

DRESS PRACTICES AS EMBODIED MULTIMODAL RHETORIC

Special Issue of *The Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics*

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This special issue seeks to explore the multifaceted ways that dress practices can function as embodied multimodal rhetoric. Part "[What I Wore Today](#)" blog and part resource guide for theorizing and practicing "professional" dress for academics, this special issue invites participants to interrogate their own dress practices in the academy with an eye towards the problematic (racist, sexist, sizeist, classist, ageist) implications of both implicit and explicit dress codes.

In their 2015 piece, "Embodiment: Embodying Feminist Rhetorics," Johnson et al. posit that "the physical body carries meaning through discourse about or by a body. But embodiment theories suggest that meaning can be articulated beyond language. *All bodies* do rhetoric through texture, shape, color, consistency, movement, and function" (39). This CFP takes up this notion and extends the "texture, shape, color, consistency, movement, and function" of the body to include body modifications that fall under the umbrella term of "dress practices." Drawing from dress studies scholars Eicher et al, dress practices can be defined as any "actions undertaken to modify and supplement the body in order to address physical needs in order to meet social and cultural expectations about how individuals should look" (p. 4). This definition of dress extends the practices it encompasses to include *any* body modification or supplement, and grounds these practices in culture. While this definition creates a broad opening for examining dress, this special issue focuses on the academic workplace. Workplaces can be important spaces to think critically about bodies because most traditional workplaces have some sort of dress code. Often, the underlying values of an institution are colonial notions of what constitutes "acceptable" bodies. Carmen Rios explains that "dress codes make room to turn a lot of 'isms' into policies—especially since typical standards of professional dress are, at the core, racist, sexist, classist, and xenophobic." There are many examples of how oppression manifests through dress codes in the workplace: from dreadlocks and natural hair being banned in professional settings to employers admitting that they judge applicants' competence by how conventionally attractive they are.

In academia, dress practices (and the body more broadly) are often dismissed as frivolous or less important than the work of the mind. When dress practices are discussed, it is often anecdotally, such as op-ed pieces in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*. Green takes this a step further and claims that, "little attention has been paid to the ways in which women academics...use clothing strategies to 'place' themselves within academic cultures which marginalize and exclude them" (98). It's critical to note that many of the stories that get told are those of people in relatively privileged bodies: cisgender, white, middle class, etc.

This special issue takes up dress practices in the academy as embodied multimodal rhetorical action, arguing that in order to fit in and/or be subversive, one must pay careful attention to audience, purpose, context, and genre. This special issue will include a wide range of submission types, including photo essays, blog entries, videos, written text, and more. Submission topics may include (but are not limited to):

- Individual dress practices as interpretations of implicit or explicit dress codes
- Academic dress practices/codes and intersectionality
- Instructor appearance and student evaluations
- Implicit academic dress/codes
- Explicit academic dress/codes
- Professional writing and dress/codes
- Subverting dress codes
- Teaching dress codes
- Clothing as embodied rhetoric
- The body as embodied rhetoric
- The connection between multimodality and embodiment

TIMELINE

- ✓ Proposals (500 word max) due: September 15, 2018
- ✓ Authors notified: November 1, 2018
- ✓ Full articles due: May 15, 2019
- ✓ Revised manuscripts due: August 15, 2019
- ✓ Anticipated publication date: Fall 2019

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