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Buttoned Up: Clothing, Conformity, And White-Collar Masculinity



Synopsis

Who is today's white-collar man? The world of work has changed radically since *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and other mid-twentieth-century investigations of corporate life and identity. Contemporary jobs are more precarious, casual Friday has become an institution, and telecommuting blurs the divide between workplace and home. Gender expectations have changed, too, with men's bodies increasingly exposed in the media and scrutinized in everyday interactions. In *Buttoned Up*, based on interviews with dozens of men in three U.S. cities with distinct local dress cultures—New York, San Francisco, and Cincinnati—Erynn Masi de Casanova asks what it means to wear the white collar now. Despite the expansion of men's fashion and grooming practices, the decrease in formal dress codes, and the relaxing of traditional ideas about masculinity, white-collar men feel constrained in their choices about how to embody professionalism. They strategically embrace conformity in clothing as a way of maintaining their gender and class privilege. Across categories of race, sexual orientation and occupation, men talk about "blending in" and "looking the part" as they aim to keep their jobs or pursue better ones. These white-collar workers' accounts show that greater freedom in work dress codes can, ironically, increase men's anxiety about getting it wrong and discourage them from experimenting with their dress and appearance.

Book Information

File Size: 2650 KB

Print Length: 274 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 1501700499

Publisher: ILR Press; 1 edition (November 17, 2015)

Publication Date: November 17, 2015

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B0183N0VSQ

Text-to-Speech: Not enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #990,138 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #161

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#246 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Business & Money > Biography & History > Labor Policy
#511 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Business & Money > Economics > Labor & Industrial
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Customer Reviews

Buttoned Up by Erynn Masi De Casanova is a free NetGalley ebook that I read during a Trivia Night in early November. I believe that I chose to read this book in tandem with Fashion Victims, but the latter book was released a lot earlier than this one. Buttoned Up takes a much more scattered, qualitative interview approach than I would've expected to such a narrow topic. That being said, it's a bulky, dense, pompous read, where it could've been more exploratory and diverse.

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