

## Chapter 5

# Too Smart-looking for a Waiter? – Scripting Appearance Norms at the Theatre of Working Life

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### Introduction

People dress for work. They do it for many reasons; it may be for protection or for symbolical purposes. However, these reasons do not explain why, for example, salespersons wear black straight trousers more often than any other kind of pants, or why a sweater is more commonly seen on a youth worker than, for example, on a lawyer. Some could say that they are *normal* outfits for those persons. This chapter will examine how these ‘normal outfits’ are constituted and maintained in everyday working life.

To put it in more sociological form, this chapter will be an examination of aesthetic norms in working life and more particularly the process in which norms are created and maintained. In other words, the aim is not to describe the appearance norms of particular occupations, but to focus on the dynamics of these everyday norms: how they are created, maintained, enacted or challenged. I study the everyday encounters that employees have with other people at their work, and how these relations shape situational appearance norms.

I interpret the norms in this chapter through the Goffmanian theatre metaphor, which sees social life as a theatrical play and people as actors (Goffman, 1959). Norms can be seen as the scripts of the play that guide the role performances of the actors. However, the actors may improvise and interpret the scripts in their own ways and thus change the way the play turns out. Moreover, there is no single ‘scriptwriter’ in the theatre of social life nor a single script, but the script itself is a product of interactions between the actors. The focus in this chapter is on those interaction dynamics among different actors, employees’ relations to their supervisors, colleagues, customers, clients or other people they encounter in

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their work. The analysis shows that the aesthetic norms employees face are often the sum of many (sometimes contradictory) expectations rather than ‘coming from the top’ or being solidly established.

The aim of this examination is, first, to describe the dilemmas employees face in interactions with other people in their work, when they are trying to figure out the right way to look. I focus more on the costumes rather than their physical characteristics, such as body size, sex or symmetry. However, the main interest is not in the actual looks of the employees, but in the meanings they represent. I analyse these meanings in terms of impression management, in which employees battle to match their outfit with the situational expectations of multiple actors (or audiences). This empirical analysis of employees’ everyday appearance dilemmas informs us about the situational logics of aesthetic norms. As explicated in the introduction and in the first chapter by Kukkonen in this book, aesthetic norms are at the core of defining how aesthetic capital works and produces social differences.

## **Theoretical Framework: Impression Management with Work Costumes**

Appearances are at the very core of how we structure social life and interact with each other.

(Shulman, 2016, p. 1)

For Erving Goffman, a classical sociological thinker, social life is fundamentally structured as a play in a theatre (Goffman, 1959). In short, for Goffman, we are characters who act in different roles and follow certain scripts in our everyday life. The audience consists of the other people with whom we are interacting, and we are, in turn, their audience. An audience can give different sanctions based on the performances of the actors. In a successful scene, actors play along with the script seamlessly, performing their tasks and sustaining their roles. These performances reproduce a certain social structure, patterning how everyday life is structured. Our everyday interactions and relations rely on the success of these performances. The appearance of an actor is an important part of the performance. Appearances are full of visual symbols that create the impression of the actor for the audience (i.e. the role s/he may be playing, his/her motives, aims etc.) and thus inform how the audience should relate to that person. On some level, we all know this, although we may not necessarily be conscious of it, as we change the way we look depending on the situation. We try to manage the impressions we convey for the sake of successful performances and interactions, ‘to grease the wheels of social interaction’ (Reyers & Matusitz, 2012, p. 143).

Managing impressions is not only an act of an individual presenting oneself but also a way to define, at the same time, the situation and its rules – it tells others how the current situation should be interpreted:

The doctor wears a white coat, the magician waves a wand, and the accomplished chef has a wide assortment of culinary

accoutrement displayed in the kitchen. Similarly, professors typically hand out syllabi, meet with students in classrooms, and stand at the front of the room near the board. These symbols of meaning help people key into expected role performances and thus aid in establishing the definition of the situation. Drawing on these symbols of meaning that convey commonly held associations enables us to define a working consensus for successful social interactions.

(Preves & Stephenson, 2009, p. 246)

Impression management aims at credibly performing certain social roles. Conveying a credible impression necessitates an audience who determines the credibility of the performance (Grayson & Shulman, 2000, p. 56). The audience determines whether actors' appearance-based impressions are credible and based on that, it credits or discredits the actor. In sociological terms, crediting and discrediting is akin to sanctioning. Social sanctions (positive and negative) may be formal (explicit) or informal rules that can be expressed in various ways, verbally or nonverbally. Altogether, sanctions are a key mechanism maintaining social norms (Encyclopædia Britannica; Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). At the same time, social sanctions bring out the current social norms, whereas norm-conforming performances are more often ignored, as they are in harmony with expectations. Norms are thus simultaneously produced, maintained, negotiated and challenged. Who is to blame, however, for establishing this script of our everyday show? Everyone in the situation is. Although the power among people is unevenly distributed, all actors contribute to the situational norms that are a result of collective action. People play the roles of an actor and of their audience, often at the same time (Bendor & Swistak, 2001; Claridge, 2020).

From the perspective of an employee and his/her everyday working context, who is responsible for creating, maintaining and monitoring the appearance code of his/her role (costume)? It varies for different occupations, but basically, there are three key audiences that most employees in occupations including human contacts encounter at some point: employers (or superiors and other higher status representatives in the occupation), their workmates (colleagues) and other people employees encounter in their work (customers, clients, employees of other workplaces) (Grayson & Shulman, 2000, pp. 56–57). These categories include a large spectrum of different actors, but altogether, these can be seen as the main audiences receiving and reviewing the credibility of employees at their work.

As mentioned above, actors are not equal when it comes to determining the looks of an employee. As a result, the employees may sometimes need to adhere to norms of which they do not approve or that are even harmful for them. This question has been addressed more in the research on emotional and aesthetic labour (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009; Witz et al., 2003). Studies on emotional and aesthetic labour emphasise that employers demand certain kinds of looks and behaviour more and more from their employees, in other words, requiring more acting skills from the workers (Bryman, 2004, pp. 122–127). These forced norms increase the workload of the employees and may cause, for example, emotional

exhaustion, if the employees do not feel comfortable with the roles they have to play (Reyers & Matusitz, 2012). In these cases, employees are depicted to have little chance to determine their appearances and the script of their play is already established. However, few occupations are comprehensive in their aesthetic demands of their employees. Instead, the scripts for aesthetic norms at workplaces are more often written in the dynamics of multiple actors, which are shown in the analysis of this chapter.

## **Data and Method**

As I was interested in the everyday importance of appearance, which often goes unnoticed, in contrast to more obviously appearance-centred situations and occupations (such as actors, models etc.), we contacted with our research group employees from several different occupations that include some kind of service work with people. We aimed to map out the role of appearance more generally in everyday working life, which touches on the experience of many. Hence, we included occupations that require higher and lower education, that are male- and female-dominated and those that are not clearly gendered. We gathered the employees of the same occupations to groups (one to three groups per occupation) and arranged a total of 12 focus group interviews, which each included two to five occupational colleagues and that lasted about two hours each and they were conducted in 2017 and 2018. The occupations were as follows:

- Lawyers and judges
  - One group of 5 women.
- University lecturers
  - Three groups: (a) 4 men, (b) 4 women, (c) 3 women and 2 men.
- Youth workers
  - Two groups: (a) 2 men and 2 women, (b) 3 women and 2 men.
- Car and electronics salesmen
  - Two groups: (a) 2 men, (b) 4 men.
- Nurses
  - Two groups: (a) 4 women, (b) 4 women.
- Bar and restaurant workers
  - Two groups: (a) a man and a woman, (b) 3 women.

I applied an interpretation of Goffman's dramaturgy and the idea of impression management while performing a content analysis of the interviews. I coded all parts in which the interviewees spoke about the appearance norm in their work. I classified these scenes by the audience that was present in the moments the interviewees described. These audience categories consisted of employees' relation

to their (a) employer or supervisor, (b) colleagues and (c) outsiders of the workplace (customers, clients, patients, students or other non-colleagues or supervisors). The categories were not mutually exclusive. Instead, in some situations, all of them were present at the same time. This was the case, for example, when a salesman at an electronics store served a customer, while his colleagues and supervisor observed him from a distance, which included three different audiences at once.

Group interviews are unusual data with which to employ Goffman-inspired methodology, especially when the main emphasis is on the content of the interviews rather than on the interviewing situation itself. Whereas Goffmanian analyses usually concentrate on observing the actions of a present moment, in the interview data, the analysed situations are filtered through the interviewees' talk. Thus, the observations are limited to the interviewees' formulations of those situations, which in the group interviews reflect the dynamics and discourses of the groups and their collectively created meanings (Pietilä, 2010). Some aspects of the situations may be left untold and others may be exaggerated, which applies to direct observations as well, but in group interviews, there is another layer that shapes the nature of the data at hand.

Despite its limits, focus group interviews offer excellent data for studying the subject. Different things are said aloud in a group than would be said alone with the interviewer or in a different group. Some of the interviewees knew each other, which also shaped the dynamics of talk. In a group, there is always a certain pressure guiding the conversation and framing the rules that defines what is being said and how. This creates a space that itself reflects the shared norms of the particular group, which is in this case the group of colleagues. In contrast to individual interviews, group interviews produce talk that better illuminates the shared values and perceptions in the group rather than their personal relations to the subject matter (e.g. Frey & Fontana, 1991; Pietilä, 2010, p. 215). For the sake of brevity, all interviewed occupations are not explicitly addressed. Instead, only the most expressive examples that illuminate the dynamics of norm negotiation are discussed in more detail in the analysis.

The focus in the analysis is on the general patterns of how role costumes (i.e. aesthetic norms) are scripted in everyday working life. Group interviews of the selected occupations from Finnish working life function here as a case example. However, it should be noted that, in every occupation, the specific aesthetic norms and appearances of the employees signified different meanings as the employees acted in different roles. For example, a judge acts as a specialist and a neutral representative of the legal system, a waiter acts as a servant of the customers, and a youth worker acts in the role of a reliable adult. In some occupations, there were more formal and explicitly dictated working costumes (such as for nurses, car and electronics salesmen and restaurant workers), whereas other occupations allowed employees to choose their work suits more freely (such as youth workers and university teachers). Moreover, there were occupations (for example, lawyers) that did not have many explicit appearance norms but neither were the employees free to choose their outfit, as their colleagues and other people they encountered actively guarded employees' conformity with the norm. These particular

differences among occupations should be acknowledged, although they are not the main interest in the analysis.

## **Analysis**

### *Impressing the Employer*

People pay particular attention to their looks when they have their first encounter with the organisation at which they are looking for a job. They thus try to manage the impressions they convey to serve their interests (e.g. to get hired) by using their looks as a means. Impression management leans heavily on appearances.

Job applicants try to give a good impression of themselves, to show that they are a good fit for the job and represent what is probably a slightly better version of themselves than they usually are. In other words, job candidates manage the impressions they give by means of their appearances, the main audience of which is the prospective employer. Besides their skills, candidates need to impress the employers with their appearance to show that they are suitable to enter the position they pursue. In this respect, employers are in a dominant position in relation to employees' appearance, as they can set the rules and norms governing proper looks for workers.

In the following example, Lasse, a restaurant worker with an academic background, tells about a contradiction he caused, when he wore different glasses in a job interview for a waiter's position than he wore later when he started the job. The supervisor commented on his appearance on his first day of work by saying: 'we didn't hire you looking like that'.

Lasse: The glasses were like too 'woke', maybe too conscious-looking and a appearance of an academic. And you can't of course, I don't know what it was, but you can't really show off there. [-] It was the supervisor of the kitchen who commented it, but I did notice that the head of the restaurant was like, 'yeah I noticed your new glasses...' [laughter] I should have been looking like more boyish or so...

Interviewer: But you kept the glasses anyway?

Lasse: ... yeah I yet kept them anyway.

I: So you can't look too smart there?

Lasse: Maybe not too smart though.

This quotation contains several interesting points. First, presumably there were no explicit remarks made about the glasses in the job interview, but nevertheless, the employer had noticed them and later had interpreted that the employee had somewhat misled him/her by not wearing the same glasses at the workplace. The representative of the job interpreted that Lasse had fabricated a certain image of

himself that had led the employer to act in a favourable manner and hire the candidate. Although Lasse had not misled employer on purpose, but just happened to need new glasses at that time, the employer felt cheated. This shows that the appearance of a job candidate in the job interview represents a certain promise of what the employer will get. Although job candidates often present somewhat polished versions of themselves in the interviews, their appearance should not differ too much from their normal looks. Otherwise, their act in the interview may be interpreted as misleading and fabricated.

The second point worth highlighting concerns fields and their different norms. The job position in question was for a certain nightclub restaurant with a particular image, style and pool of customers. That means that there are specific scripts for appropriate looks for the employers as well, as they represent the image of the company (see also [Warhurst et al., 2000](#)). These codes are seldom explicit, but still remarkably recognisable, due to socialisation, environmental cues and nonverbal signals of others ([Grayson & Shulman, 2000](#), p. 53). Lasse diverged from the script the restaurant provided with his new glasses and was immediately sanctioned in his supervisor's comments. His glasses looked 'too smart' for the restaurant, implying that the customers would interpret him in a somehow unfavourable light in relation to the restaurant's image. In other restaurants with other kinds of customers, Lasse's glasses may well have passed.

Appearance codes for employees come as much from the expectations of the employer as from the customers. Expectations of an employer reflect his/her thoughts, how customers will act – will they trust the firm and use its services or take their money to some other place? This shows the extent to which the interconnectedness of all of these actors (employer, employee and customer) determines how the employer should look at that specific situation.

Most aesthetic norms in working life are implicit and informal, as in Lasse's case. They become apparent on certain occasions, when someone diverges from them and is sanctioned. However, companies and employers also manage their employees' appearances with explicit and formal instructions. Most obviously, these appear in workplaces that require a certain work suit or uniform for their employees, for example, in hospitals and many restaurants. In these cases, the appearance of an employee is predetermined by the employer, and there is little space for employees' personal expression or individuality (cf. [Tyler & Abbott, 1998](#)). Yet, the employer never has total control over the looks of their employees. Employees practice a so-called 'secondary adjustment' in which they manipulate and interpret the given rules to their own ends to perform better at their job ([Shulman, 2016](#), pp. 96–97). This often transcends the limits of an employer's official appearance codes, and shows how the manifested appearances are a sum of relations of different actions. For example, in our interviews, youth workers stated that they did not have many official rules for their appearance at their work, except for one: they were advised to avoid wearing any kind of provocative symbols (i.e. religious or otherwise). The experience of the youth workers, however, was the opposite. They found that having somewhat provocative elements in their outfit (for example, prints on their t-shirts or noticeable earrings) was a great way to make the first contact with the youth (see also [Sillanpää, 2009](#)).

The employees broke the official rules to better connect with their clients than they would have if they had literally obeyed the employer's instructions. In other words, they stretched the norm for the purpose of doing their job better (Sillanpää, 2009).

### ***Employees' Relation to the Outsiders***

The interviewees described two kinds of strategies to affect outsiders' impressions in their work. The first was a strategy mainly utilised in occupations that are institutionalised professions, for example, nurses and lawyers. Some of them were profit-seeking companies and others non-profit organisations, such as public hospitals and legal aid lawyers. These professions have a rather straightforwardly (but not necessarily explicitly) determined appearance code, a role suit, for the employees. The employee is, first and foremost, a representative of that particular organization rather than an individual. The second strategy to affect outsiders' impressions was a more personal kind that was practiced especially by the youth workers and those waiters of a more 'casual' or 'relaxed' bar. Their employers controlled minimally the looks of their employees with explicit norms, and thus they needed to work more with their personalities and individual looks. They needed to create the appearance for their role and to get clients/customers convinced by themselves, not by relying on the existing brand of the organisation.

Altogether, the purpose of both strategies was the same: to convince outsiders of the workplace to trust that the employee could act his/her role credibly to get the job done. Thus, the result of an accomplished impression management was a sense of trust between the actors. A successful act resulted in a shared understanding of the current situation and its rules between the actors. However, if the act failed and the client interpreted the employee to act totally improperly for his/her role, for example a lawyer wearing a too sexy skirt, it caused questions and the actor appeared as suspicious. A successful impression instead creates a sense of a shared interpretation of the situation, its codes, goals and roles for actors. Those shared interpretations that we make based on each other's appearances are kind of scripts, the social structure that guide our lives. At the same time, it is a way to communicate with each other and to determine each other's characteristics that tell how to cooperate and play along in the same scene.

Next, I give two examples from our interviews of the consequences of failed impression management. The first example is from the youth workers, reflecting their appearance norm in relation to the youth they work with.

They provided two perspectives, when asked about the role of looks in their job to make contact with young people. First, they highlighted the importance of employees' similarity with the youth – that one should not give an impression that one is from a different reality than the young people by looking too adult. Hence, youth workers more often preferred hoodies over suits. As the conversation continued, it was pointed out that an elementary thing in youth workers' appearance is to not exactly mimic the appearances of their clients. The interviewees stated that the youth would easily spot it if the worker tried to be someone

other than s/he is, in other words, trying to fabricate the impression s/he is giving, and then not placing any worth (trust) in them. Or as Mikko put it:

...grown-ups are in any case from a different world so it doesn't matter what cool clothes you wear so basically you make a clown of yourself when you're trying to be 'MC Cool McDude'.

Their role as a youth worker required acting in the role of an adult mentor who works as a kind of a role model at the same time, teaching how life is to be lived. Thus, rather than trying to look like their youths, they more often promoted individuality and difference with their appearance. They valued authenticity and acceptance in one's looks highly, as they said that it is important to look like the person one really is, whether it is against the norm or not. They did not necessarily teach these views to the youth verbally, but by acting and showing an example of how to be 'real' to oneself and to accept that for others as well. This type of acting has been called authentic self-presentation, self-projection or deep acting (Grayson & Shulman, 2000, p. 59).

The second example of failed impression management comes from the lawyers' interview. Here, the audience is a person from another profession who has an encounter with the lawyer, who works as a legal aid lawyer and is used to dressing less formally to be more approachable to her more penurious clients.

I haven't had jackets before like particularly for example to go to trial, and I had this new long leather jacket. So my client was charged with drug offence, nothing mild but rather a bigger case but it was like, the client was wearing sneakers and some jacket and, there wasn't security checks back then like in airports. So they checked me thoroughly, they went through my tampons and such, took them from my purse and for my client they did nothing. [laughing] So like I was very irritated, first of all I lost money, you can't use those tampons after that. And well, after that came quickly the, the gate for the court of appeal and then gate for the lawyers, but I went and bought myself a more conservative jacket right after.

(Mirja, legal aid lawyer)

In this case, the audience of the lawyer's act was not her client, boss or colleagues but the security person(s) of the courthouse. They misinterpreted the lawyer's role, as she wore an atypical jacket for a lawyer at the courthouse. The security person(s) acted based on that false image by inspecting the lawyer instead of her client. It appeared that the lawyer had not given much thought to the impression she would give to others before that incident. The appearance norm became apparent, as her act failed and her role was misidentified, resulting in an embarrassing situation that made her buy a more accurate role costume.

In addition, the dimension of trust appears in the former incident very concretely. However, the trust is different and a more generalised sort than it was

in the case of youth workers, for whom the trust was primarily personal. Here, the security person(s) evaluated trust connected to certain roles, positions and groups of people. If a person gives an impression that s/he is a lawyer, then s/he can pass through the building without inspection. The appearance norm or role costume of a lawyer communicates a certain kind of more generalised trust that is shared by all people in the particular category, a trust related to a profession.

The above example illustrates that these more general images of the looks of certain professions and occupations, as well as brands, may appear through the sanctions of other people outside of the workplace. The appearance norms need not be explicit and literal to be real. As the norms manifest in sanctions that are given in interactions between actors, it means that the norms are also in constant flux, varying according to the relationships between the actors and audience.

### *Colleagues Monitoring Each Other's Performances*

The third audience category not yet addressed is that of colleagues and co-workers of the employees. They vastly participate in the formation and negotiation of appearance norms and role costumes at work (Vonk, 2020). First, the script is expressed nonverbally in the outfits of other employees that give the newcomer a hint of the aesthetic norm of the workplace. However, other employees may also comment aloud about the appearances, making the norm explicit.

For example, the group of lawyers came up with several cases in which their colleagues had somehow violated the appearance norm, and to which they had normatively reacted. In one of these cases, a lawyer wore shiny sneakers with an otherwise appropriate black suit to a courtroom, which the interviewee thought an inappropriate look for a lawyer and which she saw putting the lawyers' professional credibility in question. 'A lawyer should not shock with one's appearance', the interviewee added. The official etiquette for lawyers advised avoiding bright colours in their clothes and endorsed neutrality. Our interviewees showed that they keep guard of this norm, although they did not say whether they had expressed their disapproval to the subject and sanctioned her somehow more concretely than just discussing it afterwards. Altogether, they had recognized a certain dramaturgical script for a lawyer and interpreted that the lawyer with shiny shoes somewhat 'ruined the show' with inappropriate role costume. This kind of norm violation may be seen as disloyalty towards the dramaturgical order (Shulman, 2016, p. 85).

The group of lawyers also admired certain appearances of their colleagues, and hence affected the appearance norm of their workplace. They, for example, described noticing the small differences in their seemingly uniform costumes, and being able to spot whether some wore more expensive or higher quality clothes than others. They admired each other's appearances, but at the same time changed their own appearances based on those observations.

Two typical examples of verbal sanctioning among colleagues reoccurred in the group interviews: the 'are you ok?' and the 'so, what's the special event?' talks. In the

following discussion, three female nurses in the group interview recognise the ‘are you ok?’ talk when one of the interviewees brings it up, and they mimic it together:

Laura: I remember once I came to work, like I usually put on make-up for work, but this once I came to work without make-up, and one ward clerk was like – hey Laura, are you like ill or something – and I was like nooo, [laughter]...

Anna: I’ve had the same thing happen to me, like are you, are you ill...

Laura: (–) like horrible-looking or something...

Anna: ...do you have a flu or something...

Laura: ...yeah yeah...

Anna: ...did you not have a good sleep...

Laura: ...yeah like, have you been crying...

Anna: ...yeah.

Maria: I’ve also encountered that.

In a sense, the ‘are you ok?’ talk marks the lower boundary of acceptable appearance. As one nurse’s comment suggests, the ‘are you ok?’ talk is interpreted as a sign that one is not looking good (‘like horrible-looking or something...’). It may thus be regarded as a verbal sanction for not doing enough to live up to the workplace norm (see also [Dellinger & Williams, 1997](#)). In contrast, the second reoccurring trope, i.e. ‘so what’s the special event?’ talk, can be interpreted as a verbal sanction for doing ‘too much’ or looking ‘too good’ to live up to the workplace norm:

Laura: (Well just today) one, like one of my work mates came in and she had like really done her hair really nicely and the rest, and I was like ooh, like, like, are you going somewhere after work? Well, she wasn’t, but, well, it’s like... If they are someone who doesn’t usually like wear make-up, and then she comes in with her face and hair all made up, then, well, I’m not like judging, but I’m like, ok I wonder what she’s doing after work... [laughter] Yeah.

The nurses in this interview agree that colleagues, rather than customers or patients, pay most attention to their looks. Yet, they do not necessarily see these discourses as problematic, but appear to regard even appearance-related comments that sound quite harsh (e.g. comments Essi received upon colouring her previously blonde hair pink: ‘why did you do that to your hair?’, ‘did you drop a can of paint on your head... quickly go was that off’) as light banter between colleagues.

## Conclusions

Here, I have analysed how the role costumes of employees are scripted in workplaces in the relations between employees and the people they encounter at work. I did this by employing a Goffmanian framework, which sees social life as a theatrical dramaturgy and people as actors who exercise impression management while playing different roles. The analysis informed us in many respects on the questions mentioned.

First, it described how aesthetic norms at workplaces are a result of multiple relations. Bosses, customers, students, patients, clients and workmates have certain expectations about how an employee should look; they make interpretations of his or her looks and sometimes express the norm by giving the employee (positive or negative) sanctions. These actors may give contradictory sanctions to the employees, as their expectations are different from each other's: colleagues may admire, whereas the boss may say it is bad for the brand. However, employees do not necessarily change their looks in accordance with the sanctions they get, but they may in some cases challenge the norms or interpret them in their own ways, which eventually puts norms in motion.

Norms are constantly battled, which turns the attention into power relations. Whose sanctions have power over employees' looks? Why are some employees allowed to break appearance norms more than others? Who is the main 'script-writer' in each situation? Based on my analysis, the answer to these questions is more complex than the space of this chapter allows to explore. It can be said, at least, that there are multiple scriptwriters in each situation. They are the actors and the spectators of the play, giving impressions and interpreting others' impressions at the same time. Some of them, however, are equipped with more status, stronger character, same-minded people or other forms of power that make their sanctions more powerful than those of the others, which ultimately determines in whose play we are acting. A lawyer may be constrained by the general conceptions of professional appearances, which his or her clients, colleagues and other people interpret and guard, for example.

Second, the analysis informed us about the consequences and purposes of impression management: what ends does the norm-conformance serve? The interviewees talked about several occasions on which their appearance had somehow shaped the situations in desirable ways: for some, it helped to get hired, build a trustful relation with another, give credibility or professionalism to one's appearance, 'grease the wheels of economy' by pleasing and attracting the customers, or it helped to get the work done in other ways. These positive consequences of impression management became particularly apparent in cases in which impression management failed and appearance norms were broken. These resulted in interpersonal misunderstandings, feelings of shame, contempt, mistrust and inability to make a contact, for example.

From a more sociological perspective, the analysis informed us about mechanisms of how appearance is used in everyday working life to maintain social order. The Goffmanian framework of impression management highlights that we order social life by constructing 'scenes', in which we act in certain roles. The

scripts of the scenes that set the rules (and norms) for the actors and give meaning to the situation are socially (together) negotiated. Diverging from the script violates the norm, it shakes the social order and as a result, the violator may be sanctioned. Appearance norms sometimes have no purpose other than to be a symbol of a certain social role. For example, why does an electronics salesman have to wear black trousers? Why it is not suitable for a lawyer to wear shiny silver shoes? What purpose do they serve? They are hardly more practical than any other colours for the job, but instead, they are collectively regarded as symbolising these occupations. Shiny silver shoes in a courtroom may be seen as a seed of chaos in the social order of a litigation. It disrupts the expectations of the situation and the sense of known order by drawing the attention: something that does not fit in the picture. At the same time, it opens a door for social change: the audience needs to decide whether or how the act should be sanctioned, which determines whether the social norm is maintained or somehow changed.

Third, it showed that employees may break appearance norms if they find it somehow beneficial for them in their job. Then, they need to struggle between different aesthetic expectations of different audiences and choose which to follow. For example, the more provocative outfit of a youth worker or the less formal jacket of a legal aid lawyer are norm violations, but both render them more approachable in the eyes of their clients and thus helped them in their work. The lawyer changed her outfit after she confronted the security guard, whereas the youth worker continued to rebel against the employer's appearance guidelines. This substantiates the point made in recent studies on aesthetic labour: getting the right looks for a job requires extra unpaid work and resources from the employees (e.g. Donaghue, 2017; Vonk, 2020). Employees often must navigate within the pressure of conflicting expectations, pondering the right choice, what to wear and in whose play to act. This highlights the main argument of this chapter, which is that aesthetic norms are situationally and relationally negotiated and created. In terms of aesthetic capital, that means that when there are multiple audiences with different expectations, it becomes difficult for an employee to predict how his or her appearance will be sanctioned. This makes the exchangeability of aesthetic capital unpredictable and prone to situational codes and norms. It thus necessitates that employees also have the right kind of cultural capital and that they are able to embody it in their physical expressions at work. To conclude, there is no one way appearances act as capital in working life as the conception of the 'right looks' is inseparably tied to situational norms and actors with different resources and capabilities.

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