

Clothing and Personnel Selection: An Experimental Study to Test the Effects of Dress Style on Hirability Perceptions

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Abstract : The so called “red sneakers effect” refers to people’s inclination to infer status and competence from signals of nonconformity. In the current research, we explore an untested possible boundary condition to the red sneakers effect within the context of personnel selection. In two experimental studies (total N = 156), we examined how (non)conforming dress style interacts with the quality of a job applicant’s resume to determine hirability perceptions. We found that dress style indeed impacts hirability perceptions, but that the exact impact depends on the quality of the applicant’s resume. Results revealed that applicants with a low quality resume were punished for behaving in a nonconforming way, whereas applicants with a high quality resume appeared to have the leeway to dress as they please. Importantly, the observed interaction effect was mediated by perceptions of power. These findings suggest that nonconforming dress acts as a power-signaling mechanism in the context of personnel selection. However, the signaling effects of non-conforming dress style can backfire when accompanied by evidence that such posturing is not matched by cues of actual competence.

Keywords : clothing, hirability, nonconformity, personnel selection, power

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