EMERALD**HANDBOOKS**

THE EMERALD HANDBOOK OF APPEARANCE IN THE WORKPLACE

EDITED BY

ADELINA **BROADBRIDGE**

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For Ian. Love you.

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About the Editor

Adelina Broadbridge, Stirling Management School, has spent a large part of her career teaching and researching HRM and diversity. A core theme of her research examines career development issues, with a specific focus on gender differences. She has authored over 50 peer reviewed articles, as well as a monograph, two other edited books, along with numerous book chapters and conference papers. She founded the globally recognised British Academy of Management's Gender in Management Special Interest Group. She has chaired tracks at various international conferences, and co-developed and facilitated several professional and personal development programmes for women in academia. In 2019, she was awarded the BAM Medal for Leadership. She led Stirling Management School's successful application for the Athena Swan Bronze Award. She is currently the Editor-in-Chief of *Gender in Management: An International Journal*.

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Kemi S. Anazodo, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the Odette School of Business at the University of Windsor, in Ontario, Canada. Her research focuses on amplifying the voices of marginalised and stigmatised individuals as they navigate the employment landscape and employment processes. Dr Anazodo employs mixed methodologies to delve into social phenomena, such as identity, equity and stigma, shedding light on how individuals navigate the complexities of their employment experiences.

One of Dr Anazodo's key areas of investigation is the integration and reintegration of justice-involved individuals into the workforce. Her research examines the experiences and processes involved in successfully incorporating these individuals into employment. Through interdisciplinary collaborations, Dr Anazodo has collaborated with colleagues from diverse backgrounds, resulting in numerous conference presentations and published works. Her contributions to the field encompass the perspectives of both employers and individuals with a criminal history, spanning topics such as job search, employment selection and sustaining employment.

By delving into the intricacies of employment dynamics, Dr Anazodo strives to bring about positive change and create a more inclusive and equitable work environment for all individuals, regardless of their background or past experiences.

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I am indebted to a number of people throughout my academic career, many of whom have become treasured friends. My first venture in editing books was with Dr Sandra Fielden and I particularly thank her for her guidance, support and precious friendship. Other people who have been a joy to work with and are now cherished friends include Gail Clarkson, Ian Fillis, Karen Forrest, Lisa Haddow, Carol Marshall, Andrie Michaelides, Agneta Moulettes and Ian Spencer. I also am grateful to my colleagues from the British Academy of Management Gender in Management Special Interest Group who have provided much debate and stimulation of research activities. Finally, I am not forgetting 'help' from my four-legged family – Jamie and Cleo – who always make me smile.

I am lucky to have you all in my life.

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Introduction

Adelina Broadbridge

Introduction

There has been considerable research looking at career management generally. However, a lot of this research ignores the prejudice that can occur in the process. Much of that which has done has highlighted the gendered nature of career management and shown how women struggle to overcome discrimination and prejudice at various stages within the workplace. Their careers are influenced by a range of micro, meso and macro factors (Broadbridge & Fielden, 2015, 2018; Kumra et al., 2014; Powell, 2018). The knowledge this work has produced has been critical in understanding the inequities of some people's career development. However, one area that has been relatively neglected academically is the effect that appearance might have on people's careers, and this too can be gendered. We live in a visual society and from a media perspective, hardly a day goes by without seeing reference to people's appearance, some of which is within the work context. This can have a profound effect on how people present themselves generally, and specifically at work. Yet, the impact of individual appearance on career success, either positive or negative, often remains unspoken or even unconscious within the world of work. Appearance in organisations is not a new phenomenon (Hopfl, 2000; Mills, 1951) and has been going on, in some instances, for hundreds of years. Nevertheless, it has been a relatively under-researched topic area in recent years. As Peluchette and Karl (2018) argue, styles change and so do people's definition of what is appropriate or inappropriate with regard to appearance in the workplace.

Appearance generally comprises part of our non-verbal communication to the world although aspects of verbal communication such as accents and demeanour may also constitute appearance. To many, a definition of appearance refers to the clothing that people wear, and certainly this has been the subject of numerous research in the field. Drawing on Stone (1995), clothing is an important social indicator to the identification of people, both for themselves and from the perspective of others. The approach adopted to appearance in this book was to encourage authors to adopt a broader interpretation of appearance should they wish to do so. Thus, the book also considers body capital (Brewis, 2017; Edmonds & Mears, 2017), demeanour and the way people look other than merely their clothing.

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The physical body symbolises aspects of identity and the self (Haynes, 2008; Peluchette & Karl, 2007). Younger generations are increasingly identifying with more fluid and non-binary gender and sexual identities and are progressively expressing those identities in a more flexible and changing manner (Jones, 2018; Wilson & Meyer, 2021). Also, more people are showing their individualism and identity via alterations in their appearance, such as tattoos, piercings and cosmetic surgeries, but how might these impact on their experiences in the workplace? With the added intensification of the 'me too' campaign, and growing attention of the transgender and gender expansive agenda, now seems an apposite time to raise fresh academic awareness of some of the contemporary writing surrounding appearance at work.

The Importance of Appearance at Work

Appearance is regarded as very important in the workplace (Karl et al., 2013) and research shows how it can be an important component of the personal attributes required for employability (Carbery & Cross, 2015). Appearance can have a very real impact on how employees are perceived. However, it can be difficult to interpret because what is deemed 'appropriate' by one organisation may not be acceptable, and so regarded as 'inappropriate' in another. There is evidence that a person's dress and appearance can affect various aspects of the employment process right from the recruitment stage up to dismissal decisions (e.g. Baert & Decuypere, 2014; Crowder, 2010; Roehling et al., 2018). First impressions count and can be heavily influenced by attire (Howlett et al., 2013), and appearance and image has been shown to affect workplace promotions and salary decisions (Corbett, 2011; Peluchette et al., 2006), as well as career success (Peluchette & Karl, 2018; Yates et al., 2017).

Appearance at work may be to the individual's benefit or demise. From a positive point of view, it enables the employee to show their individualism. This might be particularly beneficial in certain types of occupations, say in the arts or creative industries. For example, Arndt et al. (2017) highlight the positive connotations of tattoos for demonstrating creativity and freedom. Certain companies such as Apple embrace a degree of individualism from their employees, wanting them to be themselves and believing this will allow their creativity to flourish. Likewise, if a person is perceived to possess the 'correct credentials' for the organisation in which they are employed, they too might be better placed to reap the positive benefits associated with that employment. However, this might be more problematic to construe. What is meant by 'correct credentials' often is deeply connected with the culture and image the company wants to portray. Mead (1934) and Stone (1995) argued that the responses of others constitute and validate our sense of self. So, general appearance and bodily manipulations can have a significant effect on self-esteem when they are validated by the gaze of others. We can understand how this may play out in the work context.

Appearance Codes and Aesthetic Labour

McInnis and Medvedev (2021) contend that what one wears to work is important. They argue that proper dress is necessary in order to be seen and heard in one's profession, and they describe it as a 'language' that others will understand and associate with credibility and value. Organisational dress or appearance codes might on initial inspection be regarded as superficial and inconsequential. Yet, Brower (2013) maintained that they reflect on enshrined social stereotypes and expectations of women and men and how they look. Employee appearance, particularly in customer facing roles, has become increasingly important to numerous companies in their efforts to market the right image to their customers. The inclination of employers to hire, train, reward and promote employees based on their appearance is now mainstreamed and termed 'aesthetic labour' (Warhurst & Nickson, 2020). But this labour, also known as 'lookism', has the potential to create a new form of employment discrimination based on workers' appearance (Warhurst et al., 2009).

Aesthetic labour is a form of body capital where looks are translated into economic and symbolic rewards (Mears, 2014) and physical appearance is seen as the embodiment of individuals' capabilities. This creates the business linkage of the importance of appearance and work. It involves managing and self-control over appearance at work (Witz et al., 2003). Having the 'right' look and 'looking the part' is something that can be crucial to career success; people are judged by customers, recruiters, clients and the public (who may be considered prospective consumers) according to their attire and looks. Employee appearance therefore represents part of the overall brand reputation and image of the organisation. As a result, there has been numerous research on aesthetic labour, looking 'right' and the association with corporate image (e.g. Caven et al., 2013; Hall & van den Broek, 2012; Karl et al., 2013; Nickson & Baum, 2017; Pettinger, 2004; van den Berg & Arts, 2019; Warhurst & Nickson, 2020; Williams & Connell, 2010).

Companies want to create a certain corporate image in the eyes of their stakeholders and part of doing this is through having prescribed dress codes or customary practices. Both can potentially present problems for employees. On the one hand, prescribed codes may endorse a certain traditional and stereotyped look, while on the other hand, customary practices can be ambiguous. Some workplaces have strict dress codes; others have dress codes but these can be vague and bewildering, and open to interpretation. Other workplaces do not have policies regarding employee appearance; Middlemiss (2018) notes that smaller and medium sized organisations are less likely to have explicit dress codes than large organisations. This can lead to ambiguity, making it difficult for an individual to interpret how they should present themselves in various workplace situations. Often, unwritten rules about appearance in workplaces abound and these can result in both implicit and explicit bias and stereotyping occurring.

Concern for customer perceptions (Karl et al., 2013; Timming, 2015, 2017) and portraying a corporate brand image can be all important to some companies (Williams & Connell, 2010; Witz et al., 2003) in pursuit of economic gains. With this view, recruitment and selection allows for the filtering out of inappropriate

people. Nickson et al. (2000) found job adverts encompassed various instances of appearance, speech and presentation, including some asking for photographs. This, they asserted, showed how organisations sought a particular look and disposition which might be even more important than the applicant's technical skills. They affirmed how some retailers controlled the appearance of their employees to the extent that an employee required management permission to cut or colour their own hair. Nickson and Baum (2017) contend that aesthetic labour has led to concerns about equality and fairness with regard to who can access entry level, frontline jobs. All of this confirms how organisations can create exclusionary practices, often right at the recruitment stage, in terms of who is deemed most appropriate to best represent a company's desired brand image (Caven et al., 2013; Nickson & Baum, 2017).

Research on customer perceptions of the retail service encounter has shown that customers seek reassurance in the service encounter, and this can be done by matching and mirroring the age and gender of customer facing staff with their expectations for who is credible and appropriate to deliver the service (Foster & Resnick, 2013). This clearly can have repercussions for the employment of certain categories of workers that might not face up to customer expectations. Often this can be those with protected characteristics. Although in the United Kingdom employers' dress code must not be discriminatory in respect of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010, discriminatory dress codes remain widespread, especially in relation to women and transgender employees (Middlemiss, 2018). Some of the chapters of this handbook investigate aesthetic labour and also how people with protected characteristics nevertheless experience a form of discrimination in their appearance at work.

Making an Impression and Attracting the Attractive

Johnson et al. (2010) claim that job characteristics influence the relationship between physical attractiveness and ratings of employment suitability. Associated with aesthetic labour and lookism is evidence that has shown that 'attractive' people are regarded as more beneficial to and suitable in employment (Johnson et al., 2010; Hamermesh, 2011; Johnson et al., 2018; Langlois et al., 2000; Tartaglia et al., 2005). But what constitutes being 'attractive' and who determines whether employees are deemed 'attractive'? There is an association of beauty with positive characteristics (James, 2008; Lowman et al., 2019) and economic benefits for the organisation (Bruton, 2015). Other research substantiates that attractive employees have better jobs and earn better salaries than those deemed unattractive (e.g. Johnson et al., 2010; Hamermesh, 2011; Judge et al., 2009). Crowder (2010) argued how being attractive is more highly valued than being unattractive, and in career terms, associated with various positive qualities (higher productivity, intelligence and successful). Moreover, Madera and Hebl (2012) found job applicants with facial stigmas all to rate lower on hireability than non-stigmatised applicants. Bruton (2015) rejected arguments that hiring people based on their appearance (looks-based hiring or 'lookism') is not job relevant, concluding

that this type of hiring is permissible for businesses where lookism produces clear economic benefits.

There are various signifiers that can hinder a person's career and experience in the workplace. When compared to an idealistic norm or subject to the scrutiny of others, it can affect some forms of employees far more than others. Certain categories of people might be more susceptible to appearance biases and stereotyping. Jones (2013) argued that all societies have dress/appearance codes to police the social significance of dress and appearance. The dress code message given, Jones argues, can include clues about the person's social status, income, occupation, ethnic and religious beliefs marital status, sexual availability, sexual orientation and self-identity. As such, certain research has looked at specific characteristics of people and provided insights about their 'suitability' regarding their employment. Gender is a noticeable characteristic that has drawn attention in prior literature (e.g. Fitzgerald, 2018; Haynes, 2012; Kuipers, 2015; Kukkonen & Sarpila, 2021; McInnis & Medvedev, 2021; Tsaousi, 2020), although less has been written about non-binary, gender expansive and transgender impacts (although see Hadjisolomou, 2021). Other characteristics that have been the subject to some research include age (Kumar, 2022; McInnis & Medvedev, 2021; Nickson & Baum, 2017), accents (Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Mai & Hoffman, 2014; Timming, 2017), race (Lee, 2020; Rosette & Dumas 2007), religion (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2014; Hutchings et al., 2012; Metcalfe, 2010, 2011), size/weight (Crowder, 2010; Gruys, 2012; Haynes, 2012; Mujtaba & Cavico, 2016; Nickson et al., 2016; Powroznik, 2017; Roehling et al., 2018) and looks (e.g. Hosoda et al., 2003). Some of these are fixed while others are subject to manipulation to a certain extent. Moreover, various research has found people conform largely to western ideals of professionalism (Brower, 2013), or alter their appearance according to the situation (see Clarke & Turner, 2007; Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009). Brower (2013) contends that western dress appearance codes push men and women towards traditional gender presentation, which highlights the incongruity for women's professional roles.

There may be some aspects of appearance individuals have little control over, but there are other ways they can enhance their overall appearance by attire. Men often require little adjustments as they conform to a male standard code of dress, although they can use certain accessories such as ties to enhance their overall appearance. For women, this is more multifaceted. Peluchette and Karl (2018) argue that dress, accessories, make-up, hair colour, fragrance, nail colour can all be strategies that some women use to increase their physical attractiveness, in their attempt to help the management of the impression of others.

Moreover, Rhode (2010) outlined the obsession people now have with appearance, referring to the amount of money that is spent on cosmetics, hair care, plastic surgery and weight loss programmes nowadays. The growth of cosmetic surgeries has been enormous in the past decade, and Fortune Business Insights (2022) attribute this rising demand as being in response to the importance of aesthetics in our daily lives. Interesting to note is that in 2020 women accounted for 86% of the cosmetic procedures reported by Fortune Business

Insights (2022), which might not be surprising given the emphasis of women's appearance over men's. Nevertheless, we are witnessing the targeting of younger generations of men far more so than their previous counterparts.

Gender and Appearance

Much prior work has emphasised a gendered aspect to appearance issues in the workplace (Haynes, 2008) and so a brief mention about it is warranted in this introduction to set some context for some upcoming chapters. Women may be more sensitive to issues of dress and appearance, particularly as they need a greater legitimacy and acceptance in an organisation (Peluchette & Karl, 2018). Jyrkinen (2014) found women managers felt pressured about their appearance in order to be successful in their careers. Jones (2013) maintained that clothing is an important part of the gendered social structure and an aspect of human physical appearance, claiming that dress can be viewed as an overt display of femininity or masculinity. In most cases, the benchmark for defining 'correct credentials' is traditionally associated with a male standard or ideal. So particularly for women, and gender expansive or gender nonconforming persons, achieving the right look and being perceived as professional can be more complex than it can for men. How should women dress in order to be seen as appropriate for a professional role? We associate cis men in dark suits but dress for women can be far more varied and complicated and so they come under far more visibility and scrutiny.

The roles connected with women in management and the workplace often are incongruous to the stereotypical roles expected of women in society (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 1983). Various researchers have explored links between leadership as a masculine construct and the disciplining of women's bodies, appearance and behaviours (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Haynes, 2008; Mavin & Grandy, 2012, 2013, 2016a, 2016b; Morley, 2013; Sinclair, 2005). These scholars assert that female leaders or managers experience negative evaluations because of a disconnect between the expectations of them as women and the expectations of them as leaders. Appearance in this sense can be extended beyond clothing to include behaviours. Social role expectations and role congruity theory mean that men are expected to possess agentic traits (i.e. those associated with leaders) while women are expected to possess communal traits (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and so women appear incongruous with the expectations of the leader role. This can present a double bind for women when it comes to promoted/management jobs. Senior job requirements demand traditional masculine traits, yet when women display these qualities, they appear as gender atypical and inconsistent with their sex. This can result in them being denied a promoted post.

Despite pressures felt by women regarding appearance generally, their sexual appearance can cause problems in the workplace (Howlett et al., 2015). In some cases sexual labour can be a prerequisite for employment, with women employees being groomed and packaged into a corporate image to emphasise their aesthetic and sexual appeal to clients (Caven et al., 2013). While this brings economic benefits for the organisation, it also leads to women's objectification. Often,

women's decisions on appropriate work dress involve considering the impact that sexuality has on competence and professionalism. This was also found to be the case for gay men (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009). Sexual harassment creates problems for many women at work. In my own research on career development, several women directors spoke of the problems they had encountered in their careers because of sexual harassment, which in some cases led them to leave organisations or take a step back in their careers. This part of the research was not published for reasons of confidentiality as it concerned a particular industry where women were barely represented at such senior levels. However, several of the women spoke of how they felt objectified and how the industry norm was to seek striking looking women at this level. Johnson et al. (2018) also highlighted how attractive women may be objectified and subjected to greater sexual harassment. They argued that attractiveness can be a disadvantage for professional women (yet not men) in recruitment, promotion and compensation, and further noted how attractiveness can provoke greater same-sex competition, all of which can cause problems along the various stages of their careers. Kelan (2013) argued that being sexually attractive can also be regarded as unprofessional for women. Lizotte and Meggers-Wright (2019) outline how the media coverage of Sarah Palin's clothing and attractiveness during her political campaigning was at times objectifying, led to perceptions of her being unqualified for the role and generally provoked thoughts of incompetence and unintelligence in female candidates.

Inspiration Behind the Book

The idea for this book arose from a previous book on diversity in the workplace (Broadbridge & Fielden, 2018). That book was divided into eight sections, each examining one aspect regarding diversity and how this impacted those people's individual careers (e.g. age, gender, race, sexuality). One section we devoted to 'appearance,' and this contained chapters by some leading authors in the field. These chapters gave an insight into the sense of the enormity that one's appearance might have for one's progression in the workplace. For example, Nickson (2018) revealed how hiring on the basis of looks is a well-established strategy in a range of occupations and organisations. Roehling et al. (2018) showed how biases and negative stereotypes towards the obese can lead to discrimination in all phases of their employment. Peluchette and Karl (2018) highlighted the complexities of gendered behaviour and the double bind women can encounter for dressing femininely in a masculine world of work, and subsequently their perceived ability to perform their organisational roles. Johnson et al. (2018) revealed the hidden costs of attractiveness that can negatively influence career paths of professional women at different stages of their careers. The issues raised in these chapters underline how different facets of appearance can create issues for people and their workplace experiences and development. These issues demonstrated how appearance and 'looks' can have a crucial impact on the employment experience, yet may also provoke negative reactions. They advance understanding on how stereotypes are allowed to be perpetuated in the twenty-first century, and

how appearance expectations align with dominant organisational cultures and norms. It seems, therefore, that how one looks might be regarded as equally, or even more, important than one's intellectual capabilities for the job (Inc, n.d.; Warhurst et al., 2000; Inc., n.d.). Exploring these issues further became the origin of this current book.

There are few laws to protect against discrimination based on appearance, which exposes some ethical implications of employers hiring on the basis of appearance (Nickson, 2018). Appearance discrimination is not a protected category but nevertheless is a real issue with regards to discrimination and has surfaced terms like 'lookism' (Cavico et al., 2012; Warhurst et al., 2012), 'looks based appearance' (Bruton, 2015), and 'aesthetic labour' (Nickson, 2018). Within the workplace, unfortunately there can exist more negative connotations associated with appearance, or contrasting words that show one feature as good and the opposite as bad (straight versus curly hair; fat versus thin; old versus young; white versus Black; abled versus disabled). Traditionally, the ideal would be regarded as white, male, young, slim and able bodied.

Approach to the Handbook

This handbook examines contemporary academic work on appearance the context of employment, covering an eclectic range of pertinent issues concerning appearance and the workplace. It draws on major authors in the field and examines different areas where appearance can have a significant impact on how employees are perceived and get on in their careers. As appearance is an aspect of an individual's self-identity in the workplace, and so it is important to examine its intersectionality with various protected characteristics such as gender, age, religion and sexual orientation at work. Aesthetic labour is a common part of corporate life, especially in customer facing roles. It can lead to employment discrimination based on physical appearance and have an impact on career progression. Accordingly, some authors have concentrated on the issue of aesthetic labour and lookism in the workplace. Three chapters of the book draw on the growing popularity of people expressing their self-identity via the form of body art, and how this can be presently perceived by employers and customers in organisations. Below is a synopsis of its content and authors.

Mustafa Özbilgin, Marios Samdanis and Pelin Arsezen point to the two aspects of appearance: physical qualities (e.g. height, weight, complexion and having a particular hair, eye and skin colour as well as choice and style of dress and attire) and the social dimension (how the physical qualities of a person are interpreted, rated and judged, and attributed varied meanings and values across different settings). They demonstrate how some people in the workplace may experience positive experiences while others negative, and take the reader through some underlying theories associated with appearance matters.