

Foreword

JERRY KUNS

Jerry Kuns has been a social worker, a counselor, and a supervisor for the California Department of Rehabilitation. Since 1975, Jerry has explored emerging technologies. Today, he provides technology training and support services to children and their teachers throughout the state of California; he is based at the California School for the Blind. Jerry was born with micropthalmus, had detached retinas in the sixth grade, and eventually became totally blind in his mid-thirties.

We often hear, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” Beauty is generally defined by societal values and trends or driven by marketing perspectives and the fashion industry. Most of us may not fit into the category of beautiful as defined by these parameters/entities. Yet, even if we are not “beautiful,” we all have the potential of looking good. Looking good is greatly influenced by one’s self-image. Looking good is completely self-directed. We try out and then adopt an image we want to project: classic, sophisticated, punk, grunge, Gothic, trendy, casual, athletic, and so forth. Our self-concept and self-confidence are expressed by how we present ourselves to the outside world.

In our Western society, appearance is highly valued. The word *appearance* comes from the Latin word *apparere*, “to show oneself.” To *appear* is to become visible. *Appearance* is our “visibleness,” or how we present ourselves. We have the choice as to how we wish to appear or how we can make our appearance attractive to others. Appearance is primarily a visual phenomenon. By a majority of people, great value in our society is placed on a positive rather than negative appearance. As one who has appeared before hundreds of audiences and thousands of people, I can attest to the impact of looking good—being all that one can be. Before each public appearance, I make sure that I am looking good, I step in front of the audience with confidence, I take a few deep breaths to calm myself, and I launch into my presentation.

One need not be beautiful or handsome to be attractive. One must, however, wear clean clothing and be well-groomed to be attractive and accepted. People do judge us by how we dress, how we carry ourselves, how we use gestures and facial expressions, and how we speak. The credibility of the most intelligent person is diminished significantly if he or she appears slovenly, unaware, uncaring, or unkempt.

Appearance is an expression of self-worth, self-confidence, and self-determination. For all of these reasons, one should care about looking good at every moment that one is in the public eye. To not care about one’s appearance is to deny the importance of one’s potential impact on those who see.

Looking Good provides a framework for young people to make the most of their attributes and to use their potential to express themselves in the most favorable way. Using the strategies and guidelines in this book will help young people to realize a positive self-concept. Their successes in social skills, in employment, and in life in general are heavily influenced by their effort in looking good.

CYNTHIA BACHOFER

Cynthia Bachofer is currently a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University and a teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) with the project Providing Access to the Visual Environment (PAVE) at Vanderbilt University Medical Center's Vanderbilt Eye Institute. She has also been an English teacher at both the secondary and postsecondary levels and a Project Leader in Literacy with Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). She pursues her profession with a personal interest, having grown up with low vision, and has particular interest in psychosocial issues of low vision, use of optical devices, and reading strategies of readers with low vision.

A paradox exists in the premise of *Looking Good*: One does not need to have popular good looks to be looking good. This curriculum covers the many topics behind the scenes of preparing one's appearance to enter any situation with confidence and poise. Persons with visual impairments often feel at an automatic disadvantage on this point. Appearance is a visual matter and largely consists of subtle features in how we interact and compare ourselves. All aspects of looking good—clothing choices, use of accessories, control of nonverbal expressions and gestures—say something about us. The choice here is to decide how much each of us will purposely use this form of communication to represent ourselves.

Spending time on one's appearance can sometimes feel shallow and small-minded: "I should be evaluated not on how I look, but on how I treat others and how I respect myself." Social situations often do not allow this more personal level of recognizing someone or being able to distinguish one person from another. Just like when we speak to someone on the phone, we use first impressions of tone of voice and patterns of speech to evaluate the person on the other end. We do this automatically and hardly realize how much we rely on nuances of speaking to help us develop an idea of that person. Developing the ability to look good is a compensatory skill, like using a long cane or telescopic device effectively to access the physical or visual environment, respectively. The same is true for appearance.

Giving time and effort to your appearance is neither vain nor self-centered. Just as we want our living room to appear in order and be inviting when friends stop by, we also want to look good in person. Success in looking good requires planning, practice, and skills in decision making. Persons with vision learn the smart visual cues of how to look good through observation. This curriculum provides strategies for learning how to choose and how to change visual appearance when a person has limited or no vision. How I look directly affects how I feel about myself and my functioning in a sighted world. Giving my attention to looking good is one powerful tool I can use to represent how I value myself.

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And, we wish to thank our models who posed for the pictures in *Looking Good*. They include current students, graduates, faculty, and staff of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, located in Austin, Texas.

Photographer

Ms. Carrell Grigsby is a professional photographer, based in Austin, Texas. Previously, she was the art teacher at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, where she shared her love of photography with students who have low vision. Ms. Grigsby also developed courses for students with low vision, including Vision Quest I, for students who were working to increase their use of functional vision, and Vision Quest II, for students who were increasing their photographic skills along with improving their visual efficiency.