so that they together formed an entirety that gave us answers to our research questions.

Credibility

When it comes to the credibility of the studies, we are of the opinion that they are reliable, since they were probably scrutinised before they were published in the scientific journals. However, we believe that those studies where they have assessed peoples' attractiveness based on their photos would probably have produced different results if the 'judges' had met the subjects of the experiment in person. One difficulty we came across when we were interviewing was that almost all of the recruiters found it hard to separate the physical aspects from the psychic aspects of a person. They thought that their impressions of people's looks often was influenced by their personality; an unattractive person with a great personality was often perceived as much better looking after a while, and vice versa.

Another difficulty for us when interviewing was to assess how straightforward and honest our interviewees were. It was of course impossible to find out if they had other opinions than what they told us. Some of the recruiters were very outspoken while others by no means told us as much about their thoughts. However, one thing we are certain of is that we all have prejudices or preconceived notions (ourselves included), and just because some of the recruiters shared theirs with us more openly does not necessarily make them more prejudiced than the others – perhaps just more aware of them and more willing to admit them.

Naturally, we have not been able to interview all the recruiters in Sweden, or even recruiters within all sectors. We are aware of the fact that our selection is very small and may not be representative for all sectors. However, due to the limitations of time and space, we have not been able to extend our research. We welcome further research within this field that can deepen our knowledge.

Reality Check - our empirical research

We have chosen to divide our empirical research into two parts; a first part where we present the material gathered from the interviews and a second part where we compile the information from the questionnaires. Since the interview material is very extensive, we have chosen to divide it into smaller sections arranged after the topics of discussion. This division enables a comparison of the recruiters' answers, while simultaneously keeping the text easily comprehensible.

Interviews

The recruiters we have interviewed are working for different companies; three of them are working at a recruitment agency specialised in recruiting consultants and technicians within the IT-sector; one is working at a large recruitment agency with clients in all kind of sectors; one is working at the Human Resources Department of a large manufacturing company and one is working in a fashionable clothing store. In total, we have carried out comprehensive interviews with six persons. Fifty percent of our interviewees were women and, consequently, fifty percent were men. The recruiters were aged from 29 to 39 years.

In order to get an idea about how the selection process works, we initiated the interview by asking the recruiters to tell us about it. The process is rather similar in all the companies chosen; the interview with its social interaction between the recruiter and the applicant is in focus.

The process begins with reading a lot of résumés where the formal competence is assessed. If the applicant's formal competence matches the company's demands, there is a further reading of the personal letter. If the competence and the personal letter also are interesting, the applicant is asked to come for an interview. When talking about the Human Resource Department in ordinary companies, the manager of the department where the applicant is supposed to work sometimes makes a first interview, and then the recruiter is asked for a second opinion, other times it is the other way around. After discussion, an agreement on who to be selected is done.

The recruiters working in employment agencies are at the request of different clients, seeking for suitable candidates. The clients are companies in all sorts of sectors and do usually have a

specification of the demands of an applicant. Depending on the clients' preferences, different types of competence, experience and other "soft values" are looked for. After interviewing, about three to five candidates are being presented for the client. This means that the recruiters are the ones that promote the candidates and their job is much to sell in the candidate and later together with the client find the most suitable person. In the end, one candidate is hopefully selected.

To further get to know a candidate and better understand what type of person the candidate is, both the recruitment departments and the employment agencies check upon references and sometimes they use personality tests. One of the companies did also ask applicants to come and work for a day. The recruiters working in employment agencies stressed that the requested qualifications of an applicant from the client are very important. It is not only about formal competence, you also need to look into what kind of corporate culture the client has and which persons that could fit in.

First impressions - do they last?

We wanted to know how important the first impression is and therefore we asked our interviewees to tell us what is seen as crucial when meeting a job applicant for the first time and if you are able to compensate a bad first impression. The answers were similar, three of the six recruiters said that the moment when you first meet a person is *very* important; one of them even said that the first impression says everything about a person and that it sometimes is hard to give the applicant a second chance. Here, a general picture is presented which includes everything from looks, appearance and talking to how you behave and act.

The other three recruiters all considered the first impression *pretty* important even though they tried to disregard this moment and wanted to give the candidate a few more chances to show whom he or she really is; "*some persons give a bad first impression but may be very interesting after a while*" (Male, 33). But the recruiters who tried to disregard the first impression did also emphasise the difficulty in ignoring it completely.

"*If you during the first twenty minutes of an interview get a bad impression, it may take up to twenty minutes for the candidate to make a better impression*"(Male, 32).

The recruiters did also agree upon that the importance of the first impression differs

depending on what kind of job the applicant is interested in. If you are working as a salesman, a consultant or a manager, the first impression was considered very important, whereas when working as a telephone operator, for example, it was not as important. One of our interviewees working in a recruitment agency even stated that the first impression was the most important thing of all when meeting a job applicant, since *"my first impression is often the same as the client's first impression"*(Male, 35). Furthermore, he meant that since today there are often a large number of applicants for each job, it is easier and more efficient to find a perfect match from the start, than to waste your time trying to change a mediocre one. Nor did he think that it was possible to compensate for a bad first impression. The remaining five recruiters meant that you can compensate for a bad first impression, but it may be hard and it may take some time. If you show a great engagement, your chances to compensate a bad first impression will be easier. Job applicants are often nervous when attending an interview, but after a while they often feel more relaxed. Five of the recruiters we talked to said that they tried hard to make the applicants feel comfortable and they saw it as part of their job to ensure that the interview was more of a casual conversation than formal interview.

Right competence

When asking how important the right competence is, all of the recruiters said that the formal competence comes first and often an applicant is not even selected for an interview if he or she does not have the right qualifications in competence. If there are few applicants though, some of the formal criteria may be overlooked and other qualifications will carry greater weight. One recruiter said that the formal competence is as important as 60-70% of the candidate's skills and qualities. Anyhow, some companies do not require very much experience or formal competence. Instead, "softer values" like what kind of person you are and how you react in certain situations were said to be more important than formal competence. Moreover, depending on the occupation, attitude and appearance (looks, manner, hygiene et cetera) were also said to be important.

"If I have to choose between a person with five years of experience and a bad attitude or appearance, and a person with only one year of experience but a positive attitude or appearance I would choose the latter one" (Male, 33).

An example of an occupation where the appearance may be of greater weight was working as a consultant, since that job is much about marketing yourself. Moreover, a consultant works

for many different companies and has to fit in and be able to adapt to new environments quickly. The importance of formal competence was said to be greater if you work as an engineer or technical specialist or similar occupations.

Social skills

We also asked the recruiters about the importance of social skills, i.e. a person's ability to interact socially. All of the recruiters believed that social skills are important in most occupations, especially when working as a salesman. Many companies were said to request persons who are positive and open. One recruiter said that if a person has a more introvert personality and is not very talkative but has the right competence, it might take more time to be convinced that the person is right for the job. In recruitment agencies this is even more awkward, since the recruiter knows that he or she later on will have to convince the client of the appropriateness of the candidate. When asking if good social skills can make up for an unattractive external appearance, all the recruiters said yes. One recruiter mentioned, "*if you have chosen the wrong outfit or dress, you can compensate for that if you have a high level of social skills*" (Male, 33). However, another recruiter noted the difficulty in distinguishing between attractiveness and social skills; those qualities are often connected. But he also said: "*simply being attractive is not enough*" (Male, 32).

All of the recruiters stated that self-esteem was quite important, especially within managerial positions. They also agreed that exaggerating or showing a cocky attitude could be more negative than showing less self-confidence. However, one of our interviewees expressed *"If you do not have any self-confidence, you do not get a job"* (Male, 35).

Eye for details

When we asked the recruiters if details such as bad choice of clothes, bad breath or a limp handshake could be of crucial importance when employing, the opinions differed; Three of them said that it was of no importance as long as the person was interesting in other respects and if the overall impression of the person was not impaired. One recruiter said that it could probably be reason enough to dismiss the candidate, while another meant that he probably would not even notice if it were just a minor detail. Yet another one of our interviewed told us a story about a candidate he interviewed for a position as a consultant. The recruiter had talked to the candidate over the phone and had got an excellent impression. The candidate had also been personally interview by a client, who was rather pleased. When the recruiter later

met the candidate in person he had shabby jeans, a worn out shirt and dirt under his nails, which made the recruiter react strongly. *"If you apply for a job as a management consultant, you do not have dirt under your nails and you do not have a worn out shirt"* (Male, 32). The recruiter claimed that details like that could make him change his mind about hiring a person that otherwise made a brilliant impression – he never gave the candidate any assignments again. Another recruiter informed us that he had interviewed an older woman that *"smelled of way too much perfume"* (Male, 33) which made him point out to her that she should think about that when meeting the client. Yet another recruiter (working in a recruitment agency) said that it was not uncommon that candidates called her and asked for her advice on what to wear when going to the final interview at the company. The recruiters who had formerly worked or currently was working in recruitment agencies (five out of the six) said that it was very important that the applicant made a good impression, since the reputation of the whole recruitment agency, and the recruiter him/her/self, was at stake – if the client did not like the applicants, the agency would probably not get more assignments from them.

One of the interviewees said: *"if an applicant comes to the interview with untidy hair, he/she is from another planet"* (Male, 35). He meant that if the applicant did not think of such an elementary aspect as that, there would probably be a whole lot of other things that were not right either. He emphasised the importance of details: *"Do they have old mousse in their hair or do they have moulding paste?"* He also stressed that it is not enough just to look tidy and groomed, you have to look stylish as well; according to him it was important to have more exclusive, branded clothes.

Another question we asked was if the recruiters thought it was all right if a job applicant had tattoos, piercings, extreme hairstyles or suchlike things. Fifty percent of the recruiters did not think that it was a problem as long it was not too extreme, but it was highly dependent on what sort of occupation that was being filled and the personality of the candidate. One recruiter stated; *"In a bank you do not have a piercing or green hair"* (Female, 39) and another said *"Of course, if a person has HATE tattooed on their wrist, you might find it a little strange…"* (Male, 32). Though, two recruiters found it off-putting and claimed it would make them doubtful.

General impression

Further, we asked what was more important: to have a personal style or to blend in? One of the recruiters said it did not matter, another said that it was probably best to blend in even though he remembered the candidates with a personal style much better. The other recruiters interviewed said that it depended on the occupation even though most companies, as long as they were not too conservative, liked it if their employees had a personal style. We also asked what they thought was best: to be underdressed or overdressed. All of the recruiters recommended being overdressed, but they also pointed out that it is a little strange if a person with a non-visible job wears a suit and tie. For example, for an IT- technician or suchlike, it is not as important to be stylish. One recruiter said; *"Because if you employ an 'IT-nerd', it is an 'IT-nerd', they can not talk and they are not supposed to talk. It is all right for them to dress strangely"* (Male, 32). Another recruiter said (also talking about IT-technicians who were not very concerned with their looks); *"just put them away down in a basement and make them start programming"* (Male, 35). Almost all (five out of six) of the interviewed established that a person's appearance is much more important when he or she has a profession that includes a lot of direct contact with customers and clients.

Further, we asked: If two, or more, candidates have equal competence, does the more attractive one get the job? All except for one of the interviewed claimed that, in that case, they would look at other things, such as the personal qualities requested by the company or how the persons behave. However, when asked if they thought that a person's appearance unconsciously affected their impression of them, they all said yes.

"Auditioning" for a job

One of the questions we asked is closely linked to the theory about performativity: Going to an interview may be seen as playing a role. You put on especially nice clothes and you give a great deal of thought on what you say and so on. How real or faithful an impression of a person do you think you actually get? One recruiter said that this was the reason why they made the applicants take personality tests, to try to get more profound knowledge of the person and for the candidates to be honest. He still tried to make the candidate as comfortable and relaxed as possible during the interview, since he wanted to get an indication of the person's way of behaving in everyday situations. *"Not how he or he behaves when attending an interview. Because that is not particularly interesting, really"* (Male, 33). Another recruiter

said that she thought that, hopefully, she got a better idea of whom the person really is. *"Maybe he will say 'Yes, I am a creative guy', in that case I just do not settle for that answer but ask in which situations. They cannot just sit and say something, they need to give examples as well"* (Female, 39). Yet another answer to our question was: *"Of course it is hard to know if a person is playing a role, but to dress up a little bit is probably something everybody does when they are going to an interview, and we are prepared for that"* (Female, 27). Moreover, one of our interviewees claimed that a professional recruiter is able to see through the role-playing.

Beauty versus Beast

To unearth a little more about the recruiters' attitudes when it came to physical appearance, we began by asking if it could be a disadvantage to be 'ugly'. The answers we got were varied, indeed: *"Yes, perhaps it could... You would probably have to compensate it with being very go-ahead... and show that you... or, it depends very much on which position you work in... If anything, I think it is all about charisma and personal charm"* (Female, 39). Three of the others stated that it did not matter at all. However, all of the interviewed thought it was very difficult to define what makes a person ugly, much more difficult than to define a person as attractive.

"I lack a definition of the term 'ugly', but if you understand 'ugly' by being foul-mouthed, have greasy hair, worn out clothes, it could be negative" (Female, 27).

One recruiter claimed that ugly persons are very rare, he meant that anyone has the possibility to dress up and groom him- or herself and as long as you make an effort and it is obvious that you care about yourself you are not ugly. All of our interviewees said that unattractiveness did not matter at all, as long as the person was charismatic or had good social skills.

Further, we asked them if it could be a disadvantage to be too attractive. Four out of the recruiters thought that they would probably be more suspicious if someone was extraordinarily good-looking than the other way around. They also said that it was probably a greater disadvantage to be extremely attractive for women, since it would probably make it harder for them to be taken seriously. One of the male recruiters said that if he would interview a very good-looking woman it would make him a bit uncomfortable, *"highly*

attractive persons often intimidate others" (Male, 32). The remaining two said being too attractive or too unattractive did not matter.

Moreover, we asked if it was advantageous to be good-looking. The majority of the recruiters said that it did not matter, however, during the course of most interviews there were indications that it actually seemed to matter after all. For example, one of the recruiters said that *"it should not matter"* (Male, 33), but later on when we asked if he thought that looks were more important in certain occupations he said *"Absolutely. Definitely, I would say. Unfortunately... Especially when working in a reception or a fashionable store."* Two of the other recruiters also said that nice and attractive persons always get a job, even if they do not have much (or enough) experience or competence.

Photogenic

Further, we asked if it is positive to attach a photo to your résumé. All of the recruiters thought it was a good idea as long it was a normal photo. It was not uncommon that they received strange photos, for example, private photos where people were emphasising their sex appeal or photos from family holidays. However, if the photo was normal and not misleading, it was considered as positive since it helped the recruiters to remember the person. One recruiter also claimed that the photo was also a statement about how the candidates wanted to present themselves and how they wished to be perceived. He also said *"if a candidate has the right competence and a good personal letter, a nice photo is definitely in his or her favour"* (Male, 35).

Dirty Pig or Clean Cat

When it came to hygiene, all of the recruiters agreed that it was important – two of them even said it was highly important. Hygiene was defined as cleanliness and was related to basic factors such as having a good smell and breath or clean hair. Hence, to be neat and tidy seemed to be one of the most elementary factors. One recruiter said: *"if you have not even washed your face you are probably not very interested in finding a job"* (Male, 35). Another recruiter said that it was a matter of respect as well; he did not find it very pleasant if a candidate went directly from the gym to the interview without taking a shower. He also claimed that the interview is an important opportunity and if you do not even *try* to make the most of it and make good impression, there is no point in showing up at all.

Body size

Four out of the interviewees claimed that it was not important to be of normal weight and stressed that they did not treat overweight candidates differently. However, those recruiters working in recruitment agencies said that sometimes their clients, for certain occupations, requested persons of normal weight, for reasons of health. For example, if it were physically demanding work task they considered being overweight a problem.

Nevertheless, one of the recruiters claimed that when meeting an overweight candidate for the first time, he became a little surprised and his impression was not very positive. But if the candidate had a good personality, this could compensate the first bad impression. He also said: *"exaggerating a little, overweight persons have a tendency to be more talkative, they have to compensate with social skills. It depends on the person, though"*. Another recruiter said: *"Well, it makes you start wondering about their character... There are limits to how big you can be"* (Male, 32).

Sex appeal

Neither of the recruiters considered sex appeal to be important. In general, they were all pretty reluctantly disposed to persons that emphasised their sexuality. *"In general, if you are dressed more formally, you get more credibility. Are you trying to sell your sexiness or are you trying to be professional? I think that applies for women as well as for men"* (Male, 32). All of the male recruiters thought that it was probably harder for a sexy woman to be taken seriously than a sexy man. Not only the men found it awkward to interview sexy women. One of the recruiters told us a story about his female colleague who had been interviewing a woman with a very low-cut top, later she told him: *"She had such big breasts that I could hardly take her seriously!"*

Dressed for Success

Four of the recruiters said that it was not as important to be formally dressed nowadays, as it was ten years ago. They thought that it was quite all right to wear jeans (if they were not worn out) to the interview and stressed that it was important to wear clothes you feel comfortable in. However, it was not unusual that the recruiters gave the candidates advice on what to wear when meeting the client for the first time, either to dress up or to dress down a little, in order

to fit in better. Two of our interviewees also thought it was important not to give a too 'grey impression'.

According to all of the recruiters, the dress codes could vary quite a lot depending on occupation. If working as a technician or an engineer, wearing a T-shirt and a pair of shorts was all right, whereas the same outfit would be inconceivable for a manager or a consultant. *"The consultants represent our trademark... a candidate with a sloppy appearance will not get a top-position"* (Female, 29). Almost all applicants applying for managerial or suchlike positions were said to wear suits.

Dialect

When it comes to the conceptions of a person's tone of voice, dialect and accent, the general opinion among the recruiters was that it did not matter. One of the recruiters thought that speaking with a dialect was very charming. Two of the recruiters claimed that if working as, for example, a telephone operator, a too noticeable dialect could be negative and that the voice is important. As long as the voice or dialect is not too deviant, it was not an issue.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires were sent out to five recruiters, all of them working in the same recruitment agency, recruiting consultants and IT-technicians. Four out of these five recruiters were women. They were aged from 25 to 32 years.

The first two questions were open:

1. *What is the first thing about a person you notice when interviewing?*
2. *Which qualities do you consider important for a candidate to have? In what way are they important?*

On the first question, most of the recruiters wrote that they noticed more than one thing when first meeting a candidate (number of times mentioned):

Posture/ way of carrying oneself (4)

Clothes (3)

Eye-contact (3)

Handshake (3)

Level of interest (1)

Voice (1)

The answers to the second question were pretty detailed and comprehensive. We received the following answers (number of times mentioned): formal competence (3), social skills (3), well-kept appearance (2), nice manners (1), personality (1), charisma (1), communicative skills (1), honesty (1) and cognitive skills (1). However, only one of the recruiters answered the follow-up question, motivating why she considered certain qualities important: *"communicative skills are important since the applicant is representing our trademark."*

Thirdly, we asked the recruiters to rate the importance of nine selected factors (the numbers show the ratings made by the five recruiters):

	Very important	*Pretty important*	*Neither*	*Not very important*	*Not important at all*	*Do not know*
A. First impression	1	4	-	-	-	-
B. The right competence	3	2	-	-	-	-
C. Handshake	-	4	1	-	-	-
D. Nice manners	3	1	1	-	-	-
E. Tidy clothes	-	5	-	-	-	-
F. Appealing looks	-	1	3	1	-	-
G. Normal weight	-	-	3	2	-	-
H. Hygiene	1	4	-	-	-	-
I. Sex appeal	-	-	1	2	2	-

To sum up

After interviewing all the recruiters we studied the gathered material. Even though the answers were diverse, we were able to discern certain patterns after scrutinising the material thoroughly. The most frequent opinions among all of the recruiters were "everything in moderation" and "just right is best[12]". The most important things were to fit, or blend, in and not to deviate from multitude too much. "The right person at the right place".

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[12] Here we use 'just right' as a substitute for the untranslatable Swedish word *'lagom'*.

The answers to the questionnaires were naturally not as detailed, neither did they allow for follow-up questions. Still, the fundamental features of these answers were very similar to the answers we got during the beginning of our comprehensive interviews.

In order to facilitate answering our main question, our intermediate goal was to answer our two sub-questions:

What is considered as important qualities and what is considered as off- putting?

Are there higher demands on the employee's appearance in certain occupations?

We will answer these questions with the help from the material from our interviews and questionnaires. To answer our main question we need to analyse both our empirical material and our theoretical material, hence, that question will be answered in our conclusion.

Which factors are considered as important and off-putting respectively, then? All of the recruiters claimed that the most important thing is the formal competence. You have to have the appropriate skills; otherwise you will not make it to the interview. Once you make it that far however, other factors come to play a pivotal role, such as social skills, self-esteem and appearance. The factors stated as most important were to look clean and tidy, to have nice manners, to be interested and committed and to be charismatic and socially skilled. The recruiters thought it was harder to define off-putting factors; basically, they considered it off-putting if the candidates did not live up to the factors stated as important. Bad hygiene was the only explicitly mentioned factor that all of the recruiters agreed on.

According to the recruiters, the demands on a person's appearance vary among occupations. The demands are much higher in visible jobs that include a lot of interpersonal contact, especially jobs related to sales. However, we got the impression that a person's appearance is never completely unimportant to get any kind of job. Above all, we noticed that during the course of the interviews the recruiters gradually stated their opinions more freely and their level of political correctness diminished. As we asked more detailed questions we noticed that they sometimes said things that were contradictory to what they had said earlier, however, we believe that they were unaware of doing this

Analysis

Now we have extended our knowledge with the help of theories and previous studies as well performing research ourselves. In this part of the essay we aim to connect the material from our interviews with the theories in order to discuss and answer our main question.

Aspects of Beauty; Judging a Book by Its Cover

We will analyse the concept of beauty by reviewing the answers given by the recruiters as well as the theories studied. Thereafter we will add our own thoughts and reflections to the mix before we make our own conclusion.

All of the recruiters we interviewed thought that the first impression was important. Some of them even thought it was extremely important and claimed that if they got a bad first impression of a candidate, the candidate had to work hard to make up for it. According to Hatfield and Sprecher (1986), your appearance is the most visible thing about you. Even if your other qualities (such as your technical skills and competence) are much more interesting in certain occasions (for example when you are being interviewed for a job), they are not as obvious or as easily revealed. Since all the recruiters agree on the importance of the first impression, it is not an inconceivable assumption that a person's appearance does play a pivotal role when meeting and being assessed by a recruiter.

The literature we have studied claims that attractive persons are deemed to be smarter, warmer, stronger, more interesting and have better character et cetera, than less attractive persons. The interesting question for us was whether the recruiters we interviewed were of the same opinion. If that turned out to be the case, we would be tempted to assume that it is easier for attractive persons to make a good impression. None of the recruiters explicitly expressed that they had these kinds of preconceived notions. Even though they did agree that they were probably, unconsciously, more positively biased by persons with an attractive appearance, they did not believe they drew conclusions about a person's personality based on their looks. However, it was difficult for us to determine whether they were only trying to be politically correct, or if they really stated their honest opinions. It was also difficult to distinguish if their opinions were personal or professional, and we think that the recruiters themselves found this problematical too.

While interviewing, we did come across some material that strengthened the argument that people often assume that attractive and unattractive persons are different from one another. Depending on people's appearances they were categorised as different personas. For example, two of the recruiters thought that overweight people had have weaker character than those of normal weight, and that they did not give a very good first impression. Another conception was that sexily dressed women were not seen as professionals. Further, we got the notion that several of the recruiters not only stated that IT-technicians and engineers often wore clothes and hairstyles et cetera, that deviated from the other candidates' outfits, but it also seemed as if they judged all of them alike. Our impression was that the recruiters regarded them as somewhat peculiar and it was more all right for them to look however they liked. Since their work tasks generally did not include much interpersonal contact, the only thing that mattered was their technical competence – not their personality or looks. Neither were they expected to have great social skills. Consequently, even though the recruiters stated that they did not "judge a book by its cover", a notable categorisation still took place.

Our theory also points out that an ancient prejudice is that beauty often is associated with having good mental health, among other things. On the contrary, ugly people were perceived as insane or stupid. One recruiter's opinions did match this preconceived notion; he stated that if an applicant did not care about his looks at all, it was likely that he or she was indifferent to other, more important things as well, which according to the recruiter meant that the applicant was a fool, or at least not normal.

As mentioned earlier, previous studies have come to the conclusion that attractive job applicants have a better chance of being selected when going through the recruitment process. For example, some of the studies stated that when job candidates' qualifications are similar, the appearance becomes the determining factor when hiring. Out of all the recruiters we interviewed, there was only one that admitted that this statement could be accurate. Although the other recruiters did not explicitly agree with the results of the studies, we got the impression that good looks indeed matter – but not as a decisive factor. On the whole, many of our interviewees found it hard to separate attractiveness from charisma and social skills. They were of the opinion that attractive persons often have better self-confidence and are consequently able to present themselves in a more favourable light. Research has shown that teachers and parents are positively biased by pretty children and pay more attention to them and encourage them more. Moreover, teachers tend to give the good-looking students better

grades. Thus, we believe that it is probable that more attractive persons become more secure and grow a better self-confidence since they get more support and attention. We consider the theory about Pygmalion effect to be highly credible; that is, other people's expectations of a person often turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Hence, if people in general expect more from attractive individuals they will get more. If a recruiter expects an attractive applicant to have good social skills, the applicant will probably perceive these expectations and feel more relaxed during the interview.

Even though beauty may be seen as a matter that depends on personal preferences, we have now learned that people, in general recognise and agree on who is beautiful and who is not. When interviewing the recruiters, we noticed that each of them had a rather distinct opinion about what is appropriate and what is not when talking about an applicants' clothing and looks. In addition, we could make out a considerable resemblance in opinion among the recruiters. Even if all of the recruiters have different personal tastes, they all concurred that it is very important not to stand out or deviate from the current standards too much. Most important of all, according to the recruiters, is to blend in and understand what is appropriate at the company and what is not. However, as we mentioned in our theory, this is nothing exceptional or new, even the ancient Greeks considered those who differed too much from the norm unattractive or even abnormal.

The recruiters did not state very concrete views about beauty at first, however during the course of the interviews we were able to distinguish stronger opinions about what was acceptable and what was not. Reading between the lines, the recruiters seemed to know pretty well what they thought about different aspects of beauty even though they were not keen to admit it – to us or to themselves. The previous studies we have read do not mention the problems of getting people to talk about beauty in an honest way, perhaps because these studies are much more extensive and complex.

As mentioned before, the answers gathered from our questionnaires did not give very detailed answers. When we asked them to grade the importance of appearance-related factors (appealing looks, normal weight, hygiene and sex appeal) the answers we got were rather indifferent. Yet, no one was of the opinion that it was of no importance at all. Hygiene was the one factor that provoked the strongest reactions. We believe the reason for this may be

because it is more accepted to consider bad hygiene off-putting than overweight or an ugly face.

Clothing

An important part of a person's appearance is the way of presenting oneself. The physical aspects are usually what we base our first impression on. Clothing is one way of tampering with your identity and different outfits communicate different things about you. A managing director wearing a jogging dress to work or a cleaner wearing a suit and tie when working would probably raise an eyebrow or two. It is obvious that some outfits are highly inappropriate in certain occasions.

All of the recruiters considered the applicants' clothes to be important. In our questionnaire we asked the recruiters which things they first noticed when meeting a candidate; three out of five mentioned clothing. In general, the recruiters we interviewed recommended being overdressed rather than being underdressed. It was not as important which specific garments they wore, but they thought it was necessary to look tidy and well kept. One recruiter even thought that being tidy was not enough; he stressed the importance of having the 'right' branded clothes, preferably exclusive garments. As mentioned in our theory, the business suit may be a signifier of high status and hierarchical power. We believe that what you wear to work reflects your occupational status to a certain extent. For example, the recruiters said that almost all of the candidates for managerial positions wore suits. The occupations that were not as high-status or that did not include as much interpersonal contact did not have the same demands on a strict dress code. Considering this, we think that what you choose to wear to the interview is important. A person dressed in jeans and T-shirt gives another impression altogether than a person wearing a suit and tie. It is also crucial to understand how formally dressed you need to be to live up to the recruiter's expectations. As mentioned earlier, one recruiter was appalled when a management consultant applicant wore shabby jeans and a worn out shirt. In this case the applicant's choice of clothing had drastic effects on his career – the recruiter never contacted him again.

The recruiters we met were dressed comfortably but yet quite formally. We think that they intentionally dressed this way in order to make the applicants feel more relaxed during the interview, while at the same time indicating the dress code of their own occupation. If the recruiters would have been dressed extremely formally, we think that the applicants would

have experienced their position as more exposed. On the other hand, if they had dressed too casually, the job candidates might not have taken them as seriously. Consequently, their way of dressing allows for a smoother social interaction.

Clothing is not the only way of accentuating your personality; piercings, tattoos or extreme hairstyles might also draw attention to your persona. When we asked the recruiters about their attitudes towards such things, we got the impression that they were pretty conservatively disposed – some of them more than others. We were quite surprised by some of the answers since we see tattoos and similar attributes as mere details that do not necessarily say anything about the person's social or technical skills. A person with a lot of visible tattoos or piercings is perhaps perceived differently than a person without similar adornments. We got the impression that such things are still not completely accepted in the corporate world. When it comes to more professional jobs there seems to be a number of unwritten rules and minimum standards for how you are supposed to look and behave. Although it is difficult to point out exactly what is and what is not correct, it is easy to see when someone has crossed the line.

Performativity

Above, we discussed the importance of behaving according to certain standards in order to blend in and be accepted in the corporate world. There are a variety of different preconceived notions about how people working in certain occupations are supposed to act and behave. According to studies, you may change into another identity when working, showing a more job-related and professional side of yourself in order to fulfil the environment's expectations. With this viewpoint, your work identity is merely a socially constructed act. We find some aspects of this perspective sensible; it would at least explain why employers not only have high demands on technical skills but on social competence as well. All the recruiters thought social skills were important, and especially important in occupations such as consulting or sales, where it is pivotal to be charismatic and persuasive to keep business running. The more interpersonal contact the job involves, the higher are the demands for social skills. The recruiters told us that it was common that the employer requested persons who were positive and open. Since most jobs include some kind of contact with other people, whether it is with colleagues, managers or clients, it is important that the employee is able to interact socially without problems. In some occasions, we believe that you have to be a good actor to do good work and to be able to act you have to have social skills.

Moreover, we have given a great deal of thought on the possibilities for an applicant to advantageously play a role during the interview, and if it is possible for the candidate to change into the desired person for the job. As mentioned above, people have a lot of expectations and preconceived notions about how you are supposed to behave and what personality type you should have when working in a certain occupation. During a job interview it is important to be able to promote and sell your own personal 'brand'. In our superficial society a person's appearance is an important part of this personal brand. It is nothing new that your reputation is important in order to succeed; the blacksmith who attracted most customers in the sixteenth century was the one with the best reputation. Career-wise, it is important to market yourself in the best possible way. Considering this, we find it quite natural if you, during the interview, try to adapt to the identity you consider as the most appropriate for the job. According to our theory, there are certain codes that through constant repetition develop into stereotypes, for example the suit is a symbol of power and status when worn to work. However, there is a time and a place for everything; in order to look and behave appropriately it is essential to interpret the unwritten rules. We believe that most of us adapt, consciously or unconsciously, to the current situation, social company and environment and show different aspects of our personality depending on the occasion.

The recruiters we interviewed meant that by asking the right questions or using personality tests, they could sense if a candidate was trying to be someone else. We have some reservations about this assertion, however. We think that those candidates who are highly socially skilled probably perform better during an interview since they are most likely better at adapting accordingly to the situation. Moreover, as we have understood, the habitual stereotypes we discussed above are not only about behaviour. During the interviews we got the impression that behaving appropriately was not all that was important. A number of other superficial things were important as well, such as what you wear or how you talk. In the questionnaire, four out of five recruiters claimed that the candidate's posture or way of carrying him- or herself was one of first things they noticed. These things are easily distorted or changed, some more than others, which makes it possible to create a temporary, perfect-fitting identity. Additionally, we find it slightly strange that the recruiters thought they could see past the potential role-playing, since they stressed the importance of the first impression. We believe that if you succeed in giving a great first impression, which is much about superficial things, you will probably have an advantage over your rivals. It is probable that if

you practice at making a good impression you will probably get better at it; practice makes perfect.

Conclusions

When we first started to write this essay, we were curious to investigate how much your appearance really effects important aspect of your life. Our notion was that our society is becoming increasingly superficial and that the focus is being put on people's physical traits rather than their personal qualities. In Sweden today, it is becoming more common to have a higher education, some people even have more than one degree. At the same time, the competition for qualified jobs is hard. We believe that a consequence of this is that the competition enters new arenas; you need something extra, apart from your competence, in order to succeed. This 'extra' something probably has to do with your appearance and other soft values; flaws or deviations are not accepted. This leads to the formation of a new type of norm or standard within which one has to fit in. This norm is though different depending on what kind of job you apply for. The normalisation results in, as we see it, another type of elimination process where the wheat is sifted from the chaff. Consequently, some people may be excluded from certain jobs if they do not measure up. Perhaps these boundaries and norms might even deter some people from applying for certain jobs, since they do not feel they will fulfil them.

When writing this essay, our own preconceived notions have also been tested. We have also understood how hard it is to define what makes a person beautiful, even though it is really simple to recognise beauty when you see it. Further, some of the answers we got from the recruiters were not what we had expected while others corresponded quite well with what we assumed they would answer. Nevertheless, after listening to recruiters' opinions and analysing and connecting their answers to our theory, we are now able to answer our main research question:

- *Is the appearance of a job applicant important when going through the recruitment process and if so, which criteria matter most?*

Our gathered material partially matches the conclusions from the previous studies mentioned in our theory. Our conclusion is that appearance indeed *is* important when it comes to job-

related matters, but exactly *how* important is very hard to say. We mean that the importance of appearance varies depending on occupation, the recruiter's personal preferences and the applicant's formal qualifications. For example, we believe that if a candidate has a lot of work experience and impressive technical skills the employer might not pay as much attention to his or her looks, whereas a candidate with little experience or skills probably has to measure up to other standards. The opinions of what is seen as appropriate and inappropriate differ a great deal, almost everyone has a wide spectrum of opinions, but certain resemblances can be ferreted out. Consequently, we are not able to give a definitive answer.

Our intention was also to find certain criteria that were seen as the most significant. During the course of this essay we have realised that it is very difficult to point out only one or two appearance-related factors that are seen as the utmost important. From the interviews we were able to discern a somewhat diffuse pattern; the recruiters considered it essential to look clean and tidy and to have nice manners, without a more precise definition. The recruiters claimed not to have any exigencies on a candidate's appearance as long as he or she looked neat and well kept, at the same time we got the feeling that there indeed exists a standard you have to comply with; if you do not measure up to this standard you deviate from what is 'normal' and accepted. We noted that the recruiters found it difficult to express what they really regarded as the best ways of looking and dressing. The norms and standards are difficult to describe since they are so vague. They appeared first in their concrete form when we asked them about details, such as if a specific thing is accepted or not. As written before, it is easier to judge when somebody has crossed the line than to point out what is appropriate according to the norm. We have understood that it is all about a well-balanced entirety that is quite difficult to define since many people take it for granted and see it as obvious.

However, it may seem as if it is easier than ever today to make the most of your appearance. The supply of fashion, beauty products and so on, is great and easily accessible and these products are available in all price ranges. Almost everyone have the same prerequisites of dressing nicely and looking well kept. Though, some factors are not as easily changed. For example, it is simple to change your hairstyle or polish your shoes, whereas obesity is nothing you can change over night. We do not venture to prophesy about the future, but if we were forced to speculate we would think that since it is easier to tamper with trifle things related to your looks than your personal traits, your manners and social skills might grow in importance.

Another aspect is, as we see it, that society is more focused on endorsing individuality. Everybody, especially young people, is supposed to follow their own paths and create their own destinies. Many adolescents want to be seen by differing from the rest and stand out. Will this strive for uniqueness open the door for diversity and diminish the desire to blend in? We do not think so, but we think new norms will constantly be formed; there will never be a full acceptance of *everything,* but the boundaries of what is accepted will probably shift continuously. We have already noted that nowadays the dress codes are less formal, even in occupations where they were very strict before. For example, the recruiters told us that nowadays it is highly accepted to wear jeans to work, in almost all occupations, which would have been considered unimaginable ten years ago. Considering this, it might be accepted with pierced and tattooed managers ten years from now. The same thing can be assumed about overweight. Since the population in Western Society is growing fatter, the ideals might change and overweight might be included in the perception of what is normal as well.

The long and the short of it; we have identified a common idea among the recruiters of what is normal and what ideals you need to live up to. People who do not measure up to the norm will probably always be found. The Swedish mentality is to be moderate and 'just right'. To a certain extent it is probably possible to identify this standard, and adapt oneself to what is accepted by playing a role temporarily. However, we believe that some people will never have the ability to perceive this standard, nor the social skills to adapt to it. As we see it, the fixation for beauty and superficiality has probably not yet reached its peak; it will most likely continue to be seen as important. Nonetheless, we think the boundaries of these standards and norms will be shifted gradually.

In conclusion, we think appearance is important when you are applying for a job, and you could probably improve your chances of being hired if you select your clothes carefully and consciously, make an effort to look neat and tidy and if you have extra nice manners. However, our final advice on how to do well when being interviewed for a job is to look as normal as possible without looking too boring, to blend in without passing unnoticed and try not to deviate from the norms related to the specific occupation If you, by any chance, are naturally attractive it is just an advantage!

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Appendix 1: Interview questions

Recruitment
•Can you tell us briefly about how the recruitment process works?

•For what kind of jobs are you hiring?

•Which qualities do you consider to be important (respectively most important) when assessing a candidate?

•Is competence more important than appearance? If so: In what situations? If not: Why not?

•Can such things as poor choice of clothes/bad breath/ limp handshake be determining factors when you are recruiting?

•Are there any 'golden rules' (do's and don'ts) in the recruitment business? Do you have any personal rules you judge a candidate by?

•First impression – how important is it? Is there any way of compensating for a bad first impression? If so: How?

•Does the company have specific demands/ a specific profile?

Social skills
•Could social skills compensate for an unattractive appearance? If so: To what extent? If not: Is there anything else that could compensate?

•Are social skills more important in certain business sectors? If so: In which ones?

•How important is self-esteem? Is it worse to have too much or too little? Difference women/men?

•Attending an interview: Might it not be seen as playing a role? You dress better than normally and give a great deal of thought to what you say, et cetera… How much of the candidate's persona do you really see?

Appearance
•How important is it to have the right technical skills compared to the 'right' appearance? Does it differ depending on occupation?

•In which occupations is it most important to look good / have a nice appearance?

•If you're interviewing several candidates with the same technical competence, does the most attractive one get the job?

•Could it be a disadvantage to be ugly? Could it be an advantage to be too good-looking? Which is worse?

• What is an off-putting look, according to you?

• Is it more important for women or men to look good? Is there a difference? If so: How and why?

• Is it all right to have tattoos, piercings, extreme hair styles et cetera?

• How important is body size? Have you ever got a negative impression of somebody because they where overweight?

• What do you do if a candidate has the right professional competence for the job, but the person's appearance does not correspond with the company profile?

• Is it an advantage or a disadvantage to attach a photo to the application papers? When is it positive respectively negative?

• Make-up: Positive or negative?

Clothing
• How important is the candidate's choice of clothes?

• What is more important: To have a personal style or to blend in?

• Overdressed or underdressed, which is best?

Finally
• Do you have any good advice on how to be successful at the employment interview?

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Handelshögskolan
VID GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

Enkätundersökning om urvalsprocessen vid rekrytering

Hej! Vi som ber dig svara på denna enkät heter Ellen Särngren och Anna Åberg, vi läser civilekonomprogrammet på Handelshögskolan här i Göteborg. Vi håller just nu på att skriva vår C-uppsats inom ämnet organisation, frågan vi undersöker är: "Is the appearance of a job applicant important when going through the recruitment process and if so, which criteria matter most?" Enkäten tar bara några minuter att fylla i. Dina svar kommer att behandlas helt konfidentiellt.

Jag är: kvinna   man
Ålder:_____

1. Vad är det första du lägger märke till hos en person du intervjuar?
_____

2. Vilka egenskaper tycker du är viktiga hos en kandidat du intervjuar för en tjänst? På vilket sätt är de viktiga?
_____
_____
_____

3. Hur viktiga tycker du att följande faktorer är, oberoende av varandra, när du intervjuar kandidater för en tjänst? *Kryssa i det påstående du tycker stämmer bäst.*

	Mycket viktigt	Ganska viktigt	Varken eller	Inte särskilt viktigt	Inte alls viktigt	Vet inte
A. Första intrycket						
B. Rätt kompetens						
C. Handslag						
D. Trevligt uppträdande						
E. Proper klädsel						
F. Tilltalande utseende						
G. Normal vikt						
H. Hygien						
I. Sex appeal						

Tack för din medverkan!