

2.3

You are what you wear

READING Image, identity and clothing

- 1 Work in pairs. Before you read the article look at the photos. Discuss these questions.
 - 1 Which person do you think probably has more money? What makes you think that?
 - 2 Which person do you think is younger? Why?
 - 3 Which person do you think is the most likely to get good service in an expensive department store? Why?
- 2 Read the article. Does the article agree with your answers to Exercise 1? Then match each heading (a–c) with a section (1–3).
 - a You are what you wear
 - b Dangerous prejudices
 - c Reverse psychology
- 3 Answer the questions.
 - 1 Which section of the article do the photographs illustrate?
 - 2 Do the first two experiments in the article contradict one another? Why? / Why not?
 - 3 What message did the business suit send in the second experiment? What about the old, scruffy clothes?
 - 4 What does the third experiment imply about people's view of themselves, painters and doctors?
- 4 Which of the following statements could be supported by the experiment results described in the text? Underline the specific parts of the text that either provide the support or contradict each statement.
 - 1 There is some disagreement about the message sent by wearing certain types of clothing.
 - 2 In most situations, people simply don't pay attention to what other people are wearing.
 - 3 The clothing people wear is probably not a reliable way of judging them.
 - 4 Someone will almost always come to the aid of a person who is obviously in need.
 - 5 Clothing is interesting, but ultimately not of huge importance in society.
 - 6 It seems likely that if a person wants to feel better about him or herself, choosing some nice-looking clothes could be a good starting point.

- 5 Work in small groups. Discuss the questions.
 - 1 How do you usually dress for work? What sort of clothing do office workers in your country usually wear?
 - 2 What do you think Mark Zuckerberg's casual dress says about him?
 - 3 Do you think the experiment described in paragraph 1 would have the same result in the place where you live?
 - 4 What about the experiment described in paragraph 2?
 - 5 Can you think of other ways of dressing that might have similar results to the experiments described in paragraph 3? For example, what might happen if someone put on a soldier's uniform?
 - 6 What do all three experiments say about the power of personal appearance?

VOCABULARY Describing dress

- 6 Choose the best options to complete the sentences.
 - 1 His outfit – a T-shirt and jeans – was *inappropriate* / *clashing*, considering it was his brother's wedding.
 - 2 The media praised the *tasteful* / *unconventional* dress she wore for the film opening, describing it as 'classic'.
 - 3 The designer was known for wearing *trendy* / *imaginative* clothes – jeans cut up and re-made as dresses, for example.
 - 4 His business suits were *well cut* / *glamorous*, and always fit extremely well.
 - 5 I would describe his sense of dress as *scruffy* / *eccentric*, because he would often wear a heavy fur coat in hot weather, and sandals when it was snowing.
- 7 Put the words from Exercise 6 in the correct list.
 - 1 generally negative: clashing
 - 2 basically neutral: _____
 - 3 generally positive: _____
- 8 Work in pairs. Describe the clothes worn by someone you know or a well-known person. Use the adjectives from Exercise 6.

SPEAKING Talking about image

9 21st CENTURY OUTCOMES

Work in small groups. Discuss these questions.

- 1 Why do you think the appropriateness of clothing is so important to people?
- 2 In some work situations, a business suit would make the wearer seem responsible and serious. In what situations could a business suit send a different message?
- 3 Do you think the world would be a better place if people weren't so concerned about clothing, or is it important for us to have clear rules about what's appropriate and what's not? Explain your answer.

IMAGE, IDENTITY AND CLOTHING

Science reveals the power of personal appearance

1 Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg was once a hoodie-jeans-and-trainers-wearing university student with a good idea for a social network. Now he's a billionaire businessman – who wears a hoodie, jeans and trainers to work, including to important meetings. Not everyone approves. When he wore casual clothes to meet with Wall Street investors, some critics claimed that it showed he was uncommitted and immature.

Harvard Business School researcher Francesca Gino has a different idea. She says that while most people seem to think that dressing differently from those around you generally has a negative effect, her belief is that it can actually have a very positive effect. And she's done experiments to prove it. When her researchers, wearing sportswear, visited speciality shops selling luxury brands in Milan, they found that shop assistants usually assumed they were wealthier and more important than those who visited the shops 'properly' dressed in furs and designer clothes.

Reporter Randi Newton of the *New York Observer* newspaper ran her own version of the experiment at one of New York's major department stores. When she visited the store dressed in hiking boots, track suit bottoms, a T-shirt, casual jacket and woolly hat – with messy hair underneath – one assistant asked her if she was an actress and showed her the most expensive cosmetics. She repeated the experiment with her hair carefully styled, wearing glamorous clothes and even carried a small dog – and was largely ignored. According to the Harvard Business School research, if the relatively strange style of dress looks as though it's intentional, or trendy, many people will believe you're wealthy or important.

2 But is it always the case that people judge less formal clothing more positively? Is the effect on others of the clothing we wear the same everywhere we go?

Researchers in France used a similar approach to Gino's and Newton's, but rather than testing the perceptions of

assistants in high-end boutiques, they took their research out into the street, to the general public. The video they made of the experiment shows an actor dressed in a smart, well-cut suit with a tasteful tie and polished shoes walking along the road. He begins to cough, stops and bends over to catch his breath, then falls down. Before he even calls for help, people rush to his aid.

In a second video, the actor comes back to the same crowded location and repeats the actions in exactly the same way. But this time, not one person comes to help him, even when he repeatedly calls out for help. The difference? In the second version of the experiment, he's wearing scruffy clothes and old trainers and looks like a poor or homeless person. In a situation such as this, the clothes you're wearing could mean the difference between life and death.

3 It seems that our clothing doesn't only alter the way others view us, but also the way we see ourselves – and apparently it affects our intelligence as well. Researchers at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University in the USA did some simple experiments with students.

One experiment tested subjects' ability to pay attention to details. One group wore their usual, everyday clothes while a second group wore a white lab coat. A second experiment tested the group's ability to concentrate for several minutes in a task that involved spotting minor differences between two very similar images. For this one, there were three groups: one wearing their normal clothes, one wearing a white coat that had been described to them as a painter's coat, and the third wearing a white coat they were told was a doctor's coat. Amazingly, the test subjects wearing the so-called doctor's coat performed better in both tests. The researchers believe that the test subjects' 'basic abilities' were improved as a direct result of the clothing they wore.

What the experiment didn't show was whether there were any longer-term effects. If people always wore a doctor's coat, would they be permanently more intelligent? More experiments are needed before we decide to make the white coat the fashion accessory of choice.

