



IdeaWatch



WORKPLACE ATTIRE

Not Getting Enough Done? Your Clothes Might Be Part of the Problem

We know that our workplace clothing choices can affect how others perceive us and influence our success. Do those choices also shape outcomes by affecting how we see ourselves?


Researchers conducted two experiments in the United States and a field study in South Korea to investigate the meanings employees associate with their dress. In the first experiment, participants viewed photos of various outfits and indicated what they thought each would convey in a “business casual” office. In the second, participants first changed into business-casual clothing and then into new business-casual outfits they selected to correspond with one of three randomly assigned characteristics: aesthetics, conformity, uniqueness. A control group was asked to select an outfit similar to their first one. All participants were told to imagine that they worked at a company where people could generally wear

what they wanted to and where most chose business-casual dress. After each clothing change they reported on how they would feel going to work in what they had on, what they thought their clothing would convey, and their level of self-esteem. The experiments showed that people associate clothing high in aesthetics with personal attractiveness, conforming clothing with a sense of belonging, and unique clothing with distinctiveness, and revealed that each of the three qualities raised self-esteem.

The field study involved 84 white-collar employees who worked on-site and were free to choose their attire. They filled out three questionnaires daily for 10 days, reporting on what they were wearing, their self-esteem, their interactions with (and any social avoidance of) colleagues, and their productivity. Aesthetic and unique clothing boosted self-esteem, which in turn boosted progress toward job goals and diminished social avoidance. Dress conformity had similar effects, but only on days when employees frequently interacted with colleagues.

“Investing a little extra time in the morning to prepare an outfit that is aesthetically pleasing and unique—and,

if interactions with others are expected, highly conforming to organizational norms—can have a meaningful impact on how an employee feels about themselves throughout the workday,” the researchers write. Indeed, the effects on productivity were similar to or stronger than gains from planning for the day’s work activities, while poor clothing choices sparked losses comparable with those from having an abusive boss, being treated rudely by others, or experiencing a disruptive morning routine.

 **ABOUT THE RESEARCH** “*Wearing Your Worth at Work: The Consequences of Employees’ Daily Clothing Choices*,” by Joseph K. Kim, Brian C. Holtz, and Ryan M. Vogel (Academy of Management Journal, forthcoming)

GENDER

How Summertime Fuels the Gender Wage Gap

Researchers have expended considerable effort trying to understand the persistent lag in women’s earnings relative to men’s. Here’s another contributing factor: summer. A new study quantifies the differential impact of school vacation closures on men and women in the U.S. workforce.

The researchers analyzed data gathered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Current Population Survey, starting with the survey’s inception, in 1989, and concluding in 2019, just before the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. This showed that from May to July each year,

the employment-to-population ratio among women dropped by an average of 1.1 percentage points, while the same ratio among men rose slightly. And the total time worked by women fell by an average of three hours per week, or 11%. That was twice as large as the decline experienced by men.

Those patterns track with state-by-state differences in the timing of summer breaks, and the declines in employment are concentrated among women with young school-age children; many of those women shift in summer months from employment to childcare. (Evaluating the amount of vacation time taken by various segments of women revealed no signs that increased leisure is the primary factor.) Women are disproportionately represented in educational services, the researchers note, and employment opportunities in those sectors contract sharply during the summer. The data showed that mothers tend to enter the field when their youngest children are old enough to attend school—evidence that many are choosing education-related jobs in part for the summertime flexibility they offer, often sacrificing higher compensation elsewhere.

“The heavy imprint of school summer breaks on female labor force participation, employment, and earnings highlights the potential need for policy solutions to alleviate the remaining barriers to women’s equal participation in the labor force,” the researchers write. “Options such as extending the school year, providing universal access to summer school, or increasing federal support for summer childcare could simultaneously address both labor

INFLUENCER MARKETING

What Factors Boost Engagement?

Seven variables affect engagement, according to a 2022 analysis of more than 5,800 influencer posts on the Chinese social media platform Weibo.

CHARACTERISTIC	Influencer				Post		
	Number of followers	Posting frequency	Follower-brand fit	Originality	Positivity	Includes link to brand	Announces a new product
EFFECT ON ENGAGEMENT	↑ +9% from a one-standard-deviation increase above average	↔ Highest engagement from moderate frequency	↔ Highest engagement from moderate fit	↑ +16% from a one-standard-deviation increase above average	↔ Highest engagement from moderate positivity	↑ +11%	↓ -31%

Source: “Does Influencer Marketing Really Pay Off?” by Fine F. Leung et al. (HBR.org, 2022)

market and educational implications of summer school closures.”

ABOUT THE RESEARCH “*The Summer Drop in Female Employment*,” by Brendan M. Price and Melanie Wasserman (working paper)

WELL-BEING

Diversify Your “Social Portfolio”

Several years ago the Harvard Study of Adult Development reached a conclusion about well-being. It’s not money or fame that makes people happy and healthy, the researchers said; it’s relationships. A new study by other researchers offers a postscript: The variety of a person’s relationships—not simply their quantity or closeness—is also key.

The researchers analyzed four data sets representing more than 50,000 people in eight countries. They adapted the Shannon Diversity Index, used to describe the species in a biological ecosystem, to measure people’s “social portfolio diversity”: the number and distribution of the various types of relationships engaged in during specific periods of time. For example, they examined three years’ worth of

responses to the American Time Use Survey, which details the daily activities of a representative sample of U.S. citizens. Respondents reported what they were doing when, for how long, and with whom and answered questions about their health and quality of life. Analysis showed that social portfolio diversity was a highly reliable predictor of well-being. Studying the three other data sets—the World Health Organization’s Study on Global Ageing and Adult Health, survey responses from users of a French mobile app, and questionnaire responses from U.S. residents—yielded similar results. In three of the four data sets, social portfolio diversity was a stronger predictor of subjective well-being than being married was, even though marriage is a well-documented determinant of health and happiness.

“People’s time is scarce, such that increasing the number or frequency of social interactions can prove challenging,” the researchers write. “Our results suggest that a more relationally diverse social portfolio may offer a time-neutral means of shaping well-being.”

ABOUT THE RESEARCH “*Relational Diversity in Social Portfolios Predicts Well-Being*,” by Hanne K. Collins et al. (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 2022)