

TAILORED MEANINGS: ON THE MEANING AND IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL DRESS

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Dress in organizations is ubiquitous, yet it has been overlooked in organizational studies. Dress can reflect and create a variety of organizational dynamics. This article offers a framework to consider these dynamics. Three dimensions—attributes of dress, homogeneity of dress, and conspicuousness of dress—are identified. Relationships among these dimensions and organizational processes are proposed. Dress is argued to indicate internal and external processes. Dress also can affect individual and organizational outcomes, including employee compliance and legitimation and organizational image and utilization of human resources. A rich agenda for research is proposed.

"Suits": blue-collar term for white collar managers. As in:
"Look busy. Here come the suits."

(Johnson, 1990)

Organizations spend billions of dollars each year defining, acquiring, maintaining, and monitoring employees' dress (Solomon, 1987). Employee manuals often include references to appearance that range from very detailed uniform specifications to more general dress codes. Employees failing to maintain dress standards suffer consequences that range from insults and ridicules to termination. Even organizations popularly noted as "excellent" (Peters & Waterman, 1985) or "best to work for" (Levering, Moskowitz, & Katz, 1987) expend considerable energy in maintaining standards of employee dress (cf. Hochschild, 1983; Jackall, 1988; Plys, 1990; Solomon & Douglas, 1987; Steinem, 1983; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). Yet organizational scholars often consider dress to be a peripheral or unimportant issue in organizations (cf. O'Reilly, 1989: 12). Is dress really that trivial? Are thousands of leaders who enforce standards of dress wasting their time? Or does everyone, like the fish in the water, take dress for granted and overlook its importance?

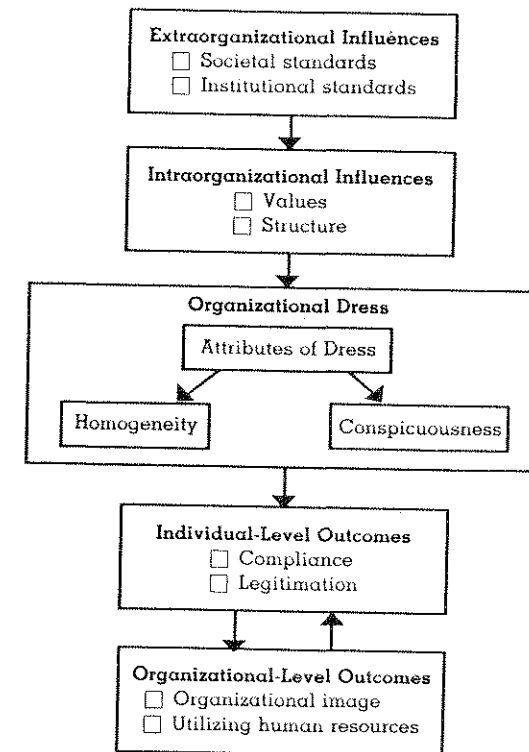
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We consider dress as a phenomenon that reflects important processes and induces various outcomes. Our premise is that adding analyses of dress to studies of organizations can enhance the understanding of organizational behavior. We introduce a conceptual framework that summarizes how the understanding of dress can contribute to studies of organizations. Two broad assertions underlie the framework: (a) that dress indicates key organizational dynamics and (b) that dress may effect key processes in organizational behavior.

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL DRESS

Figure 1 summarizes our analyses of the dimensions, influencing factors, and potential effects of organizational dress. The framework addresses two questions: (a) What can be learned about organizations by

FIGURE 1
Dimensions, Influencing Factors, and Outcomes of
Organizational Dress^a



^a The figure includes only relationships of direct relevance to studies of organizational dress.

analyzing dress patterns? and (b) What effects does dress have on both organizational and employee behavior? The remainder of this article draws on literature in psychology, communication, and sociology to explain and elaborate the constructs and relationships depicted in Figure 1.

Following the logic of the figure, we suggest that dress can be used as an indicator of the processes that lead to dress dynamics. We consider dress as an indicator both of processes within organizations and of the external cultural and institutional influences that an organization sustains. We then propose that dress may influence important individual and organizational dynamics, including (a) employees' compliance with role requirements, (b) employees' legitimation by nonemployees, (c) organizational image, and (d) utilization of human resources. We begin, however, with an analysis of the core construct, organizational dress, and how it can be defined and measured.

Organizational Versus Nonorganizational Dress

Organizational dress comprises the clothing (e.g., jacket, skirt, pants) and artifacts (e.g., name tag, smock, jewelry) that employees of an organization wear while at work. A diverse body of research from a variety of disciplines considers the meaning of dress in society. The consensus in this literature is that clothing communicates strong and powerful messages (Burgoon & Saine, 1978; Conner, Nagasawa, & Peters, 1975; Douty, 1973; Forsythe, 1990; Forsythe, Drake, & Cox, 1985; Fussel, 1983; Ketcham, 1958; Laver, 1982; Mehrabian, 1976).

A thorough review of this extensive literature is beyond the scope of this article; such a review also would be of limited relevance because previous research pertains to meanings associated with individually selected attire. Our focus in this analysis is on attire that is determined primarily by organizational pressures. Both formal (e.g., rules) and informal (e.g., norms) processes in organizations may pressure individuals to wear particular attire (cf. Daft, 1989; Hackman, 1976). To illustrate, the employee manual containing the following policy specifically instructs, and implicitly controls, what employees wear to work:

Employee Dress and Appearance Standard

It is our policy to mandate a dress and appearance standard for employees. . . . Employees shall not wear blue jeans (any color denim material including "designer labels") during work time. Employees shall not wear sun dresses, mini skirts, or shorts, during work time.

Less formal, but not necessarily less powerful, social processes were alluded to by Daniels (1983: 200) when she described how role models influenced what she wore to her work as a sociologist. Daniels noted:

[In becoming an academic sociologist] my chief role models were academics, careless of their appearance, willing as I

was to wipe their old fountain pens absentmindedly on their jackets, somewhat overweight, tending toward coiffures emphasizing hair pulled back and tied in a bun, hornrimmed goggles, sensibly dark suits (that didn't show the ink stains very much) and plain strap handbags that one could swing menacingly as one strode along in scuffed, low heeled shoes.

Both examples describe situations in which the dress of organization members reflects a specific form of social pressure. In these cases, dress is a result of a process broader than individual preferences, yet more specific than the social forces that influence everyday dress behavior (Simmel, cited in Ritzer, 1988). In our analysis, we focus on attire that is determined primarily by organizational rules and norms.

Operationalizing Organizational Dress

Despite the paucity of research on organizationally determined attire, traditional research on individually selected attire can provide a valuable point of departure for the study of dress in organizations. Building on this research, we propose that dress in organizations conveys meanings in two fundamental ways: (a) through the attributes of the dress (i.e., color, material, or style) and (b) through the comparisons it enables. Two such comparisons are possible: among members of the organization and between members and nonmembers of the organization.

Thus, three dimensions for analyzing organizational dress are proposed in Figure 1: *Attributes of dress* comprise color, material, and style of dress; *homogeneity* refers to the variance in dress among members of the same organization; and *conspicuousness* describes the uniqueness of dress among members of the organization in comparison to the dress of nonmembers. These three dimensions of organizational dress rely on distinct foci for analyses: *Attributes of dress* refer to observations of individual employees, *homogeneity* refers to comparisons of groups within the organization, and *conspicuousness* refers to comparisons across organizational boundaries. Operationalizations of these dimensions are summarized in Table 1 and are briefly described in the following section.

Attributes of Dress. Three attributes identified in research on individually selected attire can guide analyses of organizational dress: *color*, *material*, and *style*. These attributes also may be useful for coding observations of organizational dress (see Table 1).

First, *colors* of dress may carry valuable symbolic information. Research in nonverbal communication suggests that colors have meanings: blue, for example, is proposed to convey dignity, whereas red may convey affection (Burgoon & Saine, 1978; Ketcham, 1958; Mehrabian, 1976). Anecdotal evidence suggests that organizations may choose specific colors based on symbolic value. The color brown of the UPS uniform, for example, may convey trust. Similarly, hospitals use white to convey purity and cleanliness, and police organizations use dark colors to convey power (Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961; Joseph, 1986; Lurie, 1981).

TABLE 1

Operationalizing Dimensions of Organizational Dress

Aspect of Dress	Possible Values	Operationalization
Attributes of Dress	Blue, red, gold	What is the color?
	Pure, synthetic	What is the material?
	Formal, casual	What is the style?
Dress Homogeneity	Random heterogeneity	To what extent is there variance in dress both among employees and between subgroups in the organization?
	Stratified homogeneity	
	Complete homogeneity	
Dress Conspicuousness	Highly unique	To what extent is the dress in the organization unique when compared to dress outside the organization?
	Moderately unique	
	Low uniqueness	

Second, dress style may elicit attributions, particularly of status and power (cf. Cho & Grover, 1978; Forsythe, 1990; Forsythe, Drake, & Cox, 1985; Fussel, 1983; Molloy, 1975, 1977; Ribeiro, 1986; Solomon & Douglas, 1983, 1987). Thus, some styles often symbolize higher status than others. One distinction here may be between formal and tailored versus informal and casual styles. To illustrate, Rollman (1977) found that a professor dressed in a casual style of dress (jeans, sports shirt, sneakers) was rated as having less status than the same professor dressed formally (dark suit, white shirt, tie).

A second distinction is gender based. Suits, for example, are formal; they also are "male," however, and indicate traits that are traditionally seen as masculine, such as power. "Female" styles, such as short skirts and low-cut necklines, indicate traits that are stereotypically feminine, such as submissiveness (Malloy, 1977; Plys, 1990; Wolf, 1991). In this vein, Forsyth (1987) reported that clothing can effect perceptions of masculine and feminine managerial traits.

Third, the material of dress is important because of the associations it may trigger (Fussel, 1983; Molloy, 1975, 1977; Ribeiro, 1986). Fussel (1983) proposed that the purity or naturalness of dress materials determines the attributions. Synthetic fibers (such as polyester) are proposed to convey lower class and status than pure fibers (such as silk). That purity of materials is an important symbol in organizations may explain why senior executives favor wool or silk suits, whereas the staff at fast-food restau-

rants are relegated to wearing polyester uniforms (Glueck, 1989: 27; Kroc, 1977).

In short, we propose that attributes of dress are meaning-laden symbols. Processes of learned associations and cognitive categorization explain this proposition (Bower & Hilgard, 1981; Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Rosch & Loyd, 1978). Through the process of learned association, attributes of dress become one of the features that define and elicit cognitive categories (cf. Bower & Hilgard, 1981; Fiske & Taylor, 1984). To illustrate, formal dress is associated with the category "professionals" because of repeated exposure to professional people wearing suits. Thus, individuals wearing suits are perceived as professional. When employees of an organization wear particular attributes, the associations triggered by these attributes may effect attributions to the organization. Thus, if employees wear suits, the organization may be perceived as professional (Rosch, 1978; Tajfel, 1978).

Comparing Attributes of Dress. Two additional dimensions of dress in organizations engage the attributes of dress as a medium of comparison. Such comparisons reveal that organizational dress can differ (a) in the variance of dress attributes among members of the organization and (b) in the uniqueness of dress attributes in an organization in comparison to dress outside the organization. This pair of tentative dimensions is unique to studies of dress in organizations.

Homogeneity of dress refers to the variance that is observed when dress of different employees within an organization is compared. Such comparisons may reveal colors, materials, or styles that are randomly heterogeneous, stratified homogeneous, or completely homogeneous (Table 1). *Random heterogeneity* exists when there is no similarity in dress among different members of the organization; hence, the variance in dress is large. Dress in many universities and insurance companies falls into this category.

Stratified homogeneity is evident when there is similarity of dress within organizational subgroups (e.g., departments) but there are differences between subgroups. Because there is homogeneity within subgroups, the variance in dress is significantly smaller in such cases than when there is random heterogeneity. Such stratification is evident in restaurants, where bus persons dress alike and wait staff dress alike, but dress easily distinguishes between the two groups.¹

Complete homogeneity of dress occurs when all members are dressed in a similar manner; this is often the image invoked in response to the term *uniforms*. The variance in such cases is minimal both between and within subgroups in the organizations. This pattern is apparent in many

¹ The extent of homogeneity within an organization may vary. Dress may be homogeneous in some departments and heterogeneous in others. In such cases, however, stratified homogeneity of dress still exists at the organizational level.

sports teams, security agencies, and religious orders (Clegg & Thompson, 1979; Kanter, 1968, 1972).

Conspicuousness of dress refers to the extent to which dress of organization members stands out from dress of nonmembers. Conspicuousness may vary from high to low, and it refers to the extent to which the organizational dress pattern is unique in color, material, and/or style. Highly conspicuous dress clearly distinguishes employees of an organization from nonemployees. Such dress also reveals exactly which organization is involved. At a low level of conspicuousness, dress does not identify employees from nonemployees, nor does it reveal the name or nature of the organization. With a moderate level, the nature of the organization (e.g., institutional affiliation) can be discerned from employees' dress, but the specific organization cannot.² A person may, for example, be able to identify individuals as working in a medical facility by their attire, but he or she would not be able to identify the particular hospital or clinic.

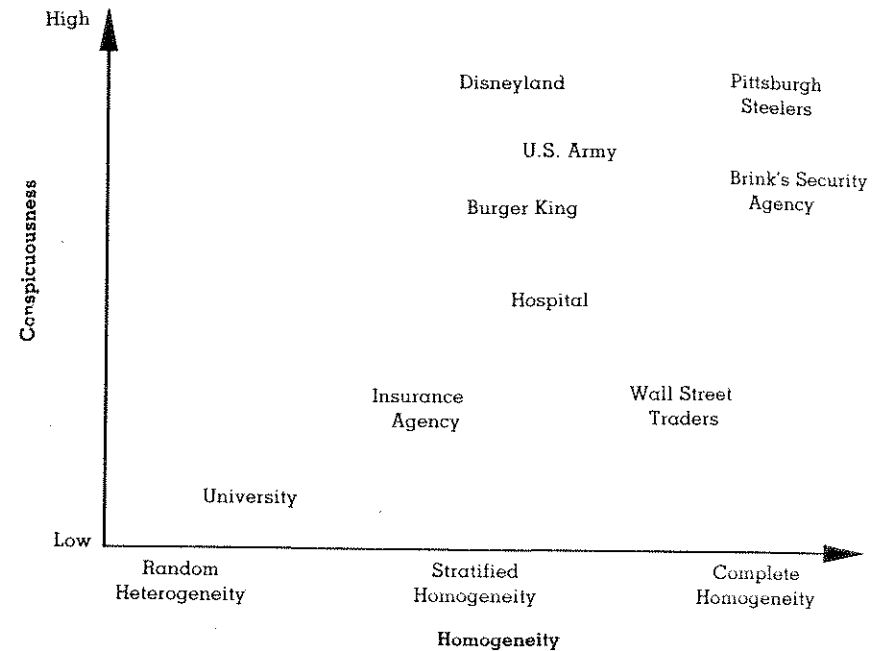
Figure 2 offers examples of using homogeneity and conspicuousness to rate organizations. Figure 2 also highlights two important features of these dimensions of dress: They are interdependent, and they are continuous.

First, the distribution of examples in Figure 2 suggests that homogeneity and conspicuousness of dress are somewhat related. The interdependence between the dimensions stems from the conceptual link between homogeneity and conspicuousness. In order to be unique at the organizational level, highly conspicuous dress needs to apply to all employees, that is, to be fairly homogeneous. Similarly, complete homogeneity of dress is unusual and tends to be conspicuous. Even if individual members are dressed in a manner that is not much different from nonmembers (e.g., all employees wear jeans and white shirts), the homogeneity of their attire is likely to make the employees as a group stand out within the organization. In spite of the interdependence between these dimensions, however, homogeneity and conspicuousness offer distinct advantages for studies involving organizational dress.

Second, Figure 2 illustrates the continuous rather than discrete nature of homogeneity and conspicuousness. Conceptually, conspicuousness is greater to the extent that the organization can be specifically identified from employees' dress. Dress in a hospital, for example, is noted in Figure 2 as less conspicuous than that of a fast-food restaurant, but it is more conspicuous than dress at an insurance agency. Dress of employees in an insurance agency reveals little about the organization's name or industry. The dress of hospital employees identifies them as

² It could be argued that this dimension is made up of two separate dimensions: The extent to which dress identifies the institution and the extent to which dress identifies the particular organization. Dress may identify the organization in which an employee works (through a logo or a name) without identifying the nature of the organization. For the purpose of parsimony, these distinctions are combined at this stage of our analyses.

FIGURE 2
Comparing Organizational Dress Between and Within Organizations^a



^a This figure is offered for illustrative purposes. Systematic observations are necessary to compare the exact locations of these various examples.

employees of an organization that provides medical services, yet often the particular hospital is not identifiable. In contrast, the attire of fast-food employees (e.g., Burger King) often reveals a specific organization and is therefore more conspicuous.

Homogeneity is also a continuum ranging from random heterogeneity, through stratified homogeneity, to complete homogeneity. Conceptually, stratified homogeneity can be closer to random heterogeneity or to complete homogeneity, depending on the explicitness of differences in dress among subgroups. The stratification of dress in Disneyland, for example, is very explicit: Each group of employees wears distinctly different colors, fabrics, and styles. In contrast, only subtleties convey status stratification among Wall Street traders (Lewis, 1989), and only a fine embroidery distinguishes managers from line workers at Quad Graphics (Wojahn, 1983).

In sum, the concept of organizational dress comprises dress attributes, dress homogeneity, and dress conspicuousness. We believe that each of these dimensions offers unique and valuable insights for organizational scholars. Researchers should further examine the meaning and

importance of each of these dimensions: They may consider each dimension independently or in relation to other dimensions. To illustrate, the meanings of various dress attributes may be examined, as well as the conditions under which particular attributes (e.g., style versus color) may be more or less influential. Available research does not enable us to answer such questions here.

Dress as an Indicator of Organizational Processes

When individuals share a pattern of dress, their appearance is the outcome of social influence processes rather than individual choice (Kaiser, 1983; Leach, 1976; Simmel, cited in Ritzer, 1988). The pattern of attire among members of an organization may therefore act as an indicator of processes in the organization. These processes may be internal or external to the organization, as summarized in Figure 1.

Dress and External Influences

Standards of dress in an industry, or in the broader social environment, are likely to have some effect on dress in an organization because organizations are open systems that are influenced by their environment (Granovetter, 1984; Schein, 1991; Thompson, 1967). Organizational standards of dress may, for example, be shared by members of a particular industry, just as particular structures or technologies are shared (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; March & Olsen, 1984).

We propose that the pattern of dress in an organization may indicate the power of, or the degree of organizational acquiescence to, specific segments of that organization's environment (e.g., national culture, industry). Thus, dress may be a medium for examining questions of organizational autonomy versus determinism (Clegg & Thompson, 1979; Meyer & Rowan, 1983; Zucker, 1988). For example, some organizations within the United States, such as IBM and Apple, maintain different patterns of dress, despite the fact that they operate within the same industrial and societal contexts. In other organizations, such as hospitals and symphony orchestras, uniform patterns of dress are shared by almost all members within the industry.

Adoption of institutionally accepted dress also may reveal the extent to which an organization seeks the association with a particular culture or industry. Organizations that seek the legitimacy of the medical service community, for example, may employ standards of dress accepted by that community. Thus, employees of optometry clinics often don white lab coats, even though the protection offered by the coat is not required for the work they perform. In a similar vein, organizations in Israel that seek the legitimacy of American "know how" maintain a suit and tie dress norm, even though this norm is not accepted in the general business community in Israel.

Proposition 1: Dress may indicate the degree to which an organization is influenced by, or seeks association with, a particular culture or institution.

Dress and Intraorganizational Dynamics

Dress also may indicate processes that are internal to the organization. Organizational theorists have noted that dress can play a central role in various organizational practices, including rites, rituals, and stories. Researchers have argued that such practices highlight core organizational beliefs and salient aspects of the organizational structure (Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983; Rosen, 1985, 1988; Trice & Beyer, 1984). Building on such research, we propose that students of organizations can employ dress as an indicator of internal processes within organizations. Dress can be used as an indicator in two ways: (a) it may reveal values inherent to the organizational culture and (b) it may indicate the nature of division of labor in the organization (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984; Beyer, 1981; Salaman & Thompson, 1980; Schein, 1991).

Organizational values. An emerging body of literature asserts that members of organizations often share perceptions of core organizational values. These values, in turn, help define the organizational identity, which is made up of those characteristics of the organization that members view as central, distinct, and enduring (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Pratt & Dutton, 1992). Building on this research, we propose that values inherent to the organizational identity may be conveyed by the dress in the organization. Specifically, dress attributes are proposed to act as a symbol of core organizational values.

Proposition 2: Dress attributes convey central, distinctive, and enduring values of the organization.

The particular organizational values indicated by attributes of organizational dress need to be examined through further research (cf. Pratt & Rafaeli, 1992). Available research on the meanings of individual dress attributes may facilitate such research (cf. Burgoon & Saine, 1978), although it is important to note that, by definition, organizational dress represents values that identify the organization rather than an individual employee. Thus, the three attributes we identified previously, color, material, and style, and the associations that they are known to convey, may provide insights about core organizational values.

To illustrate, the white color of dress in health service organizations conveys the value of cleanliness in these organizations, a value that has been central and distinctive of medical services for centuries (Becker et al., 1961). Similarly, the feminine style of dress at Mary Kay Cosmetics (e.g., only dresses, no pants) indicates the feminine values that the leader of this organization identifies as central to the organization (Ash, 1984; Jackson, 1981).

Homogeneity of dress is proposed to indicate the value of consistency in the organization. Individual differences in dress are likely to be evident when dress is left to individual choice (Cho & Grover, 1978; Fussell, 1983; Goffman, 1959; Molloy, 1975, 1977; Westley, 1982). Homogeneous dress indicates a suppression of variation due to individual differences in the interest of the collective. Thus, homogeneity of dress indicates the value of minimizing individual differences within the organization.

Consistency is often a central value when an organization specializes in mass production of services (cf. Chase, 1978). In such cases, each service transaction must conform with unvarying levels of quality. This logic was adopted by Kroc (1977) when he demanded that employees of McDonald's, an organization that prides itself on highly consistent service, maintain strictly uniform dress standards. Similar patterns of dress also are evident in other organizations that specialize in high-quality service, such as Federal Express.

In contrast, organizations endorsing creativity, such as academic institutions, often eschew homogeneous dress (Daft, 1989). In this case, the random heterogeneity of dress also reflects core values, because in such organizations innovation, not rigid consistency, is the central value. The value of creativity led Steve Jobs to refrain from enforcing strict dress standards among members of the Macintosh design team (Tyler & Nathan, 1985).

Proposition 3: Homogeneity of dress indicates the value of consistency in the organization.

Along similar lines, clear stratification of dress may convey a core value of clear division of labor. Thus, the organizational energy invested in establishing and maintaining dress stratification is proposed to indicate that in this organization every member has his or her place and that distinctions in individual locations in the organization are a central and an enduring value.

Proposition 4: Stratified homogeneity of dress indicates that division of labor is a central and an enduring value in the organization.

Organizational Structure. Observations of dress can also provide information about the manner in which the organization is formally structured (i.e., the formal division of labor in the organization). Division of labor in the organization may be either functional (who performs which tasks) or hierarchical (who is superior to whom). Stratified homogeneous dress can convey the distinctions emphasized in an organization. When individuals performing different tasks are dressed differently, for example, the functional organizational structure is highlighted. Conversely, if individuals with varying degrees of authority are dressed differently, the hierarchical structure is emphasized.

Thus, a functional emphasis based on different attractions, as in the

structure of Disney amusement parks, is evident from the distinct dress of the operators of different rides (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989; Tyler & Nathan, 1985). Many other amusement parks emphasize only authority structures by maintaining similar dress patterns among all ride operators, yet using dress attributes to identify ride managers.

In short, stratified dress homogeneity can be one indicator of the manner in which work is coordinated in the organization. As noted by Becker et al. (1961: 4), this information is valuable both to researchers and to employees. Drawing on his in-depth study of medical schools, Becker noted:

[Upon entering medical school, the students] put on white, the color symbolic of modern medicine. For the rest of their lives they will spend a good many hours among people who wear uniforms, more often white than not, which tell the place of each in the complicated division of work and the ranking system of the medical world.

Our final proposition about stratified homogeneous organizational dress builds on the fact that extensive functional and authority stratification is typical of more mechanistic organizations. In contrast, organic systems typically are less standardized in their internal structure and more flexible and adaptive to their environment (Waterman, 1987). Thus, when dress is clearly stratified homogeneous, the organization usually bears a more mechanistic structure.

Proposition 5: Stratified homogeneous organizational dress indicates a more mechanistic organization.

Influence of Organizational Dress Over Organizational Dynamics

Dress also may be a more active agent in organizations. We consider dress to be "active" when it effects behavioral dynamics in organizations. As Figure 1 summarizes, dress may bring about employee compliance, employee legitimation, a particular organizational image, and more efficient utilization of human resources.

Individual-Level Effects

Two outcomes of organizational dress on individual employees are proposed in Figure 1: employee compliance with role requirements and employee legitimation.

Compliance. We propose that organizational dress can affect employees' compliance with the goals and standards of behavior inherent to their role. That is, dress is proposed to affect the extent to which employees fulfill role requirements. Particular attributes of dress are not proposed to lead to compliance. Rather, the fact that the dress is organizational, thus determined by and representative of the organization, is pro-

posed to elicit psychological processes that inspire compliance. Our propositions in this section are based on theory and research in three areas: cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Turner, 1978), and deindividuation (Becker-Haven & Lindskold, 1978; Kanter, 1972; Zimbardo, 1969).

First, complying with dress standards and not complying with other organizational standards may lead to the discomfort of cognitive inconsistency. Compliant behaviors can reduce such inconsistency. Employees who wear organizationally designated attire are psychologically in a position of having complied with one organizational standard. Such employees can maintain cognitive consistency by fulfilling other organizational expectations.

As a result, employees who wear "organizational" attire are more likely to comply with role requirements than are employees who wear "self-selected" attire, because the former find themselves in a position of dissonance that must be reduced (Aronson, 1988; Festinger, 1957). Highly conspicuous dress, in particular, may be predicted to inspire greater compliance because it is clearly distinct from what individuals might select to wear.

Second, conspicuous organizational dress may lead to employees' compliance by making a particular role salient. Individuals hold many roles, (i.e., employee, parent, spouse, student, cf. Katz & Kahn, 1978; Turner, 1978), and situational cues help make an individual more aware of his or her current role. Dress is a vivid cue that is likely to make the role of an employee more salient than other roles. In wearing organizational dress, a person is reminded that he or she is now an employee. An interview with a mock prison guard in the famous Stanford prison study (White & Zimbardo, 1971) helps illustrate this process:

Once you put on that uniform . . . then you are certainly not the same person. You really become that role. You put on that khaki uniform, you put on the glasses, you take the night stick, you put it on. You act the part.

The salient role, in turn, offers a particular frame of reference and elicits a cognitive schema for behavior (Markus & Kunda, 1986; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Neisser, 1978; Quinn, Robinson, & Balkwell, 1980), encouraging the particular behaviors that are prescribed by the role (Wicklund & Duval, 1971; Wicklund & Frey, 1980). Thus, conspicuous organizational dress can encourage employees to engage in the behaviors associated with the role of employee. This conceptual framework helped Rafaeli (1989) to explain that sales clerks wearing organizational attire were more likely to convey organizationally prescribed emotions.

Proposition 6: Conspicuous organizational dress will lead to greater compliance with prescribed role requirements.

Third, dress homogeneity can enhance individual compliance with organizational standards because of its deindividuation effects. Complete homogeneity of dress facilitates deindividuation because it helps deemphasize individual differences. When deindividuated, individuals become completely submerged in a group, so that their individual preferences are replaced by group goals and values (Kanter, 1972; Zimbardo, 1969).

One effect of deindividuation is compliance with group standards of behavior (Festinger, Pepitone, & Newcomb, 1952; Joseph & Alex, 1972; Singer, Brush, & Lublin, 1965). Zimbardo (1969) argued that when individuals are submerged in a group, they are less likely to feel responsible for their actions and, therefore, are more likely to comply with whatever their role in the group prescribes. Milgram (1974) similarly argued that deindividuated individuals enter a state of "agency," whereby they obey without question the orders they receive. These dynamics are summarized well by Lurie (1983: 18):

No matter what sort of uniform it is—military, civil, or religious . . . to put on such livery is to give up one's right to act as an individual. . . . What one does, as well as what one wears, will be determined by external authorities.

Thus:

Proposition 7: Dress homogeneity will enhance the extent to which individual behavior is driven by organizational rather than individual goals, values, and priorities.

Legitimation. A second individual level outcome of dress proposed in Figure 1 is the legitimation of employees to outsiders. Legitimation is used here to describe situations where organizational roles that individuals claim for themselves are accepted as valid by others. Legitimation allows employees to do things that would otherwise be unconventional or illegal, such as handle other people's food, enter homes, or make judgments about other people. Legitimation through dress is particularly useful when employees whose formal responsibilities may otherwise be unknown are required to interact with nonmembers (Bowen & Schneider, 1985; Wood, 1990). Clegg and Thompson (1979: 243), for example, noted how compromises in dress may hamper the legitimacy of sports referees. They tell referees in training:

Avoid the undesirable shortcuts of wrong colored shoes, socks, belts, and jackets. Don't use a cheap whistle. Such compromises almost certainly will return to plague you.

Basic learning processes explain why dress may facilitate legitimation. Through learned associations, nonmembers come to associate dress attributes with the organization (Bower & Hilgard, 1981). These attributes

then identify individuals as employees of the organization and allow them to act on its behalf. Thus, the dress endows individual employees donning it with the legitimacy of the organization (Brickman, 1974; Bushman, 1984).

The extent to which legitimation occurs is likely to increase when the association between dress attributes and the organization is stronger. Research on contiguity effects is helpful here if we use contiguity to refer to the associations that form when outsiders simultaneously encounter the organization and specific dress patterns. Research on contiguity suggests that such associations will be strengthened when dress is vivid (captures attention) and when it is consistent among all representatives of the organization (Bower & Hilgard, 1981; Guthrie, 1959; James, 1892). Building on these findings, we propose that highly conspicuous and highly homogeneous dress is more likely to facilitate legitimation than dress that is less homogeneous and less conspicuous.

Greater homogeneity strengthens the link between dress and the organization by increasing the consistency of the experience of nonmembers who interact with members of the organization. High homogeneity increases the probability that when an outsider interacts with a member of the organization, this member is dressed in the same manner as other members of the organization. Conspicuousness is the extent to which dress is more distinctly noticeable. High conspicuousness, therefore, makes the experience of contiguity more vivid by drawing people's attention to the dress. Thus, both homogeneous and conspicuous dress strengthen the contiguous associations between dress and an organization.

Proposition 8: Homogeneous and conspicuous organizational dress increases the extent to which employees are identified as valid representatives of the organization.

Because of vicarious learning, even individuals who have had limited or no previous contact with an organization or its representatives may accept as legitimate employees wearing organizational attire. Vicarious learning occurs when individuals imitate friends, co-workers, or television actors who accept the behaviors of an employee dressed in a particular fashion (Bandura, 1977; Hall, 1989). Thus, many people who have never interacted with the police force accept the orders of individuals wearing a police uniform, and individuals who have never seen a Dominos Pizza store allow an employee wearing Dominos' red, white, and blue uniform to bring them food.

Furthermore, the associations between dress patterns and the organization can be strengthened when physical aspects of the organization (e.g., color or style of physical layout, product design, advertising) are similar to the attributes of organizational dress (cf. Ketcham, 1958; Sproull, 1981). Such similarity increases the probability that dress attributes will be associated with the organization, hence facilitating the legitimation of individual employees.

In sum, organizational dress may have an effect on the extent to which employees are accepted as legitimate representatives of their organizations, and it may have an effect on the extent to which employees comply with role requirements.

Organizational Level Effects

As summarized in Figure 1, we propose that dress may affect two organizational level phenomena: the image that nonmembers hold of an organization and the utilization of human resources in an organization.

Organizational image. First, we propose that dress can have important effects on the image that outsiders develop about an organization. *Image* refers to the perceptions and impressions that nonmembers hold about an organization (Ginzel, Kramer, & Sutton, 1992; Lindquist, 1975). Thus, dress may contribute to organizational impression management efforts (Tedeschi, 1981; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984; Weigelt & Camerer, 1988).

The rich and diverse literature on perception and cognition suggests that dress may influence the organizational image in two ways (Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Schneider, Hastorf, & Ellsworth, 1979): by engaging cognitive schemas that contain particular impressions and by encouraging nonmembers to develop a consistent impression of the organization.

As noted previously, attributes of dress generate cognitive associations. When an individual represents the organization, the meanings associated with his or her dress may be extended to the organization (Bower & Hilgard, 1981). Specific dress attributes may be selected by organizations in order to associate the messages that they convey with the organization. To illustrate, the playful, vivid, and colorful costumes in Disneyland are considered part of the "magic" and the "fun" that the Disney corporation sells (Jackson, 1981; Tyler & Nathan, 1985).³

Tedeschi and Melburg (1984) suggested two specific ways in which dress attributes may affect the organizational image: by making the organization appear more attractive and by making it appear more wealthy and prestigious. First, dress may alter the audience's perceptions of an organization's attractiveness through the use of specific colors (e.g., red), fabrics (e.g., leather), and styles (e.g., casual) that have been found to communicate friendliness (Burgoon & Saine, 1978; Lurie, 1981; Ribeiro, 1986).

Second, Tedeschi and Melburg (1984) proposed that conspicuous dress attributes can be used to manipulate the perceived amount of resources that an organization has and, consequently, its prestige. Con-

³ There is a conceptual and an empirical relationship between the values that dress attributes indicate and the image that they help create. The values that particular attributes indicate will be a part of the image perceived by outsiders.

spicuous dress that includes attributes depicting wealth, such as deep and dark colors, pure and fine fibers, and tailored styles, may help an organization be perceived as more wealthy and prestigious than other organizations.

Proposition 9: Dress attributes (colors, materials, and styles) influence the image that outsiders have of the organization.

However, the extent to which dress attributes influence the organizational image may be moderated by homogeneity of dress. The more similar the dress colors, materials, or styles among employees, the more consistent the image generated by observers' repeated exposure to organizational dress. When repeated encounters with an organization yield consistent images and attributions, the organizational image is strengthened. In contrast, encounters with employees who are dressed differently may lead to different, possibly conflicting images, reducing the clarity of the organizational image enacted by dress. Thus,

Proposition 10: Homogeneity of dress moderates the extent to which dress attributes affect the organizational image.

Dress conspicuousness, in turn, mediates the extent to which a specific image can be associated with a particular organization. When dress is highly conspicuous, dress attributes clearly identify the organization and, therefore, associate it with a particular image. If dress is not conspicuous, inferences are less likely to be associated with the particular organization. Thus, dress that is highly homogeneous and highly conspicuous will produce the most refined image.

Dress that is moderately conspicuous, that is, dress that identifies an institution or industry but not a particular organization, may cause nonmembers to associate the organization with an industry. Such dress is proposed to influence the organizational image by linking the organization with the image of the industry. In other words, conspicuous dress that identifies an institution allows observers both to generate a cognitive category for the institution and to associate that cognitive category (and the related schema) with organizations displaying such dress.

Proposition 11: Conspicuous organizational dress that identifies an institution will attach the image of the institution to organizations displaying this dress.

Utilization of Human Resources

Finally, dress may help control the utilization of human resources in organizations. Dress promotes control over the utilization of human resources by helping members and nonmembers identify each other and by helping these groups to discern patterns of authority and responsibility in organizations.

Available research on dress confirms that specific dress attributes can reveal social status (cf. Forsythe et al., 1985; Fussell, 1983; Solomon, 1986). Building on this research, we propose that dress attributes can be used to identify the status of members in organizations. Such cues may increase control over the use of human resources by indicating to employees and to customers who, for example, is superior to whom, hence who should be expected to handle specific issues (cf. Becker et al., 1961: 4; Harris et al., 1983; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989: 61). Such delineation of responsibility helps control the demands placed on employees.

The extent to which dress attributes contribute to the efficient utilization of human resources also depends on the extent to which stratified homogeneity of dress exists in the organization. Complete homogeneity of dress does not allow the identification of status or power based on dress because all members dress the same. Conversely, clear stratification of dress can convey distinct roles. Such distinctions increase the probability that employees will be approached only with requests pertaining to their roles in the organization, hence promoting monitored use of human resources.

To illustrate, stratified homogeneity of dress in restaurants reduces both the extent to which waiters are questioned about seating and the extent to which hostesses are questioned about food. In this vein, Laverdard (1987) and Marcuse (1967) claimed that hospitals that eliminated the requirements that staff wear stratified uniforms experienced chaos because delineations regarding authority and responsibility became unclear.

Proposition 12: Dress attributes and stratification of dress can identify distinctions of status within the organization and, therefore, help direct the demands placed on personnel in the organization.

Dress conspicuousness can further promote control over the use of human resources by delineating members from nonmembers. Such delineation is helpful to both members and nonmembers when identifying each other, and it is especially crucial in service settings where the interaction between members and nonmembers is central to the production process (Bowen & Schneider, 1988; Chase, 1978). Distinct dress eliminates some frustrations for customers because it informs them of whom to approach for service (Russell, 1987). Likewise, because conspicuous dress identifies other employees, it can help employees identify and direct their services to customers. Consistent with this proposition, Schwadel (1989) has commented that the performance improvements of the WalMart chain might be, in part, attributable to a newly introduced, and more conspicuous, dress code.

Proposition 13: Conspicuous organizational dress can promote the delivery of service because it helps to identify both members and nonmembers of organizations.

Delving into a new research arena is somewhat akin to opening Pandora's Box: There is no way to contain all the complexity one can construe in a simple and parsimonious model. In this article, we therefore articulate the most significant relationships. We explicitly propose that organizational dress may indicate organizational values and structure; it also may help to bring about employees' compliance and legitimation, as well as to influence the organizational image and control over the use of human resources. Both inductive and deductive research is necessary to support and enhance our propositions.

The more general goal of this article is, however, to encourage students of organizations to consider the meaning and impact of the attributes, homogeneity, and conspicuousness of organizational dress. We hope that we have succeeded in offering a succinct framework for future research on this vivid, though currently unfashionable, component of organizational behavior.

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