Tendered Identities and Career Clothing: the Hispanic Perspective

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A number of studies have indicated that clothing can affect general impressions as well as attributions of specific traits for both job applicants and job holders (e.g., Forsythe 1988; Rucker, Taber and Harrison 1981; Thurston, Lennon and Clayton 1990). Less is known about employees' experiences with role conflicts and other problems in the selection of clothing for self-presentation in a work situation. Previous research by Rucker, Arthur and Williams (1993) with males and females from two telecommunication firms found some evidence of role conflict among the female respondents. Women reported difficulty in finding clothing that was both feminine and businesslike, whereas men did not mention comparable problems. The most common problem among women, however, was obtaining a satisfactory fit.

The present study was designed to extend previous research by focusing on a particular subculture, the Hispanic subculture, to determine whether issues of ethnic identity might affect concerns about self-presentation. Peñaalosa (1994) suggested that, at least for her sample of Mexican immigrants, clothing selection was an important aspect of asserting one's place in the broader community. Two hundred eighteen employees with Hispanic surnames were selected from the campus directory of a major Western university; questionnaires were distributed to this sample by campus mail. One hundred ten people responded; 23 were eliminated because they did not self-identify as Hispanic, for a final sample of 87. Content analysis was used to determine frequency of various themes in the responses.

Results of this study indicated that conflicts between fashion versus professionalism, as opposed to the conflicts between femininity and professionalism found in the previous study, were problematic for females but not males. Fit was found to be a common problem for both males and females. In terms of preferred sources of apparel, non-store retailing was mentioned positively for its convenience, but the majority of both males and females reported particular stores as favorite sources for their career apparel. On the other hand, there was limited evidence of brand loyalty. About two-thirds of the females and more than three-fourths of the males stated that they did not have a favorite designer or manufacturer. Finally, there was no evidence in this particular study that Hispanic identity was associated with any special problems in the selection of career apparel.
REFERENCES


