



The Influence of Job Candidates' Physical Appearance on Interview Evaluations

A Prototype Matching Model

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Abstract: The influence of a candidate's physical appearance on interview evaluations is well documented. However, few models exist that explain how and why specific components of physical appearance influence interviewer perceptions. We address this discrepancy by identifying the primary components of appearance and integrating findings from the appearance literature to explain the relationship between candidate appearance and interview evaluations. We propose that interviewers compare traits inferred from a candidate's physical appearance with traits associated with their prototype for the job position. Interviewers perceive a strong person-job fit when these traits align, which is indicated by a prototype match. By detailing this progression in the proposed conceptual model, this paper answers calls from recent research and provides new directions for future inquiry.

Keywords: physical appearance, interview evaluations, job candidate, traits, prototype activation

One of the more ubiquitous and frequently studied selection practices for identifying potential employees is the job interview (e.g., Levashina, Hartwell, Morgeson, & Campion, 2014). The interview process entails a social interaction, wherein an interviewer evaluates candidates on various criteria to determine whether or not the individual should advance in the hiring process (e.g., Levashina et al., 2014; Macan, 2009). The efficacy of the process assumes that this evaluation results from the verbal exchange between the interviewer and the candidate. However, non-verbal information conveyed by the candidate also contributes to the evaluation process (e.g., Burnett & Motowidlo, 1998; DeGroot & Gooty, 2009).

One of the primary sources of non-verbal information – and subsequently interview evaluations – is the candidate's appearance (e.g., Burnett & Motowidlo, 1998; DeGroot & Gooty, 2009). This type of non-verbal information is conveyed to the interviewer almost instantaneously, as it is unavoidably one of the first things an interviewer notices (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992; Derous, Buijsrogge, Roulin, & Duyck, 2015; Willis & Todorov, 2006). These initial impressions formed by the candidate's appearance have a lasting effect on the interviewer, influencing post-interview

evaluations and subsequent hiring decisions (Barrick et al., 2012).

A possible explanation for the association between candidate appearance and interviewer evaluations is the inference of traits based on appearance (Borkenau & Liebler, 1992; Willis & Todorov, 2006). For instance, individuals often infer personality traits such as extraversion from non-verbal (visual) cues such as attractiveness (Borkenau & Liebler, 1992). Although some appearance-derived inferences may be accurate (Borkenau & Liebler, 1992; Penton-Voak, Pound, Little, & Perrett, 2006), overreliance on them can easily lead to biased evaluations of candidates, thereby hampering an organization's ability to identify high-quality employees (e.g., Rule & Tskhay, 2014). Therefore, understanding the role of heuristics on how interviewer evaluations are influenced by candidates' appearance is critical in developing optimal and fair selection practices.

An important initial point is that forming judgments based on an individual's appearance is inevitable and often subconscious (Hassin & Trope, 2000). As such, it is not unusual for interviewers to use a candidate's appearance to infer traits when forming perceptions of person-job fit

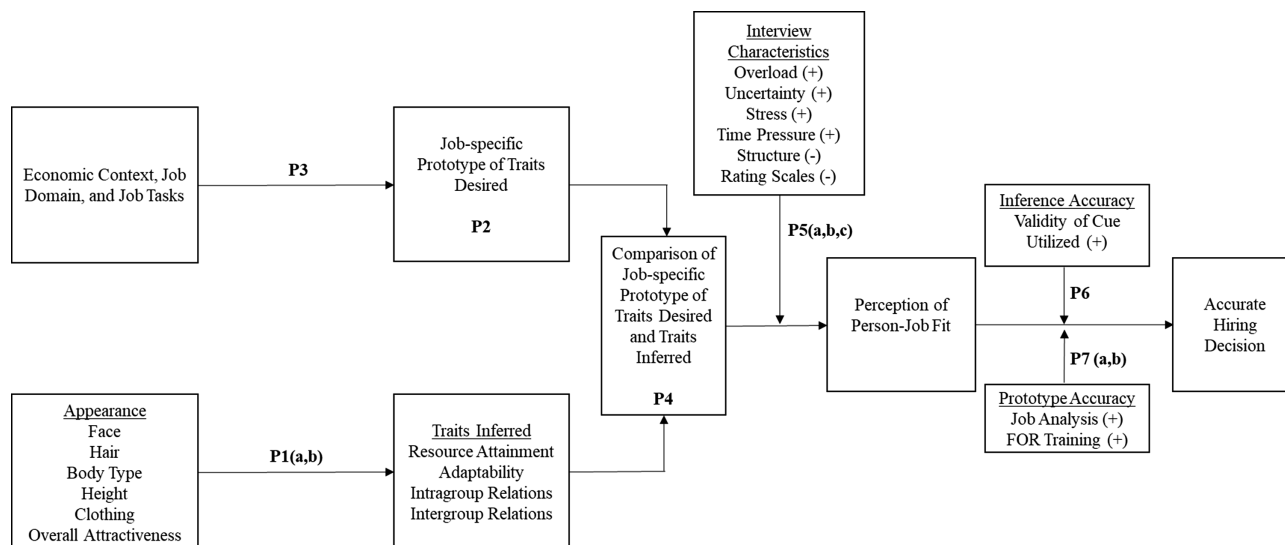


Figure 1. Appearance prototype matching model. “P” represents propositions; (+) indicates a positive moderating effect; (–) indicates a negative moderating effect; FOR = frame-of-reference.

(Edwards, 1991). Person-job fit represents how well the interviewer perceives the candidate’s personality, knowledge, skills, and abilities align with those demanded by the job (Kristof-Brown, 2000). Establishing this is a critical component of the job interview, as person-job fit is strongly associated with intent to hire (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005) and explains more variance in hiring recommendations than broader person-organization fit (Kristof-Brown, 2000). Therefore, understanding how interviewers’ perceptions of person-job fit are influenced by a candidate’s appearance can provide valuable information regarding how to address overreliance on heuristics that may lead to discrimination, and what approaches might improve evaluation of fit.

To help model this relationship between job candidates’ appearance and interviewer evaluations of person-job fit, we propose an appearance-based prototype matching model (Figure 1). In proposing the model, we first provide a brief review of related models and the literature investigating the associations between common components of appearance and the inference of traits. Next, we explain the process by which interviewers develop job-specific prototypes, how these prototypes are used, what factors may influence the reliance and accuracy of prototypes, and the consequences of fit. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of the model as well as related proposals for future research stemming from the model’s propositions. Although far from encompassing all factors that are evaluated during an interview (e.g., job knowledge), the proposed model details how evaluations specific to common components of appearance might be inferred and utilized during the job candidate evaluation process.

Expansion on Prior Models Within the Appearance and Interview Context

The lack of fit model (Heilman, 1983, 1995) is often used as a lens through which to view person-job fit. The model proposes that evaluators (here, interviewers) compare the perceived attributes of an individual to the perceived job requirements to conduct a fit assessment. If the individual’s perceived attributes align with the perceived job requirements, it creates an expectation of success, whereas if there is a misalignment it creates an expectation of failure. These expectancies then largely determine the outcome of the evaluation or personnel decision (e.g., intent to hire). Although the lack of fit concept generalizes to a variety of contexts, Heilman (1983) proposed the model as a means of explaining sex bias due to stereotyping and the influence of sex-typing jobs. In doing so, she also noted that the incidence of sex bias can be influenced by altering perceptions of sex-typed jobs to be more gender ambiguous (i.e., stereotypes applied to jobs) and by providing job relevant information about the individual to the evaluator.

More recently, Heilman’s work has been utilized in building conceptual models detailing the processes by which interviewers respond to veterans and applicants with stigmas and disabilities. For instance, Stone and Stone (2015) proposed a model wherein evaluators’ treatment of veterans is determined by organizational characteristics, attributes of the veteran, attributes of the evaluator (e.g., patriotism), and the nature of the job influencing job-related expectations and the consequences for the veteran. Related

to the Heilman (1983) model, the model is built around the use of stereotypes and stigmas as a means of categorizing and inferring attributes to veterans. The model further relies on Heilman's (1983) work by proposing interview outcomes (e.g., job suitability ratings and hiring decisions) are determined by stereotype-job fit. Although presented as a general model of veteran interview evaluations, as opposed to a model that focuses solely on the role of appearance as proposed here, the Stone and Stone (2015) model does note the importance of general "aesthetic appeal" (p. 72) as an influence on how interviewers evaluate veterans.

Deros et al. (2015) proposed a related conceptual model built on the dual-process framework for understanding how stigmas influence the interview process. Specifically, the model is built on the premise that an individual's intuition (i.e., Type I process) is predominately determined by the individual's cognitive scripts and heuristics (e.g., stereotypes and prejudice). Further, these processes require minimal cognitive demand and can be activated quickly to process and categorize information. In contrast, an individual's reasoning or reactive processing (i.e., Type II process) is a function of activating working memory, is slower, and presents a higher cognitive demand than Type I processing. Deros et al. (2015) suggest that stigmas trigger Type I processing, which can lead to an inaccurate assessment of person-job fit for stigmatized job candidates. In addition, the model suggests a number of options for stimulating the use of Type II processing, such as the use of structured interviews, enforcement of antidiscrimination policies, and diversity training.

Here, we expand on these prior models by shifting the focus from the use of job stereotypes to job prototypes and by designing a model specifically for examining the role of common aspects of job candidate appearance on interview evaluations. Doing so provides three significant contributions to the literature beyond those of earlier models. First, stereotypes represent attributes that a target is assumed to possess due to their membership within a specific group (Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff, & Ruderman, 1978). Applied to the job context, stereotyped jobs are assumed to require the attributes associated with the type of individual generally perceived as holding that position (e.g., managerial positions and males). In contrast, prototypes are cognitive structures containing a set list of attributes used to identify objects or concepts (e.g., Rosch, 1973). Therefore, while stereotypes rely on a specific identifier (e.g., skin color, gender) to imply attributes of the target based on group membership, the use of prototypes (a) does not utilize group membership to assign attributes to the target, and (b) categorizes the target by comparing multiple attributes of the target against the attributes previously assigned to an individual's cognitive categories. This allows for a much broader application of attributes identified by the interviewer as necessary for the

job position, as the attributes are not identified using group membership (e.g., male sex-typed jobs requiring male attributes) and are free to vary based on the actual requirements of the job (i.e., attributes that cross multiple groups).

Second, examining how interviewers evaluate person-job fit from a prototype perspective allows for an integration of the connectionist perspective of implicit theories (e.g., Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001) to formulate a model that identifies the antecedents by which interviewer prototypes are developed and the information-processing that occurs when interviewer prototypes are activated. Specifically, the connectionist perspective suggests that attributes within a prototype can be viewed as a network of interconnected nodes, where the structure of the network is relatively stable and the importance (or value) placed on the different nodes varies based on contextual factors (Cantor & Mischel, 1977; Lord et al., 2001). For instance, Lord et al. (2001) identified culture, leader, follower, and current task as the primary contextual (or input) layer influencing individual's implicit leadership prototype. In this way, contextual factors determine what attributes (e.g., agreeableness and conscientiousness) populate the individual's prototype and the importance placed on these attributes. Further, the model proposes that the attributes within the network are generally ordered, such that certain nodes are expected to co-occur (Horowitz & Turan, 2008). This leads to gap-filling, where identification or categorization of information is a function of both the information received by an individual and information inferred due to the relationships between nodes (Cantor & Mischel, 1977; Schneider & Blankmeyer, 1983). Prototype activation occurs when an individual compares the pattern of attributes within their prototype against the pattern of attributes observed or inferred. The degree of overlap between the two patterns (e.g., the degree to which traits comprising the prototype align with traits observed or inferred) determines the strength of the categorization (e.g., strong or weak perceived person-job fit).

This approach differs from Heilman's (1983) suggestions for dampening the effect of stereotypes by providing additional job information, such that we propose more of a developmental model wherein prototypes are formulated to be accurate representations of the job requirements and potentially a useful cognitive heuristic, as opposed to erroneous stereotypes. Further, while prior models note how the nature of the job influences perceived job requirements (e.g., Stone & Stone, 2015), we expand on this by highlighting how multiple contextual factors (i.e., economic context, job domain, and job tasks) influence how interviewers conceptualize job requirements and how factors surrounding the interview process (e.g., information overload, stress, and structure) influence the reliance on appearance-based prototype matching when determining person-job fit.

Third, while stereotypes are often associated with biases and prior models have focused solely on the negative aspects of how interviewers use heuristics, the greater accuracy of prototypes can provide a justifiable means of assessing a job applicant. In this way, an appearance prototype matching approach aligns with research suggesting that traits inferred from appearance can be accurate (e.g., Borkenau & Liebler, 1992), and therefore useful when evaluating job candidates. We detail this possibility by utilizing evolutionary theory to identify what traits are most easily inferred by interviewers, and Brunswik's (1956) lens model to explain variation in the accuracy of traits inferred from a job candidate's appearance.

In proposing a prototype-based approach to how interviewers evaluate job candidates' appearance, we also contribute to the interview literature more broadly by identifying the common aspects of job candidates' appearance (face, hair, body type, height, clothing, and overall attractiveness) and which traits are most likely to be inferred based on appearance. This moves beyond demographic constants and nondescript "attractiveness" (e.g., aesthetic appeal; Stone & Stone, 2015) that dominates the appearance bias literature, and provides a taxonomy for future research investigating the role of various components of appearance within the interview context. As such, the proposed model addresses calls for research on the influence of appearance on interviewer perceptions, and incorporates into a single model various aspects of appearance often examined in isolation (Barrick et al., 2012; Derous et al., 2015; Huffcutt, 2011).

Components of Appearance and the Inference of Traits

Appearance encompasses a person's manifest physical attributes (Hurley-Hanson & Giannantonio, 2006), and has been identified as one of seven factors commonly assessed in interviews (Huffcutt, Conway, Roth, & Stone, 2001). In the development of models for how interviewers form perceptions of applicants, appearance is often conceptualized as simply attractiveness or appropriate clothing, or is otherwise poorly operationalized as a single or vague construct (e.g., Judge, Higgins, & Cable, 2000). This has led to studies traditionally examining the aspects of appearance in isolation. The proposed model integrates findings from these piecemeal studies into a more comprehensive model that provides a framework for examining appearance as multifaceted. In addition, we (1) take on an evolutionary perspective to identify what traits are most readily inferred based on a candidate's appearance, and (2) utilize Brunswik's (1956) lens model to explain the variation in the accuracy of these inferences.

Face

Traits are often inferred from an individual's facial appearance (e.g., Walker & Vetter, 2015; Willis & Todorov, 2006). For instance, facial appearance is particularly predictive of leader selection within military, political, business, and sports contexts (Olivola, Eubanks, & Lovelace, 2014). Specifically, individuals making selection decisions prefer congruence between traits inferred from facial appearance (e.g., competitive or cooperative) and the problems associated with the situation the candidate will be entering (e.g., need for competition or cooperation; Spisak, Homan, Grabo, & Van Vugt, 2012; Trichas & Schyns, 2012).

As an example of trait inference, bearded men are perceived as notably more masculine and dominant as compared to clean-shaven men, particularly clean-shaven men with small jaws (Dixson, Lee, Sherlock, & Talamas, 2016). Additionally, facial age appearance can influence selection outcomes as interviewers perceive individuals with younger faces as healthier and more physically fit (Kaufmann, Krings, & Sczesny, 2015). Such personality inferences derived from facial characteristics have been found to alter how interviewers perceive candidates (Hassin & Trope, 2000) and perceptions of person-job fit (Kaufmann et al., 2015).

Hair

Research involving the impact of candidates' hair, such as style or color, on interviewer perceptions is comparatively sparse. However, extreme hair styles and unnatural hair color can have a significant negative impact on a candidate's interview ratings. For instance, hair styles or colors that diverge from what the interviewer perceives as appropriate for the position will likely result in a negative evaluation (Barrick, Shaffer, & DeGrassi, 2009). Additionally, hair style and color may serve as a social cue (e.g., indicator of warmth or likability) or intellectual cue (e.g., indicator of responsibility or respect) during the formation of first impressions (Lennon & Miller, 1984). A lack of hair can also influence the traits inferred about a candidate. For example, recent research found that men with shaved heads are viewed as more confident, mature, and dominant than are men with a full head of hair (Mannes, 2013).

More broadly, government employees often view unconventional hair styles and hair color as having a negative impact on customers' perceptions of service quality (Karl, Hall, & Peluchette, 2013), thus emphasizing the importance of the job-relevant context. Considering that some of these incumbents are likely to participate in the selection process, even conducting interviews of candidates, this bias against unconventional hair styles and

colors likely plays a role in how evaluators form judgments of candidates.

Body Type

The majority of current research on body type involves understanding bias against overweight individuals, which is a growing concern in the workplace. Stereotypes applied to overweight individuals include emotional impairments, social handicaps, and undesirable personality traits (e.g., Roehling, Roehling, & Odland, 2008). These negative stereotypes have the potential to impact almost all stages of the employment process (Rudolph, Wells, Weller, & Baltes, 2009), particularly the selection and interview stage (e.g., Bartels, 2016). For instance, despite comparable qualifications, overweight individuals are less likely than average-weight applicants to be rated as employable (Grant & Mizzi, 2014), to be moved forward in the selection process (Agerström & Rooth, 2011), and to be presented with a job offer (Pingitore, Dugoni, Tindale, & Spring, 1994). Further, overweight applicants are rated lower on punctuality, manners, and trustworthiness than average-weight applicants in the context of sales positions (Zemanek, McIntyre, & Zemanek, 1998).

However, in some circumstances, individuals who are above average weight are not impacted by negative stereotypes. As an example specific to sales positions, insurance companies have been known to hire men who weigh more than the national average due to a perception by sales managers that larger salesmen are better performers in such a sales role (Murry, 1980). Further, the economic context and job tasks can influence interviewers' perspectives on how well overweight candidates might fit the job position (Roehling, 1999). For instance, overweight candidates may be seen as unfit for the more customer-facing and physically demanding external sales roles, however, may be seen as a better fit than non-overweight candidates for internal sales positions (Bellizzi & Hasty, 1998).

Height

Another prominent aspect of physicality is height, such that there is a general preference for taller individuals in the selection process (Little & Roberts, 2012). This aligns with complementary findings that taller individuals are perceived as better leaders (Re et al., 2012). Judge and Cable (2004) presented a theoretical model specific to height, with initial tests indicating that tall individuals enjoyed "advantages in several important aspects of their careers and organizational lives" (p. 428), including leader emergence and associated income (controlling for other potential factors such as sex, age, and weight). For both

men and women, height has also been linked to perceptions of positive personality traits (e.g., Jackson & Ervin, 1992). However, the extent to which some of these traits, such as assertiveness and ambition, are valued is likely somewhat contextually dependent. For instance, assertiveness and ambition (often stereotyped as male traits) might be desirable for managerial positions, but may be detrimental for a candidate applying for a more supportive or administrative position (which is more likely stereotyped as a female-oriented role; Little & Roberts, 2012). As a result, the type of role the organization is intending to fill can play an important role in influencing the value placed on traits inferred from the candidate's height.

Clothing

The few studies that explore this aspect of appearance have found support for the contention that candidate clothing influences how interviewers perceive job applicants (Damhorst, 1990). For example, even minor alterations in clothing can influence interviewer perceptions of a candidate's competence (Howlett, Pine, Cahill, Orakçioğlu, & Fletcher, 2015), and well-dressed candidates are generally rated higher by interviewers as compared to candidates perceived by the interviewer as being poorly dressed (Riggio & Throckmorton, 1988).

Job candidates' formality of dress has also been found to correlate positively with social skill, such that higher formality of clothing is related to higher self-ratings and other-ratings of social skill (Gifford, Ng, & Wilkinson, 1985). Neatness and formality of clothing have also been found to positively relate to conscientiousness (Albright, Kenny, & Malloy, 1988). Perceptions of other traits, such as dominance, competence, professionalism, and openness to experience, creativity, and extraversion, have also been associated with attire (e.g., Borkenau & Liebler, 1992; Penton-Voak et al., 2006). Moreover, particular colors of clothing can convey symbolic meaning, and have been associated with traits such as high social status or perceived power (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993).

Overall Attractiveness

In addition to more tangible physical attributes, attractiveness is an important aspect of perceived physical appearance (e.g., Hurley-Hanson & Giannantonio, 2006) and can be defined as the degree to which one's physical appearance "elicits favorable reactions from others" (Morrow, 1990, p. 47). Perceived attractiveness has been found to be associated with a number of favorable traits and outcomes, such as perceived intelligence, social skills, and sense of humor (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Langlois et al.,

2000), and often leads to favorable interview evaluations (e.g., Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 2003). However, the true effects of attractiveness are often difficult to isolate, as they are easily conflated with evaluations of other aspects of appearance. That is, each aspect (e.g., body type, clothing) contributes to a more general impression of whether or not an individual is considered holistically “attractive.”

Notably, information conveyed by attractive candidates is generally received more positively than information conveyed by non-attractive candidates (Burnett & Motowidlo, 1998). This resembles a type of halo error (e.g., Cooper, 1981; Murphy, Jako, & Anhalt, 1993; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), wherein evaluations of one attribute (i.e., attractiveness) correlate highly with evaluations of other attributes (e.g., competence), and is representative of the “what is beautiful is good” heuristic (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). As a result, attractive individuals are levied a positive stereotype and generally experience better selection outcomes as compared to less attractive individuals (Hosoda et al., 2003). However, in some cases, being attractive can have a negative or neutral impact on evaluations (Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979). As an example, although not always the case (e.g., Marlowe, Schneider, & Nelson, 1996), individuals may prefer slightly unattractive candidates over attractive candidates when making hiring decisions for a managerial position (Geys, 2014). Additionally, for evaluations of integrity and concern for others, attractiveness provides no advantage, or may even provide a disadvantage in the case of the “beauty is beastly” effect, as it too may generalize to trait inferences (e.g., that attractive individuals may be arrogant or egocentric; Gallucci & Meyer, 1984). In addition to the types of inferences made, the level of customer contact required of the job also influences the impact that attractiveness has on interview evaluations (e.g., Eagly et al., 1991), again emphasizing the importance of context.

Inference of Traits

A review of the literature indicates that a multitude of traits may be inferred from a job candidate’s appearance, and that these inferences are often developed subconsciously. This process aligns with evolutionary theory (e.g., Spisak, Nicholson, & van Vugt, 2011) and the proposed use of physical cues to evaluate social fitness found in ecological theory (McArthur & Baron, 1983; Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2008; Zebrowitz & Rhodes, 2004), as both suggest that people are naturally attuned to detecting signals in their physical and social environment that may either pose a threat to survival or provide an opportunity for reproduction. In the interpersonal domain, such signals are sometimes provided by physical characteristics that either reflect a history of past behaviors (e.g., scars from prior combat) or the

phenotypic expression of one’s genetic make-up (e.g., Hamilton, 1964). For example, male facial width-to-height ratio is related to testosterone levels (Lefevre, Lewis, Perrett, & Penke, 2013), which is considered an accurate indicator of aggressive behavior (e.g., Carré, McCormick, & Mondloch, 2009). Therefore, based on evolutionary theory, we expect individuals to readily generate information from appearance, given that survival is enhanced by knowing who is (or is not) a threat. Here, we propose this general principle as an evolutionary mechanism that is often subconsciously triggered when the interviewer is exposed to a job candidate’s appearance.

Proposition 1a. Interviewers are subconsciously influenced by components of a job candidate’s physical appearance (face, hair, body type, height, clothing, and overall attractiveness) in making trait inferences about the candidate.

Types of Traits Inferred

In addition to informing a general proposition, evolutionary theory suggests that certain traits may be more salient to individuals due to their proximal association with survival and reproduction. Four behavioral dynamics, in particular, are considered paramount for human survival and reproduction (Spisak et al., 2011). The first is resource attainment, which on the most basic level includes things like food and water. However, in the context of organizations and employment, this might entail prestige, wealth, or social networks that grant individuals access to valued resources, and may be reflected in traits such as extraversion and proactivity. The second is adaptability, which refers to an individual’s ability to adjust to the environment and modify behavior to acquire resources. In the modern context, this could be indicated by how well an individual aligns with social norms, such as modifying their clothing to appropriately fit the attire expectations for an interview.

The third behavioral dynamic is intragroup relations. As Spisak et al. (2011) note, “selection does not operate on the genotype but on the phenotype” (p. 167), suggesting that physical attributes play a central role in determining an individual’s perceived potential for contribution and potential level of cooperation with the group. For a job candidate, ability to maintain intragroup relations likely relates to traits such as competence and likeability. The last primary behavioral dynamic is intergroup relations, such as organizing allied groups for war or establishing trade between groups. Within the interview context, intergroup relations are likely associated with traits such as dominance and charisma, depending on the level of competition or collaboration required of the position. Although the types of traits inferred from a job candidate’s appearance are extensive,

Table 1. Proposed evolutionary dynamics and examples of associated traits and appearance components

Evolutionary dynamic	Trait	Example appearance component	Trait-appearance reference
Resource Attainment	Assertiveness	Obesity (negative)	Pomerantz, Pomerantz, Greenberg, and Blackburn (1977)
	Extraversion	Facial symmetry	Pound, Penton-Voak, and Brown (2007)
	Power	Height	Judge and Cable (2004)
Adaptability	Cognitive Ability	Height	Case and Paxson (2008)
	Conscientiousness	Neatness of clothing	Albright et al. (1988)
	Openness to Experience	Culturally deviant hairstyle (e.g., unusual dye)	Nathanson, Paulhus, and Williams (2006)
Intragroup Relations	Competence	Well-dressed clothing	Riggio and Throckmorton (1988)
	Honesty	Babyfaced	Brownlow (1992)
	Likeability	Low/Normal Weight	Carels and Musher-Eizenman (2010)
Intergroup Relations	Charisma	Height (for men)	Hamstra (2014)
	Confidence	Shaved head (for men)	Mannes (2013)
	Dominance	Facial width-to-height ratio	Geniole and McCormick (2015)

we posit that traits associated with resource attainment, adaptability, intragroup relations, and intergroup relations will be the most readily inferred by interviewers when exposed to a job candidate's appearance (examples provided in Table 1).

Proposition 1b. Interviewers most readily infer traits related to resource attainment, adaptability, intragroup relations, and intergroup relations based on a job candidate's appearance.

Prototype Theory and Interviewer Reliance on Prototypes

The traits inferred from the components of appearance are consistent in different contexts (e.g., a tall candidate is likely to be viewed as assertive and ambitious regardless of whether the job is for a management or front-line employee position). However, how the interviewer evaluates the desirability of the traits inferred from a candidate's appearance is determined by the interviewer's prototype for the given situation (Cantor, Mischel, & Schwartz, 1982) – in this case the job position. According to prototype theory, individuals have templates (prototypes) representing specific characteristics and attributes used for purposes of categorizing novel stimuli (e.g., Rosch, 1973). When an individual is exposed to a new stimulus, the individual uses prototypes to determine the extent of match between the new object (here, the applicant) and existing descriptive categories (e.g., a job-specific prototype). The more similar the new object is to its prototype, the stronger the perceived association between the object and its category membership (e.g., Rosch, 1973).

In relation to the proposed model, when an interviewer is tasked with evaluating job candidates for a particular position, the interviewer has a specific set of attributes he or she has deemed representative of the ideal or typical employee in that role. These characteristics comprise the interviewer's job-specific prototype, and represent the traits the interviewer expects will lead to success in the job. When an interviewer is exposed to a job candidate's appearance, the candidate's appearance triggers a pattern of inferred traits (e.g., high in competence, low in trustworthiness, etc.). In order to process this information and categorize the job candidate, the interviewer then compares the pattern of traits representing his or her job specific prototype to the pattern of traits inferred about the candidate. If there is congruence between an interviewer's perceptions of the candidate and the interviewer's prototype for the position, the candidate will be viewed as having high person-job fit and will be expected to be successful on the job (Heilman, 1983; Perry, 1994). Therefore, the formation and use of job-specific prototypes can provide insight into how job candidates are evaluated in general, but also how candidate appearance influences interview evaluations.

The value placed on different features (e.g., high extraversion or low aggressiveness) within an interviewer's job-specific prototype can be reinforced or changed over time. This is considered one of the major advantages of prototype theory and the connectionist perspective, as it acknowledges that the values an individual places on features comprising a particular prototype are malleable (Hampton, 1995). However, this also means that not all individuals have the same perception of certain prototypes, and everyone processes information differently – even for the same job (e.g., Busenitz, 1996). This has noteworthy implications for the interview process, as interviewers may hold different views on what qualities are most needed

to be effective in the position the organization is intending to fill. Further, it also means that the “quality job candidate” prototype will change based also on the job characteristics as well as the interviewer’s assessment of the corresponding prototype.

Proposition 2. Interviewers have job-specific prototypes comprising the perceived traits needed to accomplish the job position the interviewer is intending to fill.

The Role of Economic Context, Job Domain, and Job Task in Prototype Development

Economic and contextual conditions can impact which traits are most valued when forming prototypes used in evaluations to select a leader (Rule & Tskhay, 2014). For instance, perceptions of warmth, likability, and trustworthiness derived from the candidate’s physical appearance are viewed as detrimental to a leader’s ability to navigate financial uncertainty. Similarly, when the organization is following a growth strategy, a younger appearance is preferred, whereas when the organizational strategy is based on stability, an older appearance is more likely to be favored (Spisak, Grabo, Arvey, & van Vugt, 2014).

The specific domain or position within the organization can also influence the desired traits for the position. For instance, warmth and attractiveness are valued for business and political leaders, while masculinity and maturity are more valued for sports leaders (Olivola et al., 2014). As another example, controlling for age, attractiveness, sex, race, and competence, Geys (2014) found that employees prefer managers who are perceived as less likeable, and interviewers prefer managerial candidates who look assertive and competitive. In contrast, for other positions (e.g., salesperson) likability or being cooperative might be highly valued.

Tasks specific to the job also influence which traits are considered the most important for the position. Individuals select potential leaders based on congruence between traits associated with facial appearance and the particular tasks the leader will be undertaking (Little, 2014). For instance, when presented with a cooperative task, leaders are selected based on traits associated with cooperation. In a similar manner, individuals whose appearance leads to inferences of strength and aggression are preferred in situations involving competition and conflict (Hehman, Leitner, Deegan, & Gaertner, 2015). However, strength and aggression are viewed as negative traits when selecting teammates for an intellectually demanding situation, such as a

chess tournament (Hehman et al., 2015). In this way, desirable traits are associated with specific job tasks.

Proposition 3. The traits the interviewer perceives as needed to accomplish the job are influenced by the economic context, job domain, and job tasks.

Using Prototypes to Evaluate Candidate Person-Job Fit Based on Appearance

Prototype activation occurs when an interviewer infers traits about a job candidate and then attempts to categorize the candidate as having high or low person-job fit. This process begins when the job candidate’s appearance triggers a pattern of inferred traits about the candidate. In attempting to categorize the pattern of traits, an interviewer’s previously dormant prototype (comprised of specific traits) is activated and the degree of overlap (i.e., the number and strength of shared traits) determines how well the interviewer perceives the job candidate to align with his or her conceptualization of a high person-job fit candidate.

Prior findings suggest that interviewers conduct this evaluation of a candidate’s traits within seconds of observing the candidate’s appearance (Willis & Todorov, 2006). If the traits inferred from the candidate’s appearance match those identified as valuable for achieving success in the position, the interviewer will perceive the candidate as having a strong person-job fit, a form of contingent selection (Little & Roberts, 2012). However, if the traits inferred do not align with the traits comprising the prototype, the interviewer will perceive the candidate as having a weak person-job fit. The degree of person-job fit will then influence the candidate’s interview evaluations and chances of receiving a job offer (Kristof-Brown, 2000).

Proposition 4. Interviewers’ evaluation of person-job fit will be influenced by the degree of congruence between the interviewer’s prototype for the job and the traits inferred from the candidate’s appearance.

Enhanced Use of Appearance Prototype Matching: Interview Characteristics

Interviewers are particularly prone to rely on prototype matching as a cognitive shortcut (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). Although the process is often subconscious, certain characteristics common to the interview setting can heighten the use of prototype matching to form evaluations. The first interview characteristic is cognitive overload or limited cognitive ability at the time of the interview (e.g., Bodenhausen, 1990). This is when an interviewer is presented with too

much information to process at one time and becomes unable to process detailed or specific information about a candidate. Instead, an interviewer is forced to rely on appearance-based heuristics rather than objective measures and information. The second interview characteristic that can predispose an interviewer to reliance on prototypes in evaluations is when the interviewer is faced with high levels of uncertainty, such as a candidate providing indecipherable or irrelevant verbal responses to interview questions (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Tajfel, 1981). In these situations, an interviewer's ability to process information is hampered due to the uncertainty surrounding unexpected behavior by the candidate or the ambiguity (or sheer lack) of information received. Additionally, irrelevant information received from interviewee responses unrelated to the interview question or non-job-related questions can also create uncertainty for the interviewer. As a result, an interviewer may rely on more easily accessible information, such as appearance, to compensate for the lack of available, discernable, and relevant information.

A third interview characteristic that we propose would increase interviewers' reliance on a candidate's appearance to formulate an evaluation is an emotionally charged or stressful situation (e.g., Huffcutt, 2011). Although a typical employment interview is unlikely to produce an extremely emotionally charged situation for an interviewer, it is an inherently stressful situation and the questions and answers may trigger some strong emotions, which may result in an interviewer having a biased recall of information and an overreliance on heuristics. Finally, the fourth interview characteristic that may increase an interviewer's reliance on heuristics is significant time pressure, such as having to conduct numerous interviews within a condensed time-frame (Wyer & Srull, 1994). The added pressure of reporting these evaluations quickly leads to the use of cognitive shortcuts. As a result, instead of processing the more objective and relevant information presented by a candidate, an interviewer will over-rely on first impressions and snap judgments.

Proposition 5a. The interviewer will rely more heavily on appearance prototype matching when experiencing high cognitive overload, information uncertainty, stress, and/or time pressure.

In addition to cognitive overload, information uncertainty, stress, and time pressure, interview structure can also play a role in determining an interviewer's reliance on appearance prototype matching. Structured interview questions are designed to evaluate job characteristics and help interviewers focus on collecting objective information about the candidate (e.g., Burnett & Motowidlo, 1998). Unstructured interviews, in contrast, are often conducted

in an idiosyncratic manner, which leads to interviewers relying on their subjective impressions of the candidate to form an evaluation (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Dipboye, 1994). This often results in low quality or ambiguous information about the applicant, leading the interviewer to rely on stereotypes to form an evaluation (Bruner, 1957; Dipboye, 1994). Although interviewers will still infer traits from a job candidate's appearance regardless of the degree of structure in the interview (DeGroot & Gooty, 2009), the use of appearance prototype matching likely decreases as the structure of an interview increases.

Proposition 5b. The interviewer will rely less heavily on appearance prototype matching when structured interviews are used.

As a component of interview structure, the use of rating scales (e.g., behaviorally anchored rating scales [BARS]; Bernardin & Smith, 1981; Smith & Kendall, 1963) for items asked during the interview can decrease the variance between interviewer evaluations based on job candidate appearance, including moderating the effect of biases against overweight candidates (Kutcher & Bragger, 2004). The purpose of rating scales such as BARS is to provide interviewers with exemplars of behavior given the definition of the evaluation criteria (Bernardin & Smith, 1981). With the prototype-matching model, we suggest that results from Kutcher and Bragger's (2004) study extend to all components of appearance. This is due to a reduction in the use of interviewer prototypes during the interview process. Specifically, by using rating scales (e.g., BARS) the interviewer is no longer inferring traits from the job candidate's appearance, but rather is comparing the applicant's behavior or responses to the exemplars provided by the scale. This aligns with the consistent finding that providing interviewers with job relevant information (e.g., specific behaviors identified as anchors) can lead to a reduction in the use of heuristics.

Proposition 5c. The interviewer will rely less heavily on appearance prototype matching when rating anchors are used.

The Accuracy of Traits Inferred

Although interviewers more readily infer certain traits, the accuracy of those inferences varies. According to Brunswik's (1956) lens model, environmental features can function as a lens through which observers indirectly perceive underlying constructs within the environment. Further, the accuracy of these perceptions is determined by cue utilization and cue validity. The former represents the perceived association between an observable cue and

its underlying trait, such as making an association between the organization of an individual's desk and the individual's level of conscientiousness (e.g., Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, & Morris, 2002). The latter represents the actual association between the observable cue and the trait. If the two converge, such that the cue utilized is also a valid cue, the inference made about the underlying trait will be accurate.

The validity of cues can be interpreted through the behavioral residue model (e.g., Gosling et al., 2002), which proposes that physical objects left behind in an individual's environment can be used to infer traits about the individual. Within the context of a job candidate's appearance, the model suggests that repeated expression of emotion or behavior may result in physical cues that can be used to accurately infer traits, where both static cues (e.g., clothing) and dynamic cues (e.g., facial expression) are associated with the inference of relevant personality traits (Naumann, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009). For instance, repeated emotional expression over time can lead to physical alterations in a person's face (e.g., laugh lines) and the subsequent inference of personality traits by observers (Malatesta, Fiore, & Messina, 1987). However, other physical cues might lead to inaccurate trait inferences due to the utilization of invalid cues. For example, an individual's body weight is often utilized as a physical cue to indicate an individual's punctuality and trustworthiness (e.g., Zemanek et al., 1998), despite this being a generally invalid indicator of an individual's true level of punctuality and trustworthiness. In this way, the validity of physical cues utilized by an interviewer when inferring traits based on a job candidate's appearance is likely to fluctuate.

Proposition 6. The validity of the physical cue utilized will positively moderate the relationship between perceived person-job fit based on appearance prototype matching and accuracy of hiring decision.

The Accuracy of Job-Specific Prototypes

One of the advantages of the proposed model is that unlike when job requirements are determined by stereotypes (e.g., sex-typed in Heilman's model), job requirements based on prototypes can represent accurate cognitive structures comprising a variety of traits that are useful to evaluate in the interview context. For instance, when an organization's business model is built on employee image and places a high value on "aesthetic labor" (e.g., Warhurst & Nickson, 2007), the traits inferred from a candidate's appearance are likely a justifiable concern for the organization. In turn, interviewers with accurate prototypes of the desired traits who also utilize valid appearance cues will be more likely to hire candidates that appropriately fit the image of the

organization. Therefore, while the economic context, job demands, and job tasks influence the development of prototypes, interviewers vary in how they interpret these factors as indicators for what traits are required for the position (Borman, 1987). Therefore, how an individual responds to these factors and the validity of the prototype developed can play a significant role in the utility of the interviewer's prototype when inferring traits about candidates based on their appearance.

Here, we propose two techniques by which organizations can improve the accuracy of interviewer prototypes. The first is the use of strategic job analysis (SJA; Schneider & Konz, 1989) to help interviewers develop a more accurate understanding of what is required of the position they intend to fill. A SJA is "a purposeful, systematic process of collecting current and future work-related aspects of a job, within the organization's strategic context" (Singh, 2008, p. 92). The process consists of conducting an environmental and internal analysis, evaluating how the requirements of the position are anticipated to change in the future, and evaluating the effectiveness of the SJA over time (Singh, 2008). In following this process and providing the resulting information to interviewers, organizations can help prevent interviewers from developing prototypes for the position based on their idiosyncratic, and potentially inaccurate, perception of the position. For instance, an interviewer might have inaccurate perceptions of the organizational strategy or the organization's current economic context. By providing the interviewer with the results of an SJA for the position, subsequent perceptions by the interviewer should more closely align with the intentions of the organization regarding what traits are most relevant for the position in actuality.

In a similar manner, frame-of-reference (FOR) training (Bernardin & Buckley, 1981) can be used to facilitate valid interviewer prototypes. FOR training is one of the most widely supported training techniques for improving performance appraisal quality (Roch, Woehr, Mishra, & Kieszczynska, 2012; Woehr & Huffcutt, 1994). The training consists of (1) emphasizing the various components or dimensions of performance, (2) providing definitions for performance dimensions, (3) utilizing behavioral incidents to represent the dimensions identified and their corresponding level of performance, and (4) allowing raters the opportunity for practice and feedback using the performance standards developed. The effectiveness of FOR training is built on the premise that creating a shared performance prototype for all raters (here, interviewers) leads to a more accurate and consistent prototype for identifying low- and high-performing job candidates (e.g., Bernardin & Buckley, 1981; Roch et al., 2012). This can be particularly beneficial when raters have idiosyncratic perceptions about the job requirements (Uggerslev & Sulsky, 2008).

Proposition 7. The use of (a) job analysis and (b) frame-of-reference training to inform an interviewer what traits are needed to accomplish the job will positively moderate the relationship between perceived person-job fit based on appearance prototype matching and accuracy of hiring decision.

Discussion

Integrating the concept of prototype matching with contextual considerations, as put forth in the proposed model, expands our understanding of when, how, and why candidate appearance influences interviewers' evaluations, and subsequently hiring decisions. In this way, the proposed model provides direction for organizations in relation to interviewer evaluations and job candidate appearance. Importantly, the model emphasizes the criticality of SJA and FOR training and their roles in influencing interviewer prototype accuracy. Specifically, organizations should facilitate the development of accurate prototypes by providing information about the position – such as results from a SJA and use of FOR training – to the interviewer before conducting candidate interviews. The organization can then ask the interviewer to describe the traits, and the level of those traits, that they believe are necessary for success in the particular position of interest. Congruence can then be assessed by comparing the traits identified by the interviewer with the necessary traits determined by the organization. This will allow the organization to determine if the traits associated with an interviewer's activated prototype align with the traits the organization has deemed important for the position, and to resolve any discrepancy. Walking through this process with interviewers and tracking changes to interviewers' prototypes before and after interview training (e.g., FOR-based), provides an opportunity for the interviewer to make the appropriate adjustments to his or her activated prototype, to develop congruence between multiple interviewers to facilitate consistency throughout the process and across candidates, and to develop congruence with organizational hiring objectives.

Second, the proposed model emphasizes the importance of clear and relevant communication between the interviewer and the candidate. As previously noted, traits inferred from physical appearance are not always accurate (e.g., Rule, Krendl, Ivcevic, & Ambady, 2013). This can prove problematic, especially since the evaluation of traits based on appearance is often unavoidable. Further, reliance on information derived via the applicant's appearance increases when the verbal information exchanged is limited or ambiguous (Hassin & Trope, 2000). Therefore, interviewers should be trained regarding how to not only ask

job-related and relevant questions, but also how to clarify responses from applicants that seem ambiguous or irrelevant given the question asked. Similarly, providing the interviewer with sufficient job-related information about the candidate at the outset (e.g., qualifications, performance) should likewise reduce or even prevent overreliance on the applicant's appearance for evaluations (e.g., Kunda & Thagard, 1996).

Third, interviewers should be aware of social affordance and correspondence bias. Social affordance refers to situations where particular traits or personality characteristics are more pronounced (Zebrowitz & Collins, 1997). Within the context of an interview, these situations should be relatively constant across evaluations. However, interviewers should be aware that the social interaction required in an interview will enhance their ability to assess certain traits (e.g., extraversion) while diminishing others (e.g., dominance) (Zebrowitz & Collins, 1997). Correspondence bias (Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Malone, 1995), which is similar to social affordance, is traditionally applied to behavior as opposed to the more static attribute of appearance, but might also exist within the interview context. Specifically, behavioral and psychological constraints within the interview context might inform the type of appearance a job candidate presents, thereby limiting variance across candidates, and potentially leading to inaccurate trait inferences. For instance, an applicant typically low in conscientiousness might wear clothing consistent with high conscientiousness due to the perceived situational constraints of appropriate attire in an interview.

To address these issues, organizations should train interviewers to adjust the interview context to highlight particularly relevant traits (e.g., questions that target specific traits). Additionally, organizations could employ multiple selection techniques – such as different job simulations in an assessment center or a multiple hurdle approach that involves a variety of selection procedures – to better evaluate a range of job-relevant traits. Utilizing these techniques – along with training interviewers to be cognizant that some traits may be enhanced, dampened, or constrained due to the social affordance and correspondence bias associated with interviews – could be particularly useful for improving interview evaluations in relation to job candidates' appearance.

Future Research Directions

The appearance and interview evaluation model provides a new perspective for examining the effects of central aspects of a candidate's appearance on interview evaluations beyond the more commonly examined demographics of sex and race. Researchers should empirically test the

underlying assumptions of the model to determine if it provides an accurate representation of how candidate appearance influences interviewer evaluations. This should include attention to how the various aspects of appearance may impact trait inferences not only in isolation (by holding other appearance aspects constant), but also in combination, as well as whether some aspects function more strongly than others. In a similar manner, empirical testing should be conducted to examine the application of evolutionary theory to identify the traits most readily inferred by interviewers. This will provide novel insight into what traits and associated physical components play prominent roles in influencing interviewer evaluations.

Future research should also seek to compare the efficacy of improving prototype accuracy versus decreasing the reliance on prototype matching. For instance, is it more effective to utilize SJA or FOR training to develop accurate prototypes or simply employ behavioral rating scales to limit the use of prototype matching? Empirical investigations should compare these approaches to determine whether (and when) a particular method represents the optimal approach for organizations to limit biases and enable interviewers to effectively select the best job candidate.

From the applicant's perspective, and similarly to the aforementioned correspondence bias, social desirability and impression management might influence the inference of traits based on appearance. For instance, individuals high on dark personality traits tend to utilize clothing as a means of manipulating how they are perceived by others (Holtzman & Strube, 2012). Future research should aim to establish the effectiveness of intentional manipulation of appearance specifically within the interview context, as well as the extent of manipulation compared with the individual's actual trait score.

Finally, while our model is more thorough than prior models by discussing a variety of common components of appearance, it is worthwhile to note that even within the proposed model, more nuanced aspects of appearance – such as fingernail paint/manicure, facial acne, port wine stains, and so forth – are subsumed under the appearance facets herein. While future research would do well to examine the functionality of these nuanced appearance facets, such examinations may be best undertaken after the field develops a more thorough conceptual understanding of the broader facets of appearance identified here. Further, the proposed model is developed specifically for understanding how interviewers are influenced by job candidates' appearances and how those inferences influence perceived person-job fit. Additional factors relevant to the interview evaluation (e.g., job knowledge, work experience) are not modeled here, but should be given due weight when evaluating job candidates.

Conclusion

The present model answers recent calls from researchers emphasizing the need for a process model dissecting interviewer evaluations and biases in context. In drawing on the model herein and heeding the recommendations for training and future research, practitioners and researchers alike can begin formulating strategies to develop effective interviewer training that targets the often subconscious processes used by interviewers in evaluating job candidates based on appearance. This can be accomplished by developing a stronger understanding of how aspects of appearance work independently and collectively in forming trait inferences, as well as how job-specific prototypes are formed and utilized in determining perceived person-job fit. Doing so will advance our ability to develop selection methods and techniques that not only reduce negative biases due to candidates' appearance, but also improve the overall accuracy and effectiveness of interviews for optimal selection.

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