

# Wearing Your Worth at Work: The Consequences of Employees' Daily Clothing Choices

How do employees' daily clothing choices influence their state self-esteem and, in turn, affect their task progress and social behaviors at work?

This study by Brian Holtz, Ryan Vogel, and Joseph Kim (University of Illinois-Chicago), published in the *Academy of Management Journal*, explores the psychological and behavioral effects of employees' daily clothing choices in organizational settings. The authors integrate enclothed cognition theory and sociometer theory to argue that clothing aesthetics, conformity, and uniqueness carry symbolic meanings of personal attractiveness, belongingness, and distinctiveness. These symbolic meanings influence employees' state self-esteem, which fluctuates daily and impacts work-related behaviors. The research includes both experimental studies and a 10-day field study involving employees from four different organizations.

The experimental studies confirm that people associate these clothing dimensions with their respective symbolic meanings and feel these meanings embodied when wearing such clothing. The field study finds that wearing aesthetically pleasing and unique clothing increases state self-esteem and leads to greater goal progress and less social avoidance. Interestingly, conformity to workplace dress norms impacts self-esteem only on days when employees interact frequently with colleagues, emphasizing the social context's role.

The findings extend enclothed cognition theory beyond specific symbolic garments to everyday work attire and highlight the dynamic nature of self-esteem influenced by daily dress choices. The study also uncovers the dual importance of fitting in and standing out for maintaining self-esteem at work. Practically, it suggests that employees and managers can improve well-being and productivity by thoughtfully considering daily clothing choices.

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## MAJOR TAKEAWAYS:

- Daily clothing aesthetics and uniqueness significantly raise employees' state self-esteem and improve work outcomes.
- Dress conformity boosts self-esteem only when employees have frequent workplace interactions.
- Employees' feelings of belongingness and distinctiveness both contribute to self-esteem and workplace motivation.

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## WHO NEEDS TO KNOW:

- Employees
- Managers
- Organizational Psychologists

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- Wearing Your Worth at Work: The Consequences of Employees' Daily Clothing Choices
- Journal: *Academy of Management Journal*
- Article Link:  
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2021.1358>