

huma light



# More Than How You Look

Making room for the life you want to take part in



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Humalight

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Read at your own pace. Use the contents to return to a section or an exercise.  
Keep your notes wherever you find it convenient.

This free opening includes “Before you begin” and the complete first part.  
The full book continues with explanations, practical exercises, sources and further reading.

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# Before you begin

You may want to go and still spend the hour before leaving looking for a reason to stay home. The invitation is welcome. The people seem friendly. Yet getting ready becomes a decision about whether you look acceptable enough to be there.

This book concerns that condition: the feeling that your appearance must first be put right before you can join in, be at ease or let someone get to know you. We will look at how the condition develops, what keeps it persuasive, and how to make a decision that includes more of what matters to you.

Claire, who has recently joined a ceramics class, carries the main story. Victor, who faces repeated remarks at work, shows why a concern about appearance is not always a mistaken prediction. Their situations illustrate possibilities; they are not assessments of you.

The practical section offers six short exercises around one ordinary occasion. You do not have to learn to love every feature, stop enjoying clothes or decide that appearance never matters. The aim is to give participation a place alongside appearance, and to distinguish a feared judgment from treatment that actually needs a response.

These are educational suggestions, not a treatment programme or a guide to cosmetic decisions. If appearance concerns are seriously affecting your life, individual support may be more useful than working through this book alone.

# Part I — Getting ready becomes deciding whether to go

## An invitation she wanted

Claire is thirty-five and works in purchasing for a furniture company. Much of her week involves screens, delivery dates and conversations about what has not arrived. A month ago, she joined a Wednesday evening ceramics class because she wanted to do something with her hands and meet people outside work.

She has attended four sessions. She likes the room, which has long shared tables and shelves of pieces at various stages of completion. She is still learning how much pressure the clay can take. So are several of the others. There is enough to talk about without having to manufacture an interesting account of herself.

After the fourth class, another member, Marion, suggested coffee on Saturday at a café near the studio. She posted the time in the class group: eleven. Several people said they could come. Claire replied that she hoped to make it. She was pleased to be included and had kept the morning free.

Now it is Saturday, a little after ten. She has put on jeans and a green top, looked in the mirror, and changed into a darker one. She changes back. Then she opens a photograph someone shared from Wednesday's class.

In the photograph, she is turning towards a person speaking beside her. She remembers that moment as pleasant. On the screen, she looks almost exclusively at her own face. The angle of her nose becomes the part of the image she cannot leave alone.

She enlarges it. Then she looks at the others.

## **The occasion changes in her mind**

At the class, there is clay to work with. At the café, they will sit and look at one another. Claire begins to imagine herself being watched while she talks. She wonders where she will sit, what the light will be like and whether anyone will take another photograph.

These were not the questions that made her want to join the class. They have arrived during preparation and begun to replace the questions she cared about: whether she might get to know these people and whether Saturday could become something more than errands followed by an evening at home.

She considers sending a message that something has come up. Nobody is depending on her for a lift or a reservation. Cancelling would be easy to explain.

For a moment, the possibility of staying home feels like relief. She could stop choosing clothes. She would not have to discover how she felt at the table. Then she remembers that she wanted the invitation and feels disappointed before she has even answered it.

She knows that changing her top has not changed her face. Yet putting the decision back into clothing gives her something to keep doing. Perhaps the next combination will make her feel ready.

## **When readiness has no clear finish**

Getting ready can be enjoyable and practical. You choose something that suits the weather and occasion. You style your hair because you like it that way. You notice a mark on a shirt and choose another. There can be a clear relationship between the action and what you need to do next.

Claire's difficulty is that the finish has become harder to identify. She is no longer deciding whether her clothes fit a Saturday café. She is trying to reach a point at which she cannot imagine being judged.

A new outfit cannot promise that. Nor can the photograph tell her what the other people will think when they talk to her. The more she asks these things to settle the uncertainty, the longer preparation can continue.

You may recognise the pattern in a different setting. You leave your camera off during a meeting because you cannot stop thinking about how you look on the screen. You postpone a date until you have changed something about your appearance. You avoid a photograph you might otherwise value because you expect to dislike your place in it.

The difficulty may concern one feature, changes with age, the shape of your body, or how you compare with particular people. It may be limited to some occasions. You can feel at

ease with old friends and struggle before meeting a new group.

The wish underneath can remain ordinary: to belong, enjoy yourself, be respected or make a connection. What has become demanding is the condition attached to it.

Claire does not need to settle every question about her appearance before deciding what to do this morning. But she needs a way to understand why the condition feels necessary. Without that, advice to “just go” leaves the most important part of her experience unanswered.

# Continue with the book

You want to go, but another inspection of your reflection delays the moment of leaving. Or someone really is making unwanted remarks. This book keeps those situations distinct. Explore what appearance has come to promise, what checking costs and how to make room for participation. Practical exercises help you prepare an ordinary occasion or respond to conduct that needs to change.

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