



Revista Organizações & Sociedade
2024, 31(109), 001-025

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10.1590/1984-92302024v31n0008EN

e-location: ev31n0008EN

eISSN 1984-9230 | ISSN 1413-585X

www.revistaoes.ufba.br

NPGA, Escola de Administração

Universidade Federal da Bahia

Editora Associada:

Leticia Dias Fantinel

Recebido: 12/01/2023

Aceito: 24/04/2024

Apparel and its Implications in Organizational Life: Clothing as a Regulatory Tool in Organizations

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Abstract

This essay aims to deepen the understanding regarding the role of attire and its implications in organizational life by proposing that organizational attire and its standardizing effect are essentially instruments of individual and collective disciplining and control, serving as integral components and conduits of power relations in organizational life. We argue that in a society where appearances play a fundamental role, what is worn on the body extends beyond functional and aesthetic layers and serves as a significant mirror of the functioning of social mechanisms, indicating deeper connections related, for example, to culture, social function, belongingness, and desires. The theoretical framework underpinning the discussion is primarily based on Foucault's work (2006), wherein the contribution lies in the proposal of a theoretical perspective composed of four phases of attire's influence on individuals, ranging from the moment the body is dressed to its effects when they become generalized and collectively internalized.

Keywords: organizational attire; standardizing effect; disciplining; power relations.

Introduction

In recent decades, reflections surrounding the issue of clothing have entered organisational studies and have gained prominence in discussions on topics such as culture (Libretti, Moreira, & Amorim, 2018; Miyazaki, Hanashiro, & Ipiranga, 2018; Narducci, 2016) and organisational aesthetics (Korica & Bazin, 2019; Gagliardi, 1990; Höpfl, 2007; Leal, 2007; Narducci, 2016; Strati, 1990; Wood Jr. & Csillag, 2001), in addition to being increasingly explored in subjects like the use of uniforms (Roche, 2007) and gender issues within the workplace (Andrade, 2009; Caproni & Saraiva, 2018).

The phenomenon of fashion emerged at the dawn of the Renaissance (Godart, 2010) as an element of individualisation, arising from the rejection of past culture and values and the emphasis on self-reflection and the perception of others, simultaneously representing society's collective choices and assuming different characteristics at various moments in social history (Linke, 2013). Attire, a derivative of fashion, has become an object of sociological or historical study, as it is specifically tied to the customs and practices of different social groups at different times (Barthes, 2005; Linke, 2013). More than a purely aesthetic sense, clothing, fashion, and attire also embody and (re)produce ideals, behaviours, perceptions, cultures, and social and organisational structures and patterns, as they bear within themselves the many complexities present, above all, in the individual's relationships with oneself, with others, and with the world (Santos, 2015). Clothing, seemingly simple and superficial, constitutes a medium of representation, internalisation, and externalisation of far deeper social and organisational issues than what meets the eye (Viana & Silva, 2019). These nuances reverberate around each individual, who, through interaction, form a mechanism of uniformity that strongly shapes relations of power, discipline, and social control within the collective body.

In light of this, our aim is to deepen the understanding of the role of clothing and its implications in organisational life by proposing that organisational attire and its homogenising effect are, fundamentally, instruments of individual and collective discipline and control, and how these, together, are integral components and conduits of power relations in organisational life. Our primary theoretical contribution is the suggestion that the comprehension of the instrumentalisation of attire in power relations unfolds through the delineation of four stages, where each subsequent phase exists only by virtue of the fulfilment of the preceding ones, ultimately culminating in power relations themselves and their diffusion throughout the collective.

In this endeavour, we follow in the footsteps of authors such as Gioia and Pitre (1990) and Hassard (1991), who proposed multiparadigmatic strategies for the study of organisational theories, more specifically the proposal by Paula (2016) and her model of the circle of epistemic matrices. This theoretical-analytical proposition presents itself as an alternative to the paradigmatic framework of Burrell and Morgan (1979) and is composed of three cognitive matrices based on Habermas's studies (1982): the empirical-analytical matrix, the hermeneutic matrix, and the critical matrix. According to Paula (2016), the epistemic matrices serve as a reference for systems of knowledge production, termed sociological approaches. The author identified six of these: functionalist, interpretivist, humanist, structuralist, post-structuralist, and critical realist. Some of these approaches are pure, as they tend to situate themselves within only one matrix: this is the case for the functionalist (empirical-analytical matrix), the interpretivist (hermeneutic matrix), and the humanist (critical matrix). However, other approaches are hybrid, as they traverse more than one epistemic matrix simultaneously: this is true of the structuralist (empirical-analytical and

hermeneutic matrix), the post-structuralist (hermeneutic and critical matrix), and the critical realist (empirical-analytical, hermeneutic, and critical matrix).

According to this classification, the present study is situated within a non-pure approach, namely post-structuralism or the postmodern approach, as it is also referred to by some (Paula, 2016). The postmodern perspective, which in organisational studies is guided by a multidisciplinary theoretical movement "ranging from philosophy to aesthetics, involving the arts and sociology..." (Vieira, 2005, p. 8), is characterised by various elements such as globalisation, relativism, and pluralism, marked by the dissipation of objectivity, rationality, and the spectacularisation of society (Vieira & Caldas, 2007). In the circle of epistemic matrices model, the post-structuralist approach is the product of an advanced epistemic reconstruction, as it stems from both the structuralist approach and the social constructionism present in the interpretivist approach. Thus, it is a hybrid sociological approach, navigating between the hermeneutic and critical epistemic matrices, although there are controversies regarding its adherence to the emancipatory interest (Paula, 2016).

Our commitment here, much like the postmodern endeavour, is to explore and comprehend the micro-practices within organisations that have the potential to generate collective effects, such as society itself, organisations, and cultures. As a theoretical foundation, we primarily draw upon a Foucauldian lens aimed at understanding power, recognising that power was the object of fascination and study for Foucault. Foucault, along with the other authors referenced herein, has aided us in shaping and guiding the path towards the intended understanding; through their work, we hope to have constructed our analytical process with coherence, historical depth, and systematic rigour. It is important to note that Foucault (2006) is frequently labelled a postmodern/post-structuralist author, though he himself rejected this label in a 1983 interview. What follows, therefore, is equipped with the necessary delineations to support our arguments and provide an original understanding of the means by which we came to grasp this phenomenon as it is presented here.

The contribution we propose is a comprehension of how organisational dynamics are influenced by power relations through the impact of organisational attire on identities, perceptions, identifications, judgements, decisions, and, ultimately, the many subjectivities of life in society. This study further contributes to the development of research related to the phenomenon of fashion within the field of applied social sciences, given that its academic production remains relatively late and scarce compared to other areas of societal study.

This theoretical essay is structured as follows: after the introduction, we discuss the dimension that phenomena related to what is understood as "fashion" occupy in the social lives of individuals; in the third section, we develop the proposed theoretical framework by creating a subdivision into four phases concerning the instrumentalisation of clothing within power relations and its cycle until it reaches collective dominance, permeating everything and everyone, without being confined to a specific structure. Lastly, final considerations are presented.

Dressing is political, social, and organizational

Until the 19th century, studies related to fashion were conducted by art historians and were limited to descriptions of attire, without seeking to explain them. By the end of that century,

philosophers, sociologists, economists, and anthropologists began to pursue more elaborate explanations for the dynamics of clothing and its relationship with society (Pereira, 2015). Studies on garments then started to be carried out within various domains of human sciences, focusing on signalling aspects such as gender and social class. With the advent of industrial capitalist development, these studies also expanded, becoming linked to areas such as organisational studies and marketing.

Scholars like Tarde (1992), Veblen (1980), Simmel (1998), Barthes (2005), Boucher (2010), Baudot (2008), and Laver (1989) are regarded as foundational figures in the field, as their contributions allowed for the understanding of fashion as something intrinsic to social dynamics. Although, since the late 19th century, some studies on the role of clothing in society had emerged, with various authors of the time highlighting how dress systems and codes were fundamental to comprehending the societies in which they were embedded, this field continued to be academically overlooked until more recently (Figueiredo, 2011). However, if such reflection emerged at that point in history, it is likely that many "possibilities for analysis made visible through our most tangible surface, our relationship with the external world" (Figueiredo, 2011, p. 1) were recognised. From the earliest civilisations, social structural dictates have been externalised through appearance: the image of each individual, as well as what was worn on the body, carried representations of the division of labour, class membership, societal positioning, or the performance of a function. What was displayed or worn constituted a silent demonstration of social behaviour.

What is placed upon the body thus became an instrument identifying social position (understood as the symbolic place an individual occupies within society). Initially appearing as a device for protection and the maintenance of modesty, the cultural competence inherent in a group's attire evolved beyond mere dressing: clothing became one of the greatest cultural productions of society, as well as one of the most significant symbols of the culture of certain civilisations. Over time, as human history progressed, clothing became a major vehicle of signification.

Therefore, to begin our reflection, it is necessary first to understand what each concept signifies throughout this essay, as although the concepts of fashion, clothing, and attire are closely related, scholars who study these phenomena today argue that they do not share the same definition, with the former being more "loaded" and broader in scope (Bethke & Keigel, 2019).

In general, for Barnard (2020), fashion can be understood as a profound cultural and social phenomenon that communicates and shares meanings through garments, adornments, and other modifications to the body. It is a social process of negotiation, in which styling, dressing, and adorning the body are fundamental parts of the formation of the individual (shaping, sustaining, and altering them), as well as a process of continual self-perception and identity construction in an ever-changing world (Kaiser, 2012).

Contemporary authors necessarily associate fashion with consumption, a characteristic inherent to capitalist society. However, we disagree on this point. For us, every society, consequently possessing its own form of organisation, has its own "fashion." Any community, no matter how remote, possesses its particular method of adornment and body modification; even the absence of these aspects is, in itself, an intrinsic symbolism of how they characterise and differentiate themselves in relation to the world and their own collectivity.

The concept concerning the age of the earliest garments is relatively new. Although the first evidence of dressing dates back to around one hundred thousand years BCE (Todorović, Toporišič, & Pavko Čuden, 2014), it is widely accepted that the fashion system as we know it emerged only during the Renaissance, around the 15th century (Godart, 2010). There is no absolute consensus regarding its origin; Italy, France, and Japan are cited as some of its birthplace, particularly with the emergence of cities and their middle classes. From a broader perspective, Pereira (2003) suggests that fashion originated at the Court of Burgundy in France, arising from competition between the nobility and the new emerging class of the time: the bourgeoisie. One of the premises of the French bourgeoisie was, in fact, social ascent and acceptance into the world as an equally powerful and privileged class, akin to the nobility. To achieve this, it was necessary to behave accordingly, leading the bourgeoisie to engage in the game of imitation, copying the clothing, accessories, and hairstyles of the nobles of Versailles, which was not well received by the latter, who wished to remain pristine and unmatched (Pereira, 2003; Godart, 2010). The nobles, therefore, sought even greater differentiation and originality, setting the fashion machinery in motion.

According to Braga (2006), by the 17th century, France was already exerting a strong influence on the fashion of other European countries. Louis XIV, the King of France, was regarded as an extremely vain figure and is considered by many as the creator of status, luxury, and the world's first fashion school, leaving behind various legacies to Western culture, such as high-heeled shoes, beauty salons, and the first haute couture designers. During this period, the world's first fashion newspapers were established, alongside the phenomenon of seasonal fashion (the changing of trends each season). For Louis XIV, fostering his vanity was a means of enhancing his power, and France adeptly utilised this to influence other European powers.

Although we cannot pinpoint a single origin for this phenomenon, we know it emerged as a dynamic of ostentation directly linked to the aristocracy, the elite, and the bourgeoisie, forming part of a systematic complex whereby individuals began to signify their social inclusion through what they chose to wear (Godart, 2010). Therefore, fashion is, at its core, a collective phenomenon.

Todorović et al. (2014) highlight how the culture of "dressing" belongs to one of the most significant anthropological paradigms, both theoretically and empirically. This notion is important to us, as the authors contend that since clothing is a tangible object in society (in the physical sense), they understand it as a "...constant inevitable in daily life" (Todorović et al. 2014, p. 322). This illustrates how objects themselves embody fashion, whose mission "includes patterns of behaviour and ideas (smoking, for example, may no longer be fashionable...) and is articulated through a series of concepts (from grunge to vintage; from appearance to style), which, indirectly, show an interest in the material sphere" (Riello, 2011, p. 2).

Clothing, in turn, is situated at the intersection of the individual and the community; broadly speaking, it can be understood as any combination of garments and adornments applied to the body capable of conveying ideas pertaining to the character of the social, political, cultural, and economic context, as well as expressing norms and conventions (Bethke & Keigel, 2019; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). Its structure can be divided into costume and attire (Barthes, 2005). The latter can be understood as a social and institutional reality that exists independently of the individual and from which they derive what they choose to wear. The costume represents a particular reality in which the individual modifies the institution of attire. Together, costume and attire constitute the entirety known as clothing:

the relationship between costume and attire is a semantic one: the significance of clothing increases as one transitions from costume to attire; the costume is weakly significant, expressing more than it notifies; in contrast, attire is strongly significant, establishing an intellectual, notifying relationship between the wearer and their group (Barthes, 2005, p. 273).

Attire, therefore, signifies for us a set of symbolic elements contained within the garments and adornments used in a specific space-time, fundamental in defining various identities, whether of class, gender, culture, among others. It manifests patterns, boundaries, and impositions of diverse orders and, consequently, establishes typical projections of behaviours characteristic of particular spaces and epochs, thereby systematically fixing values and meanings. For this reason, expressions such as “organisational attire” will be used later.

The stylisation of the body involves a complex process that overlays simultaneous incorporations of aspects such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, social class, nationality, and age/generation, as well as the attention, decisions, and choices related to one's own appearance, which are connected to the formation, maintenance, and continuous changes in the subject's identity (Kaiser, 1990). Thus, it is expressed here that we approach dressing from a perspective that transcends aesthetics, delving into the sociological, market, moral, and, principally, organisational spheres.

Attire as an instrument of power

In this section, we present the reasons why we believe that attire, along with the effects arising from it, are tangible and vivid instruments of power relations in the organisational world we inhabit. Our aim here is to highlight how these power relations emerge from the most minute elements present in attire, which gain strength as they are internalised by individuals and reverberated within their organisational contexts. This configuration manifests as a subtle effect of self-discipline, until this effect ultimately permeates the collective and transcends organisational boundaries, infiltrating civil life in such a way as to be located in everyone and everywhere, transforming into devices of power. Our theoretical perspective comprises four phases that are necessarily interdependent, with the second phase being contingent upon the prior completion of the first, and so forth. Ultimately, it is posited here that every development rests upon a preceding one, and every process establishes prerequisites for subsequent processes.

Power relations stem from the symbolic weight incorporated

Clothing and its use as social markers have entered societal life as symbolic games that indicate not only function but also gender and morality, demarcating hegemonic conventions, decency, and the moral standards inherent in civil life, as observed in the “civilizing process” explained by Norbert Elias (Santos, 1997). Normative attire has become a dimension of daily life, regulated by the state and guides on etiquette, becoming a field of societal intervention, transforming into a punitive and monitored directive.

From a socio-historical perspective, Norbert Elias sought to understand society through etiquette manuals dating from the Middle Ages to the 19th century, investigating the conduct transformations imposed around civilizing processes, primarily driven by social distinction. His aim was to identify visible changes in personalities linked to social changes within the historical process of civilization construction, which lead to alterations in social structures (Garcia, 2008). This historical development analysis model is based on a growing restriction of impulses embedded within the complex network of social interdependence. While Elias argues that these impulses are socially formed, he expresses that such restrictions on spontaneity affect various spheres, including affection, bodily inhibition, and etiquette, shaping individuals to fit societal norms through the discipline of multiple aspects of social life (Van Krieken, 1990).

This perspective illustrates how the ideas we hold today are neither unique nor timeless; they represent the product of many generations. It becomes impossible to understand the construction of many societal aspects without first grasping the interdependence network that shaped them. People perceive their subjectivities as self-evident; however, according to Elias, understanding the temporal development of these ideas is to comprehend social development from a "multi-generational perspective" (Newton, 2001, p. 468), wherein social history is a mosaic of personal actions of individuals themselves (Van Krieken, 1990; Newton, 2001).

With rules prohibiting certain practices—such as the absolute prohibition against spitting at the table during the Middle Ages, which went against courtesy—it has been possible to observe particularities regarding the evolution of social conduct. Elias initially noted that these behaviors were exclusively related to interactions among individuals of equal or higher social standing, thus directly tied to status and social treatment. Subsequently, these norms served to include individuals within a specific social group, provided they adhered to the established protocols, while simultaneously excluding from social recognition those who behaved inappropriately under certain circumstances (Garcia, 2008). Over time, certain behaviors deemed socially unacceptable began to disappear from etiquette "manuals." This did not occur because they ceased to be unpleasant but rather because they became increasingly established as distasteful or indecent, increasingly repressed and omitted (Garcia, 2008). Once socially known, these rules did not need to be constantly recalled; instead, they could cause psychological discomfort. Thus, behaviors acquire a character that differentiates them from normative conduct, establishing a symbolic control over individual behavior. These impressions of modesty, or even shame, associated with these norms demonstrate the alteration in individuals' personality structures and inevitably contribute to some of the "symptoms" of societal civilization.

But what do the "good" behaviors socially imposed have in common with what individuals wear or use on their bodies? According to Barthes (2005), no individual dresses free from obligation: the personality that is (re)produced among members of a social group or organization directly influences aesthetic dispositions. Just as good manners evolved over the centuries and across regions as codes of gender representation, function, social position, and belonging to a specific social group, the dress code also formed part of these good manners and was incorporated into the rules of modesty. Its "utility" transitioned from merely being "functional" to endowing individuals with a range of characteristics capable of conveying diverse messages about their places in the world and the organizations to which they belong.

What has been presented suggests that, fundamentally, rationality is not the driving force of civilisation; rather, the civilising process arises from the strong connection between the structures of individual personalities (and the changes therein) and society. The gradual control of impulses and the cultivation of modesty, for instance, are among the factors that contribute to the discipline of the ego and, over time, are integrated into the affective structure—or habitus—of a community.

According to Wacquant (2007, p. 66), habitus can be understood as a “... sedimented individual and group history within the social body, transformed into a mental structure...” that operates below the level of consciousness. In other words, according to the author, habitus encompasses that which exists in human practices that affords a certain autonomy beyond full human awareness; it is a social construction, rather than a natural one, that is individually as well as collectively rooted in society, and which varies across time, place, and, crucially, the distribution of power.

Habitus provides, simultaneously, a principle of socialisation and individuation: socialisation because our categories of judgement and action, derived from society, are shared by all those who have been subjected to similar social conditions and conditioning (thus, we can speak of a masculine habitus, a national habitus, a bourgeois habitus, etc.); individuation because each individual, having a unique trajectory and location in the world, internalises an unparalleled combination of schemas. Being both structured (by past social means) and structuring (of present actions and representations), habitus functions as the ‘non-chosen principle of all choices’. (Wacquant, 2007, p. 69)

This symbolic system is present in all and in the most diverse social groups. Separated by social class, gender, region, age, religion, function, or any other factor, individuals are part of communities and organisations that possess distinctive codes endowed with significance both within and beyond them. Habitus is directly associated with lifestyles and the various spheres of practical life, such as music consumption, dietary choices, political and marital decisions; what is worn on the body is included here, becoming an extension of the individuals themselves, acquiring shared meanings for groups and communities, and forming part of an entire symbolic system that serves a profound social function. Wherever there is a social group and an organisational environment, there exists a culture—a set of beliefs, habits, values, behaviours, experiences, and knowledge shared by a community—which is established, filled with symbols that become characteristic of that circle. According to Bourdieu (2001, p. 10), symbols are, by their very nature, instruments of social integration, as they “make possible the consensus regarding the meaning of the social world, which fundamentally contributes to the reproduction of social order: logical integration is the condition of moral integration”.

The body, then, becomes a necessary topic when discussing clothing. Just as what one wears—and in conjunction with this—the body serves as a stage for the most varied discourses. A body is always a provisional state of the set of information that constitutes it, a state that is constructed through the contacts established with the environments through which it lives and moves (Oliveira & Castilho, 2008). A body, therefore, can be read as a representation of its surroundings, while at the same time its surroundings become the body itself. For a considerable time, it was believed that the study of the body pertained to nature rather than culture, studied as

something distant from rationality and the mind, assigned to medical sciences and analysed as a biological and anatomical object composed solely of systems and organs (Caleiro & Gusmão, 2012; Dale, 2001; Flores-Pereira, 2010). However, bodies possess their own histories and constitute social, economic, and mental structures in which they operate not only as products but also as agents (Le Goff & Truong, 2006).

Although we are primarily adopting a Foucauldian perspective here, we recognise that just as the body can be constituted and socialised according to the political, social, and organisational order to which it belongs (as we have discussed throughout our argument thus far), it can also exert influence over society, history, and the culture of the organisations in which it operates, as it is a constitutive part of them. This is one of the reasons why organisational attire can play a role in organisational relationships; after all, while there may be layers of habitus embedded within each individual, once internalised, they also acquire complexity and reverberate within the space.

An organisation, regardless of its size, location, or function, possesses a dress code; this code, in conjunction with the individual's body, carries a myriad of significations concerning the organisation. Over the course of history, specific rules and standards of attire have emerged within various organisations. Historical events such as "... wars, moments of prosperity or poverty, religious influences—indeed, all the phases experienced by humanity impact attire" (Stefani, 2005, p. 15). These environments become embedded in bodies according to their space and time: the body reflects what occurs around it, and what happens transforms into the body itself. This allows us to comprehend the role of clothing in organisational life, irrespective of the organisation in question.

What is deemed fashionable today—which is also a form of language—has taken the form of a communication system to which all individuals are compelled to conform (Stefani, 2005). Each garment worn, therefore, carries symbolic weight, possessing the capacity to affect the body as it is incorporated, while mediating a succession of transformations that pertain not only to appearance but also to individual behaviours, social norms, expectations of and for them, the values of the time, historical moments, social functioning, and their roles within the groups to which they belong. Clothing, therefore, serves as a collective instrument capable of establishing strong communicative relationships that, at any given moment, will be power relations dependent on the symbolic weight concentrated by the individuals—or institutions—engaged in these interactions.

Power relations also arise from the uniformizing effect of attire

We have thus far understood how clothing and its codes possess the capacity for both communication and the transmission of identity, a central aspect of society as a whole. Dress codes are essential for the recognition of belonging to an organisational environment, whether it be a tribe, a community, or a professional setting (Bazin, Riot, & Aubert-Tarby, 2013). From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, these dress codes emerged with greater force alongside the advent of industrial society, driven by the explosion of a capitalist way of life centred on work, which has significantly developed one of the fundamental characteristics of contemporary human life: professions.

By combining Simmel's (1998) classical definition with that of Bazin et al. (2013), professions can be understood as specific forms of socialisation constructed through co-optation, that is, through integration, assimilation, and shared values, defined by rules regulating their activities, as

well as by informally shared values within a community and by signals that facilitate recognition among professionals. Becoming a professional or achieving professional status should be regarded as an aesthetic experience, as individuals' senses are wholly engaged in this process (Bazin et al., 2013). Dress code policies sculpt the visual expressions of organisational culture, with work attire being significant elements of their constitution (Maysonave, 2001; McCarty, 2013; Wood & Benitez, 2003). Similarly, while one is part of an organisation, their social identity is influenced not only by the norms established therein but also by particular workgroups, hierarchical levels, functional areas, among other factors (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Chawla & Srivastava, 2016), rendering attire an insignia of identity manifestation for various individuals.

It is important to emphasise that professional attire is not confined to the wearing of uniforms per se, as there are forms of dress that, although not specifically designated by this term, exhibit their own uniformising effect. This is the case with religious and judicial attire, for example (Fortes, 2016). Thus, we can observe at this juncture how such attire has evolved into organisational garb, representing a new layer of habitus within Western society, being disseminated and refined in accordance with the needs of organisations.

The fact that work attire is a key component of the desired culture within organisations has given rise to dress code policies. According to Entsuah, Abraham, and Kyeremeh (2018), a dress code is a set of standards developed by companies to guide their employees on what is appropriate to wear for their profession, ranging from formal to casual attire. It thus represents the rules that govern individuals' appearances and is subject to sociological variables such as age, class, religion, gender, occupation, or ethnicity. Furthermore, it helps delineate what should or can be worn.

In studies that link clothing and organisations, the role of dress codes in the development and application of existing conventions and traditions within various professions is emphasised (Easterling, Leslie, & Jones, 1992), such that dressing oneself means donning codes that cannot be dissociated from the professions to which one belongs; this act, and all it entails, is directly connected to professional identity and professionalism as a whole. Additionally, when considered alongside appearance, dress code is also viewed as a significant factor impacting individuals' psychological well-being and performance in the workplace (Kwon, 1994; Peluchette & Karl, 2007; Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, & Mackie-Lewis, 1997). Research indicates that the way an individual dresses influences the impressions formed by others (Johnson, Nagasawa, & Peters, 1977; Kwon, 1994; Mast & Hall, 2004), and that individuals consciously utilise clothing to manage others' impressions, whether through formal business attire to promote respect and status, or casual wear to enhance their connections with others (Rafaeli et al., 1997; Rucker, Anderson, & Kangas, 1999).

The studies mentioned indicate not only the nuances hidden beneath the superficial layer of clothing but also reiterate that it is not necessary for there to be a perfectly standardised uniform within an organisation to produce a uniformising effect and, consequently, organisational attire: the manner of dressing within an organisational context serves as a conspicuous signal of a mechanism that balances human beings' capacity to adhere to social norms with their interest in doing so, as well as their ability to seek deviation from these norms. The uniformising effect, therefore, is produced as a consequence or result of the layers of habitus associated with attire, sedimented through the relevant space and time, which have been historically, socially, and organisationally constructed based on their symbolic weight, continually incorporated by individuals not only

individually but also collectively, across various layers, levels, and configurations within any organisations to which they belong.

The symbolism of clothing, ostensibly simple yet visibly vivid, represents an extremely useful and accessible means to externalise and highlight organisational issues that are conflicting or less readily discussed or understood (Karl; Peluchette, & Collins, 2017). Professions have developed characteristic aesthetics reflective of their communities, identities, and *modus operandi*, with many professionals and apprentices deriving their own sense of purpose from the full development of their senses. This encompasses not merely actions but also the material and immaterial environment in which they are embedded (Bazin et al., 2013). However, the uniformising effect does not exist unless it is externalised, experienced, and performed in human interactions. For it to exist socially, it necessarily requires the presence of the “other”; fundamentally, it exists within relationships.

Power relations also arise from the disciplining of attire

According to Marsden and Townley (2001), Foucault's work has been explored as a response to the radical concept of power, as his concern did not lie in seeking explanations for the “why” of power but in understanding “how” it manifests. Foucault demonstrated how organisations are simultaneously architectures of power and devices of knowledge, which served as a veiled critique of approaches that perceive power solely in terms of repression of the actions of others. For Foucault, power is not an alienable commodity; it cannot be possessed in any society, and there is no division between those who possess power and those who do not; rather, it exists in terms of who exercises and practises it (Paniago, 2008).

In his discussions on power, Foucault (1987, p. 164) emphasises disciplinary relationships, which he considers fundamental for understanding domination, as they are capable of forming a “politics of coercion” that does not solely aim to deepen the subjugation of individuals; it also seeks to establish a relationship of dependency, in which the mechanism of calculated manipulation renders the body more useful and obedient (and the less obedient it is, the less useful). In any society, the body is subjected to power relations that impose obligations and prohibitions, ultimately leading to limitations, with disciplines serving as a meticulous control method that enforces a relationship of utility-docility upon bodies.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1987, p. 163) explains that a soldier, in the face of domination strategies, transforms into something that is manufactured; he becomes the machine necessary for his organisation through a “calculated coercion” that dissolves into the automatism of habits. At some point in history, there was a “discovery of the body as an object and target of power.” The body thus becomes an object that is trained, shaped, and manipulated to enhance its skill and utility. The effects of domination exercised by power result in control. For the author, the object of this control is more directed towards the strength of exercise than towards signals. However, how can one conceive the exercise of power without the transmission of ideals? Coercion operates on strength but also acts upon signals, as these are significant and necessary elements for the transfer of ideas. Therefore, the behaviours and languages of bodies are continuously altered and influenced by coercion, enabling meticulous control over bodily operations as it acts upon space, time, and movement. This control over the subject and their forces gives rise to a relationship

of docility-utility; or, more accurately, a relationship of discipline. The author also provides examples of organisations where these techniques are applied, such as schools and military barracks.

The space in which these organisations are situated is one of the control tools presented by Foucault (1987). Once a well-defined space that can be controlled is established, it becomes possible to regulate the time of arrival and departure, what transpires within it, and to extract the maximum advantages possible through various obligations and prohibitions. The manoeuvre of segmentation, for instance, pertains to the organisation of an “analytical space” where “each individual [must be] in their place; and in each place, an individual... It is important to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to find individuals...” (Foucault, 1987, p. 169). Thus, it becomes feasible to establish a separation of plurality: the disciplinary space begins to control the circulation of subjects, crowds, the multiplicity of ideas, and behaviours deemed unacceptable, such as vagrancy and desertion (Foucault, 1987). Consequently, agglomeration diminishes the skill and utility of bodies, in addition to posing a danger to dominant figures.

A third strategy may be perceived as the outcome of the preceding ones. The author introduces the concept of functional spaces, designated not only for surveillance and control but also to create utility. To illustrate, he utilises the figure of the hospital as an institution where bodies, symptoms, and diseases are individualised within an administrative space that translates into a useful and functional space from a medical perspective. In this manner, similar to a corporation, traversing the space allows for the simultaneous surveillance of all individuals and the individual, verification of their states, comparison and classification, as well as monitoring their successive stages. Ultimately, discipline entails elements that can be interchangeable, in the sense that everyone has a place in the queue. All occupy a position within a classification, within a series. Discipline, therefore, distributes bodies in an organised manner and facilitates their circulation within a web of relationships (Foucault, 1987).

At these points, one can frequently observe the constant relationship between the body and space. However, is this the sole means of delineating and homogenising the arrangement of bodies? Discipline also establishes an articulation between bodies and objects, and in this regard, aesthetic disposition can serve as a significant tool of influence over individuals: a manipulated body is the foundation of efficient gestures. After all, what is the perspective of appearances if not an attempt at expression within the social space, but also part of the social process of seeking to organise human behaviours? It is therefore only natural that in the pursuit of discipline, control, or establishing surveillance, one would also aim to discipline aesthetics, as the aesthetic discourse possesses the power to reveal unique organisational facts that can only be perceived through sight or through one's own experience.

Thus, it is understood that attire influences how a cultural group represents, utilises, and hierarchises individuals. When an individual dons clothing as an artefact, they tend to adopt certain of its characteristics (Fortes, 2016). Professional attire is experienced by bodies with the full effects of a symbolic ensemble composed of cultural elements and organisational memory. A uniform, for instance, becomes an integral part of organisational life as it impacts the body integrated into an organisation. Consequently, it serves as a tool capable of delineating rules and articulating prohibitions, thereby influencing institutional control, as it effectively confines those who wear it.

A standardising attire is also capable of organising bodies analytically, as it acts as an instrument of location, functioning as a showcase of an individual's position within an organisation: "each individual in their place; and in each place, an individual" (Foucault, 1987, p. 169). By categorising the subject, the objective is to establish genuinely useful communications, to know where and how to locate them, and to identify absences. Once the subject dons their uniform, they cease to be an ordinary individual; the standardising attire can transform the body into a functional space, ready to be utilised, controlled, and monitored. A body in this capacity, therefore, must become adept, useful, and disciplined, functioning as administrative units with a role to fulfil and a position within an organised classification, while strategically embedded in a web of relationships.

Striped patterns, for example, which are prominently present in contemporary clothing, historically served to signify infamy and exert power and surveillance over deviant bodies in prisons; the insane, the ill, thieves, and convicts were thus marked by the stripes typical of various social cultural periods (Fortes, 2016). Once marked by the stripes, the individual of that era occupied a marginalised position within society, outside the imposed normativity, thereby being observed, controlled, and manipulated as necessary; their utility lay in their separation from the normal social milieu; their place in society, to maintain its organisation, was there: amid stripes, prisons, and asylums. It is worth noting, however, that this aspect is not confined to the corporate realm (Fortes, 2016). Any attire that possesses this effect involves and subjugates bodies within a reality of social behaviour control and surveillance technologies. The invisible control exerted by a few over many must be established in such a way that allows for the simultaneous observation of multiple bodies. In this sense, clothing, when linked to organisations, can possess the power of a panoptic rationality (Foucault, 1987).

From the moment one adorns oneself with symbols, culture, and specific organisational memories, one becomes a part of that organisation. As an entity, it embodies a series of values and perceptions that it wishes to convey to those on the outside. The "uniform" becomes a manifestation of meanings, connecting society (and society's perception) to the organisational body; thus, work attire serves as one of the tools through which interaction between the institution and the social environment occurs.

By donning a standardising outfit, your identity, your role, and your classification within the social milieu come under scrutiny. Once a body is cloaked in this manner, the subject—along with their conduct—can be observed at any time, regardless of their location. In this context, clothing functions as a panoptic device, organising subjects into a series of units that facilitate their perception and surveillance through the trap of visibility itself. This gives rise to the most significant effect of this rationality: the automatic functioning of power. Just as a prisoner monitored within a panoptic architecture exists in a state of perpetual awareness of their visibility, those who wear attire assigned to their organisations, whether inside or outside, are cognisant of being watched.

The standardising garments, therefore, instil in individuals a consciousness of their constant representation of their organisation, which constitutes the panoptic effect of clothing. Through this instillation, the effects of surveillance become enduring and extend beyond organisational boundaries. This apparatus possesses a mechanism of power so adept that it renders "the actuality of its exercise superfluous" (Foucault, 1987, p. 225); in other words, it need not be exercised in a tangible manner: what matters is that the subject is aware of being observed, although this does

not necessitate actual observation. They must never know whether they are being watched but must always be assured that they could be: power must be visible, yet unverifiable.

And finally, power relations also stem from uniformity within the collective

To better understand how the standardising effect operates not only on an individual level but also extends to the collective, we draw upon the process of change observed in Foucault's thought, through which his conception of power is altered and complemented. In his genealogical phase, Foucault (2013) focused on how the production of discourses is organised, selected, (re)distributed, and controlled, comprehending the power emanating from them (Pereira, Muniz, & Lima, 2007). Foucault perceived power as relations of forces manifested in social practices, with discourses being strongly included. Thus, discourse serves as both a word of order and an ordering principle, an expression referring to the practical effects and the force through which it is actualised and legitimised within the social body, alluding to both its internal order and its external order.

In this genealogical phase, Foucault emphasised that power does not reside at any specific point within the social structure; there is no side that possesses it and a side that is subject to it. Power exists in everything and everywhere, functioning as a network of mechanisms from which there is no escape; it is constituted within relations deeply embedded in society and not merely in the relations between the State and its citizens or in the boundaries between various classes. These relations are ingrained in the bodies of individuals, in actions, in discourses, in learning processes—in other words, they are part of the everyday (Marsden & Townley, 2001). This idea led him to what he understood as micropractices of power, an important term in Foucault's theory, which was met with contestation from the academic community at the time of its emergence, as it contradicted widely accepted theories positing that power emanated solely from the apparatuses of the State. The intention was not to diminish the State but to highlight that power relations extend far beyond its confines (Machado, 2013; Paniago, 2008).

For Foucault, discourse, along with the involvement of individuals' subjectivities, is capable of constructing dimensions that produce and establish rules of behaviour. He asserted that discourse is laden with subtleties, present both in what is said and what is left unsaid in communicative acts, and through it, standards of conduct can be established and legitimised in order to mitigate conflicts, thereby materialising these discursive practices through the creation of social moulds and frameworks. Discourses consist of contingent systems of thought that, in practice, also assume particular forms of subjectivities through specific power techniques, and once these notions are projected as forms of action in the social world, their exercise provokes effects akin to those of any other action (Faria & Meneghetti, 2001; Mello, Silva, Lima, & Paolo, 2007). Organisational attire, as a discourse, thus produces its particular subjectivities, as it embodies notions rich in subtleties that are projected into the social world, establishing patterns and frameworks that ultimately shape moulds and behaviours that become legitimised.

Once clothing is perceived as discourse, the manner in which it is utilised and instituted within organisations actualises orders in the social realm, arising from the need to control, discipline, and organise what is seen and said in society. For our purposes here, organisational attire thus constitutes tactical strategies of power that traverse not only the political dimension but also the social and moral spheres, serving as "words" of order capable of effecting processes of exclusion

and organisation—ultimately, processes of control within the social body. Organisational clothing, therefore, comprises its own network of power mechanisms that interconnect all, with the standardising effect serving as a crucial tool for the subtle control of the social body.

It is present in everyone, across all organisations, communities, places, and eras. Even those who escape this effect often gravitate towards others who do the same, thereby forming a community. Regardless of any situational context in space-time, this standardising effect is ever-present and self-perpetuating, as it is fundamentally collective and, being inherently social, is integral to the manifestation of hierarchies, social roles, permissions and prohibitions, beliefs, desires, and cultures. It exists, therefore, within all and everywhere, composing networks of micropractices of power that do not necessarily originate from the State, nor are they invariably interconnected with it (Machado, 2013).

There exists, then, a relationship of complementarity—rather than contradiction or denial—between archaeology and genealogy, the latter of which can be understood as an expansion of Foucault's fields of study (Gimbo, 2016). This line of reasoning provides a bridge for us to discuss what Foucault conceptualised as biopower, an important idea for understanding the standardising effect within the collective.

Disciplinary power is complemented by biopower (Pogrebinschi, 2004). The latter does not exclude the former; rather, it encompasses it, as discipline operates on the individualisation of persons while biopower pertains to collective processes, that is, it refers to the massification of the effects of discipline. In biopower, there is an extensive production of knowledge that emerges from the fusion of biopolitical and disciplinary mechanics of power, which simultaneously impact both individuals and the population as a whole. Thus, biopower and disciplinary power incessantly overlap, as exemplified by Foucault's discussion of sexuality, which became a strategic field by the end of the nineteenth century, situated between individualised bodies and the multiplicity of the population. Sexuality, therefore, is a domain dependent on not only biological processes but also controlling, disciplinary, individualising, massifying, and regulatory mechanisms (Pogrebinschi, 2004). Throughout the development of his theories, Foucault recognised that power mechanisms began to act on the normalisation of phenomena inherent to human life, without limiting themselves to any single individual. This implies that, in addition to seeking control over the subject and their body, power began to operate on the population, aiming to manage and regulate human multiplicities (Butler, 2008; Duarte, 2008; Santos, 2015).

We thus understand organisational attire and its standardising effect as a constantly flowing force that operates within a network, rather than being instituted as something fixed, such as a specific individual; this flow should be interpreted as a succession of phenomena that traverse individuals, impacting both subjects and society as a whole simultaneously.

Foucault (1996) further explores the distinction between disciplinary society and society of control. The former is based on rigid rules and institutions, while the latter revolves around the internalisation of these rules, resulting in self-surveillance by the individual themselves—after all, resistance occurs to a lesser degree when control takes the form of self-control. In the notion of biopolitics, power begins to affect life "from one end to the other," and forms of domination present themselves in more internalised, subtle, and widespread manners. The new forms of managing life require the adjustment of subjects and their competencies to the contemporary market reality,

which is directly connected to issues such as the health and aesthetics of productive bodies, thereby shaping subjectivities in the process (Foucault, 1996; Pelbart, 2003; César & Duarte, 2009).

We recognise that the concepts of biopower and biopolitics formulated by Foucault pertain to interventions within the population that aim to protect, encourage, stimulate, and regulate life concerning the vital conditions of society itself, seeking the preservation of life. However, he also identified newer, more flexible, and subtle forms of biopolitical control under the post-war neoliberalism, understanding the subject as an economic agent responding to market stimuli rather than as an autonomous political-legal personality. Here, we comprehend that organisational attire forms part of the individual that Foucault, as early as the 1970s, in his conception of neoliberalism, regarded not merely as an entrepreneur in the market, but as an entrepreneur of the self, seeking to be their own producer of income. In other words, he anticipated that the subject, as an economic agent, began to amplify and enhance themselves to increase their utility and become competitive in the market, while simultaneously attempting to mitigate potential risk factors. For us, organisational attire emerged as this enhancement, with its standardising effect acting as one of the many subtle instruments regulating these factors.

Today, organisational attire and its effects undoubtedly reach society from one end to the other; they have been—and continue to be—generalised and are constantly internalised by society. These characteristics have become forms of self-control that are almost imperceptible, as they remain deeply embedded within the social body and the various layers of habitus deposited both individually and collectively, yet continue to influence organisational phenomena that are inherent to life in any group or community in contemporary times.

Conclusions

“A body never exists in and of itself, not even when it is naked” (Oliveira & Castilho, 2008, p. 69). It represents a provisional state linked to the environment in which it is situated, reflecting a collection of information absorbed by it and everything that constitutes it; indeed, what is placed upon it is imbued with information, symbols, and history. In this specific case, it is primarily infused with power relations. In this context, this study aimed to deepen the understanding of the role of clothing and its implications within organisational life, proposing that organisational attire and its standardising effect function as instruments of individual and collective disciplinary control, and concurrently integrate and serve as conduits for power relations in organisational life. From this foundation, we proposed a theoretical perspective on the influence of attire on individuals, consisting of four phases, ranging from the moment the body is clothed to the effects when these influences are generalised and collectively internalised. To develop this argument, we employed concepts such as dress code (Entsuah et al., 2018), attire (Barthes, 2005; Linke, 2013), disciplinary power, micropractices of power, and biopower (Foucault, 1977, 1984, 1987, 2013), among others.

From the sociological perspective adopted in this study, dressing transcends aesthetic considerations; it is treated as a complex process mediated by aspects such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, social class, nationality, and age/generation (Kaiser, 1990). Thus, choices regarding attire are not neutral, as they are linked to the personalities shaped by group members (Barthes, 2005) or by the affective structure—or habitus—of a community (Wacquant, 2007); for, as symbols, garments serve as instruments of social integration (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 10).

Our theoretical perspective presents four phases that are necessarily interdependent, with the second phase unable to occur without the prior unfolding of the first, and so forth. Firstly, it is essential to recognise that, in addition to the fact that bodies are constituted and socialised according to the political, social, and organisational orders in which they are embedded, they also exert influence upon society, history, and the culture of the organisations they inhabit, as they are constitutive parts of those entities themselves. In this initial moment or phase of the theoretical perspective, we understand that clothing and its codes possess the capacity for both communication and the transmission of identity, which is a central concern in society as a whole. Dress codes thus emerge as indispensable for recognising belonging to an organisational environment, whether it be a tribe, a community, or a specific professional setting (Bazin et al., 2013). In this way, we comprehend that organisational attire is capable of participating in the constituent relations of organisations. What may be considered fashion takes the form of a communication system to which all individuals submit, such that each article of clothing bears symbolic weight capable of influencing the body and mediating a succession of transformations linked not only to appearance but also to behaviours, social rules, expectations, values, historical moments, origins, and belonging, among other aspects (Stefani, 2005).

This leads us to the second phase in the theoretical perspective presented, where we observe how power relations emerge from the standardising effect of attire. From the mid-nineteenth century, with the growth of industrial and capitalist society and the emergence and consolidation of various professions, dress codes became increasingly essential for recognising belonging to an organisational milieu (Bazin et al., 2013). This gives rise to the so-called standardising effect, produced not only through the use of professional uniforms but also through the standardising effect of certain professional attire (Fortes, 2016) or the adoption of dress codes (Entsuah et al., 2018). We understand the standardising effect as that which is produced as a consequence or result of the layers of habitus associated with attire, sedimented in the relevant space and time, constructed historically, socially, and organisationally, through its symbolic weight, which is continually incorporated by individuals not only individually but also collectively, across different layers, levels, and configurations of any organisations to which they belong.

From this point, clothing becomes a key component of what is desired or deemed appropriate within organisations: it represents the rules that regulate individuals' appearance and is subject to sociological variables such as age, class, religion, gender, occupation, or ethnicity. These rules help stipulate what should or can be worn or not. Through the imposition of specific clothing, employers also seek to neutralise inconveniences: inappropriate attire that could distract attention and reduce (or negate) the time spent choosing other garments, potentially causing delays in work and, consequently, in productivity. The outfit thus envelops the body in such a way that it begins to emit a series of characteristics derived from the organisation to which it belongs. Once an individual becomes part of this staff, they are equalised, levelled, or hierarchically differentiated within it.

The disciplining effect of clothing corresponds to the third moment of the proposed theoretical perspective. This can be explained by the fact that through the imposition of uniforms, specific attire, or artefacts laden with meaning, it is possible to train, shape, manipulate, and render bodies capable and useful (Foucault, 1987). Moreover, standardising garments are also capable of analytically organising bodies, as they serve as instruments of location and grid-making (Foucault,

1987). Once a body is clothed in this manner, the subject—along with their behaviour—can be observed at any time and in any place. Clothing thus functions as a panoptic device, organising subjects into a series of units that allow them to be perceived and monitored through the trap of their own visibility. Those who wear attire attributed to the organisations they belong to are, whether inside or outside, aware that they are being watched.

Finally, we arrive at the fourth moment, where the disciplinary and uniformising effect operates not only on an individual level but also extends to the collective sphere. To understand how this uniformising effect also acts collectively, we draw from Foucault's perspective on micropractices of power (Foucault, 2013), which are deeply embedded in the bodies of subjects, their actions, discourses, and learning processes—essentially, they are present in the everyday (Marsden & Townley, 2001). Discourses thus take on the form of practices or transform into actions that, when they concurrently affect both individuals and the population as a whole, are termed biopower, which complements the individual effects of disciplinary power (Pogrebinschi, 2004). In Foucault's view, discourse, alongside the participation of individuals' subjectivities, is capable of constructing dimensions that produce and establish rules of behaviour. The uniformising effect transcends organisational boundaries with such intensity that it infiltrates social life, and this is made possible due to its disciplinary, panoptic, and regulatory nature.

It is important to highlight that some epistemological challenges were encountered during the study, such as the scarcity of research concerning attire not linked to aristocracy and elites. This fact may reflect the very nature of these power relations. Additionally, we recognise that the proposal presented here lacks empirical deepening, which we suggest for future studies, and we stress that, much like postmodern and poststructuralist proposals, the results presented are not universalising, nor do we seek such generalisations.

In conclusion, we hope that this study can contribute to organisational studies, as the relationship between clothing and organisations remains underexplored compared to others. Clothing, much like power relations, is fundamentally a collective product present in all social spheres, and its effects deserve to be understood.

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Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Conflict of interests

The authors have stated that there is no conflict of interest.

Inclusive language

The authors use inclusive language that acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities.

Authors' contributions

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