

COVID Casual

Refashioning professional attire in the age of remote working

Dr Briony Lipton and Sulagna Basu



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We wish to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians, whose lands, winds and waters we now all share, and pay respect to their unique values, and their continuing and enduring cultures which deepen and enrich the life of our nation and communities.

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Language is a powerful tool for building inclusion, and we always seek to use the most inclusive language possible. We recognise that there are people whose experiences and identities cannot be captured by binary gender language. This report for the most part, uses binary language, but it is not our intention to offend or exclude. We do this because, even though we recognise that neither sex nor gender exist in binary categories, these categories have very real effects and sometimes binary language is necessary to convey the gendered nature and dynamics of our society. We welcome feedback, so if you wish to raise any questions or comments about the terms used in this report, please do not hesitate to contact us.



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"Once we allow the lockdown to get us to dress like we're at the beach, the virus has won."

Executive summary

The COVID-19 crisis has transformed the world of work. Two years into the pandemic and more Australians are working from home than ever before, with 40 per cent of the workforce working remotely due to the pandemic (Productivity Commission 2021). This reflects not only government social distancing regulations, employer requirements and international trends, but also increased desires from Australians to either have access to or to use flexible working arrangements (ABS 2021; Baird & Dinale 2020; Baird et al. 2020; Nahum 2020). A key but under-researched advantage of remote working has been the relaxing in many professions dress codes, with **'COVID casual'** becoming the norm for many workers. This report highlights the role of appearance, dress codes and aesthetics in the contemporary workplace and the **refashioning of professional attire in the age of remote work**.

Report findings stem from a national online mixed methods survey about people's experiences of getting ready for work before and during the pandemic, their perspectives on work attire in their profession, as well as their perceptions of professionalism, productivity, and sense of job security. Drawing on a quota sample of responses (n=1155) from Australians working across six key industries: Professional, Scientific & Technical Services, Financial & Insurance Services, Information Media & Telecommunications, Education & Training, Public Administration & Safety, and the Arts & Recreation Services, survey results indicate a definitive shift to more casual attire when working from home.

It may have been a novelty to wear pyjamas during work hours at the beginning of the pandemic, but over the past two years, decisions around what to wear to work when working at home have evolved. The survey findings on perceptions of performance and professionalism raise interesting provocations for the future of work.

The transition to work from home during COVID-19 has resulted in the 'blurring' of the boundaries between work and home life (Allen, Regina & Waiwood 2021; Jenkins & Smith 2021; Couch, O'Sullivan, & Malatzky 2021). Ambiguities about workplace attire have become more vexing and salient when considering the home as a work environment, with physical spaces becoming an extension of professional identities.

Interestingly, survey results show an uneven adoption of background images or filters for video conferencing. Most women and men across all six industries reported never using a background image or filter for video conferencing except for Public Administration & Safety

where the highest percentage response for men (38%) reported using a background image or filter most of the time. Despite this, both men and women reported changing outfits for video conference meetings indicating the continued significance of appearance to workplace cultures.

Industries with business dress codes before the pandemic showed the greatest change in dress standards and therefore greatest potential for change in workplace cultures. Despite the fact that men are now dressing much more casually than before, their responses indicate serious sartorial considerations being made in their work from home attire.

First impressions at work still matter, regardless of the work environment and an aesthetic fit is one way through which discriminatory attitudes impact the labour market. Organisational expectations – formal and informal – of workers' professionalism, their attractiveness, style, and interactional mannerisms – or their 'aesthetic labour' – influence which people will be hired to do what jobs, who gets promoted, and how people are expected to look and behave at work (Warhurst & Nickson 2001; Petersson McIntyre 2014).

While there is consensus that appearance is important to work performance, across all industries, **women are more likely to remark that appearance is important to how they are perceived at work**.

Despite women dressing more casually when working from home across all industries, women still largely agreed on the importance of appearance to their performance at work (especially for these industries: Education & Training (44%), Public Administration & Safety (42%), and Information Media & Telecommunication (35%)). Women in Financial & Insurance, and the Arts are still largely dressing up for work. Formal presentation was, and still is, expected in many public and client-facing workplaces, and trust-engendering industries such as law firms, banking, and investment advising (Entwistle 2001; Maran et al. 2021).

Another standout finding was **the prevalence of active or athleisure wear in women's daily wardrobe rotation**. One possible explanation for the rise in activewear is the competing responsibilities for children, family, household duties, and work that women have experienced throughout the pandemic. Comfortable and practical clothing may allow women to navigate these shifting demands on their time.

The pandemic has undoubtedly had a disproportionate impact on women in terms of their workforce and economic participation. Women have shouldered a higher increase in unpaid work in the household, limiting their engagement in paid work (Risse & Jackson 2021). Women were also twice as likely as men to take on most of the unpaid domestic work, and more than three times as likely as men to take on caring responsibilities (Craig & Churchill 2021).

Considering a post-pandemic future of work, or new normal amidst the COVID recovery, the connections between professional appearance and work environment warrants further attention, in particular the gendered impact of remote working on women's careers, as well as the emergence of place-based workplace cultures tied to work attire. This would provide significant benefits to improving gender equality into the future of remote, hybrid, and physical workplace models of work.

Key findings

- Survey results indicate a definitive shift to more casual attire when working from home. This shift is even more prominent for industries like Public Administration & Safety, Financial & Insurance Services and Professional, Scientific & Technical Services where the professional attire pre-COVID was largely reported as Business Casual by both men and women.
- Women are dressing more casually than men. This is especially the case across Public Administration & Safety, Information Media & Telecommunication, Professional Scientific & Technology and Education & Training where the highest percentage of women described their current work attire as activewear, leisure wear, track pants, hoodies and loungewear.
- However, most men and women reported changing outfits for video conference meetings across all industries. Often, respondents described changing only the top half of their outfit highlighting the emergence of a 'waist-up' dressing trend during the pandemic.
- Compared to their male cohort, a large proportion of women were more likely to remark on the importance of appearance to how they are perceived at work despite largely disagreeing that wearing work attire at home made them more productive.

"Well, you frock
up a bit for Zoom,
depending on the
audience."

Working from home

As many workers relocated to the home office, bedroom or kitchen table during the pandemic, work attire has taken on new meaning. Our survey wanted to understand how work environments shape what workers wear to work and how they might influence their choice of attire and their perceptions of professionalism. While working from home is certainly not a novel concept it is particularly suited to desk-based industries with a workforce comprising of managers, professionals and administrative workers who use computers, interact less with the public and whose job description does not entail working outdoors or undertaking physical activity (Productivity Commission 2021). Unsurprisingly, women and men across all six industries featured in our survey largely worked regularly from home during the pandemic. Some industries like Professional Scientific & Technical Services, Education & Training and Information Media & Telecommunications had relatively higher percentages of both, men and women working occasionally from home even before the pandemic.

Workspaces

Access to a dedicated workspace when working from home has gained renewed importance with the current shift to remote working. It is important to acknowledge that the home environment may not be conducive to effective work with some workers not having a suitable workspace or the equipment they need in order to work from home. Evidence on whether workers have access to a suitable workspace at home is mixed (Productivity Commission 2021). A 2020 poll by Sheehan, Griffiths, and Collie (2021) found that fewer than half (45%) of respondents working from home had a designated office area while Beck and Hensher (2021) discovered that almost three-quarters (74%) of respondents had access to an exclusive room or space when working from home. Likewise, the majority of our survey respondents had a dedicated workspace.

There is a designated study in our house but there are 3 of us working at home so I sometimes use the study and sometimes work from the kitchen bench. (Woman, Professional, Scientific & Technical Services)

42% of all respondents were also working with children and dependents at home with them and home offices were used for work as well as education and leisure activities (i.e. computer gaming and hobbies).

It appears to be generally accepted that working from home means less formal environments, which is reflected in the backgrounds of video conferences and clothing. (Woman Education & Training)

Research (Lopez-Leon et al. 2020) has highlighted the importance of separating workspaces from living spaces as more people move to working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, studies have also shown the persistence of a gendered prerogative over such spaces with access to a dedicated workspace often defaulting to the man (Zisko 2020). Considering this, our survey results showed women had greater or close to equal access to a dedicated workspace at home.

[appearance] It is much less important. Your workspace that appears on video seems to have taken the place of heels and makeup. (Woman, Financial & Insurance Services)

Virtual backgrounds

Along with home-based workspaces, the pandemic has also led to a shift from physical interactions to virtual meetings and conferences for workers. This has accelerated the adoption of virtual backgrounds and filters during video conferencing. However, our survey results show an uneven adoption of background images or filters for video conferencing.

People are much more accepting of a messy room, children coming in and out, noise on the video call from other in the house etc everyone is a bit nicer I think and less polished which is great because it's real! (Woman, Financial & Insurance Services)

Across all six industries, the highest percentage of women reported never using a background image or filter for video conferencing.

This was also the case for male respondents across all industries except those from Public Administration & Safety where the most men (38%) reported using a background image or filter most of the time.

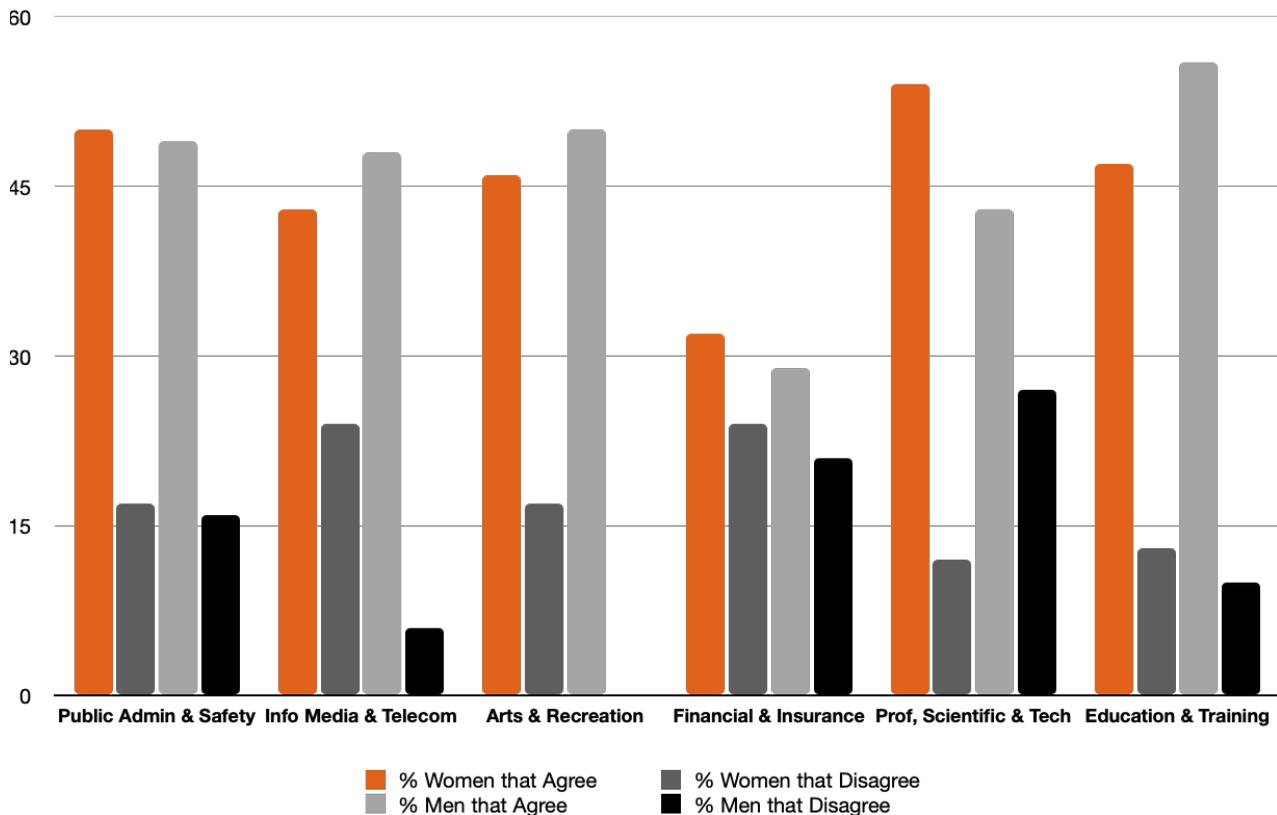
[Things are] more casual, but we were smart casual anyway. See more of peoples backgrounds, homes, pets and kids. (Man, Education & Training)

Interestingly, this openness and acceptance of 'real life' appearing on screen, did not stop respondents from also changing their outfits for external video conference meetings with clients, customers and stakeholders (Graph 1)

I often hear others (my partner and friends) complaining about the pressure to turn on the camera and having to get changed for meetings. (Man, Information Media & Telecommunications)

This may indicate an increasing normalisation of the workplace moving to a home setting where appearances of one's home/ work environment are secondary to one's personal appearance. Indeed, dress and appearance in the workplace have emerged as an important site of professional identity construction.

Survey responses to statement on changing outfits for video conferences



"I'm mostly wearing pyjamas and active wear – I'm trying to home school and single parent and work full time. It's a nightmare."

COVID fashion

Work wear is a form of self-expression. Appearance helps define professional and personal success and is considered an essential building block in developing a professional image (Gagilo 2014). However, 'professional appearance' is a nuanced concept that is imbued with social norms and power relations. Wearing a suit and tie or a dress or skirted suit was once the norm in many professional work contexts. Even prior to the pandemic many workplaces dress codes were gradually morphing into business casual, with collared shirts and slacks, blouses and skirts, and a relaxed leather shoe widely accepted. Since COVID-19, workers have turned to more informal and comfortable fashion alternatives, including leggings, trackpants, t-shirts, jumpers, slippers, and sneakers. Even when working from home, clothes can produce gendered and aged subjectivities with gender roles being transferred to bodies in constrictive ways.

Since Covid I still make an effort to get dressed for work but my style is extremely - comparatively - casual. I haven't ironed in about a year or more now. When I buy new clothes they are stretchy and comfortable, but still smart and often brightly coloured for zoom. I still wear makeup, but a lot less, and I don't do much to style my hair (just make sure it looks neat). I wear jewellery but the same things (basic studs etc) every day. I never wear shoes anymore, except my sneakers to go out for a walk. I'm in slippers 95% of the time. I also used to get changed into comfortable clothing after work but I don't do that anymore because what I wear for work now is already quite comfortable. (Woman, Education & Training)

Women working in Public Administration & Safety (49%), Information Media & Telecommunication (49%), Professional Scientific & Technical Services (47%) and Education & Training (52%) reported the highest percentage of current work attire as activewear, leisure wear, track pants, hoodies and loungewear categorised as Other. While those working in Arts & Recreation Services (51%) and Financial & Insurance Services (48%), a higher percentage described their work attire as Smart Casual. Women from Information Media & Telecommunication (51%), Professional Scientific & Technical Services (43%) and Education & Training (43%) also reported wearing jeans less than before the pandemic compared to their male counterparts.

For men in each of the six industries, the current work attire was evenly split between the categories of Smart Casual and Other, with those working in Information Media & Telecommunication (52%), Financial & Insurance Services (53%), Professional Scientific &

Technical Services (63%) and Education & Training (52%) erring more towards Smart Casual.

This indicates that (except within the Arts & Recreation Services and the Financial & Insurance Services), across industries women are dressing more casually than men. This verifies Saiki et al's (2021) findings that dressing behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic varied across men and women with the latter resorting to wearing more informal dress than their male counterparts.

I wear track pants and leggings with ugg boots to work from home, as nobody is going to see my bottom half. I do not wear bras with underwire or pants without elastic in them anymore. (Woman, Education & Training)

Across all six industries, the highest percentage of women reported wearing less make-up than before the pandemic, but for the most part, women reported wearing a bra as much as they had done before the pandemic. Both men and women reported wearing shoes less than before the pandemic.

PJ or track pants and whichever t-shirt or hoodie I found on the floor closest to the bed with the least food stains. May as well be comfortable for the apocalypse. (Woman, information Media & Telecommunications)

Survey responses of women when asked how much they are wearing make-up compared to before the pandemic started.				
%	Less than before	About the same	More than before	Not applicable
Public Admin & Safety	70	19	1	10
Info Media & Telecom	76	13	3	8
Arts & Recreation	66	8	3	23
Financial & Insurance	72	20	0	8
Professional, Scientific & Tech	61	23	4	12
Education & Training	60	26	3	11

'Dressing up' while working from home was recounted as one way of separating work from home life and was linked to personal motivation and self-care or for more performative reasons such as meetings with external clients, senior management, or teaching. While one respondent observed, *"lazy casual is creeping in"* in their place of work (Man, Education & Training), another said they *"get dressed like I'm going into office to get in the right head-space"* (Woman, Education & Training).

I wear largely the same things. I don't pay as much attention to my hair, but sometimes 'dressing up' as if I were going out makes me feel a little more confident and less like a lazy lump. (Non-binary, Education & Training)

From the waist up

It's all a bit *"business upstairs and party downstairs at the moment"* as one respondent put it, when describing their work attire. *"I maintain the appearance of dressing the same. No one can see my ugg boots on zoom!"* (Woman, Education & Training). Our study supports the overall finding of a transition to more casual dressing when working from home during the pandemic. Another trend that emerged was the increasing relevance of 'waist-up' clothing often consisting of a bifurcated ensemble with a formal or business-like top and more casual and relaxed on the bottom.

It sounds like a covid cliché, but I only dress up the top half & I tend to be more casual - long sleeve tshirts instead of collared shirts. I still wear large earrings and make-up - so that hasn't changed but might not bother with bangles or brooches. (Woman, Education & Training)

Indeed, the emergence of a 'waist-up' fashion trend has even been picked up by fashion labels, now designing outfits for video conferencing by changing the placement of brand logos to collars of tops, designing elasticated trousers and flatter shoes (Criddle, 2020).

No makeup anymore. Purchased lots of tracksuit pants for lockdown. I tend to be trackies and slippers on the bottom and a business casual top on top, which is the part visible on Zoom. (Non-binary, Education & Training)

Since the survey was in the field in the cooler part of the year, most respondents reported wearing slippers or Ugg boots as part of their everyday work from home ensemble.

If I am going to be on Zoom, I'll put on eyeliner, mascara, eyeshadow, and lipstick, and straighten my hair. I will not tie my hair up for a Zoom call, because I wear large headphones and I don't like the way I appear on screen with my hair back and my headphones on - I feel unattractive and unprofessional. (Woman, Education & Training)

Activewear

Activewear also known as athleisure wear is the marriage of comfort and fashion suitable for sport or exercise. Except in Arts & Recreation Services where similar percentages of men (75%) and women (77%) reported wearing more active/leisure wear during work hours, women across all industries reported higher percentages for wearing more active/leisure wear during work hours than their male counterparts.

[It's] Sad. Lots of active wear. I rarely wear underwire bras. If I have a zoom meeting I will put on eyebrow and eyeliner pencil and make sure my top will look okay, but sometimes that's just a case of putting a jumper over my pyjamas - isn't that awful! (Woman, Education & Training)

While there is an overall acceptance of a more casual appearance and as one respondent described, “**a greater leniency for people with children**”, working at home is also “**paired with [a] continued focus on delivery, and increased pressure**” (Woman, Arts & Recreation Services). Many respondents acknowledged a contradiction between individuals’ and organisations’ acceptance of the complexity of peoples' lives and the continued expectations that they will also deliver under these circumstances.

I think people are lenient because of the pressurized working conditions under Covid (Especially for those with young children). But once we go back to the office things will revert to how they were and I will wear smart casual business attire (Woman, Information Media & Telecommunications)

Our findings support popular opinion and research that suggests women were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Craig and Churchill, 2021) and were more likely to take on a greater share of caring and unpaid work responsibilities during the pandemic prompting a change in otherwise routine behaviours such as dressing for work.

I'm mostly wearing pyjamas and active wear – I'm trying to home school and single parent and work full time. It's a nightmare. (Woman, Information Media & Telecommunications)

One possible explanation for the rise in active wear as a work from home staple amongst women is the increase in competing responsibilities for children, family, and household duties, alongside paid work that women have experienced during the pandemic.

I am wearing trackies. The kids are wearing trackies. We all know it. (Woman, Education & Training)

'Active', 'stretchy', and 'comfortable' clothing may allow women to navigate these demands on their time more easily.

Everyone is wearing more comfortable clothing. People are doing things during their breaks - cleaning, washing etc, so more relaxed clothes are worn to facilitate this. (Woman, Financial & Insurance Services)

The impact of dress and personal grooming on men and women's careers is also significant, and these findings contribute to developing a more nuanced understanding of how working from home has impacted upon their perceptions of career success.

People [are] dressing however to get by, especially when many have kids at home and so much less time to work that 'getting dressed' takes a backseat. (Woman, Education & Training)

"There have always been different standards for office dress and home dress. It's always been normal to wear comfortable clothes at home and suits at work."

Perceptions of professionalism

Professionalism is an important basis upon which job applicants and employees are evaluated, particularly via the way workers present themselves. It shows respect for the workplace, the work itself and the company's brand (Gaglio 2014). Appearance helps define professional and personal success and is considered an essential building block in developing a professional image. However, 'professional appearance' is a nuanced concept that is imbued with social norms and power relations. Expectations around performance, productivity and professionalism are grounded in the gendered narrative of the 'ideal worker' (Acker 1990). While younger, queer, and non-white professionals may be more likely to challenge prevailing norms around what is appropriate to wear for work, organisations and workplaces with competitive cultures are more likely to continue to uphold conservative ideals.

Dress codes

The idiom of 'dress to impress' is a consideration of what appearance means and involves layers of aesthetic and emotional labour (Hochschild 1983). Aesthetic labour entails not just looking good but also 'looking good and sounding right' (Warhurst & Nickson 2001). It does not just refer to beauty in general terms but builds on processes of cultural matching through which workers are chosen based on their desired corporeal dispositions (Pettersson McIntyre 2014). Often workplace dress codes are conveyed more informally and 'learned through interaction with co-workers' (Dellinger 2002, p. 5). To understand the perceived dress codes for each of the six industries, our survey asked respondents to describe their industry or profession's work attire.

When I started work men would wear a tie every day. Now most men will not wear a tie. It has also become acceptable to wear casual pants and a corporate polo shirt in the office. This was never the case 10 or so years ago. There was a pre-existing trend towards more casual that has been accelerated. (Man, Financial & Insurance Services)

I tend to wear the closest female equivalent to male business attire to fit in. I never wear heels because I can't walk fast enough in them to keep step with male colleagues. (Woman, Public Administration & Safety)

Dress codes have changed and evolved over the years with diverse combinations of dress code policies among organisations. In Australia, workplace dress codes have gradually become more casual especially over the last decade although a majority still believe in the importance of dressing for success (CHOOSI, 2018).

The highest percentage of both men and women working in Arts & Recreation Services, Information Media & Telecommunication and Education & Training described their industry/professional work attire as Smart Casual. Across the industries of Public Administration & Safety, Financial & Insurance Services and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, the highest percentage of men and women respondents described their profession's attire as Business Casual.

In Public Administration & Safety, Financial & Insurance Services, Professional, Scientific & Technical Services most men and women agreed that their profession's dress codes and workplace culture around appearance and attire at work are changing. Incidentally, all three of these industries categorised their work attire as Business Casual before the pandemic.

To be honest, the only good thing about pandemic is a push to big orgs to focus on things that matter intrinsically (people) more than formally. But the branding instinct is still there. Also caring about say mental health, or wasted commutes, is not the same as having resources to compensate for extra work/stress that Covid's socio-economic etc impact has had at our workplace and industry. (Man, Education & Training)

Many respondents across all genders noted that appearance might not be as important in the future, ***"I think that we will measure the output of someone's work rather than the presentation"*** (Non-binary, Financial & Insurance Services).

I've realised nobody cares what I wear. And that looking the part has absolutely no impact on doing the part well. For a woman, it's liberating... (Woman, Arts & Recreation Services)

However, others also admit that some gendered norms around appearance and professionalism might prevail, *"I'm a man so I don't cop anywhere near as much scrutiny as women"* (Man, Education & Training).

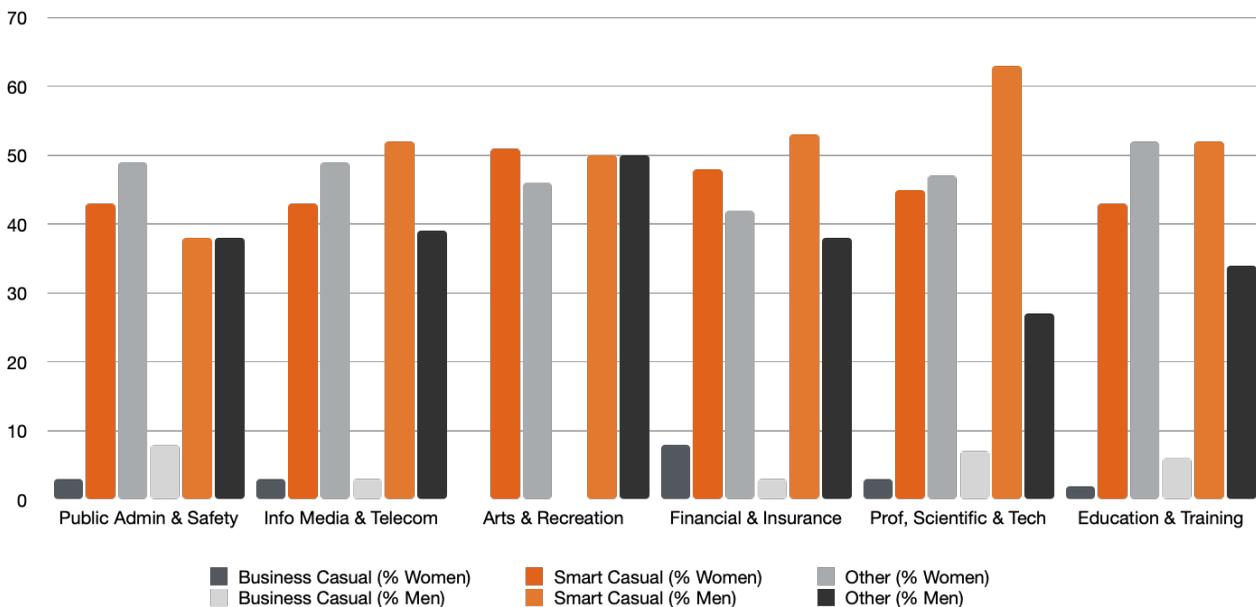
Despite dressing more casually, women still largely agreed on the importance of appearance to their performance at work especially for those working in Public Administration & Safety (42%), Information Media & Telecommunication (35%) and Education & Training (44%).

I think while fintech has always been casual, there has been a strong emphasis on outward appearance,

of being hip, fashionable, put together. I believe people are realising the same work can be done just as well without makeup or in pyjamas, as long as you are professional in your presentation where it matters (i.e., how you speak, how you deal with external stakeholders). (Woman, Financial & Insurance Services)

Respondents were also asked to describe what they would usually wear while working from home during the pandemic. Based on survey responses, most respondents classified their current work attire in the categories of Smart Casual or Other, the latter being the overarching category that captures all types of outfits such as activewear, lounge wear, hoodies etc. that do not fit into any of the other work attire categories of Business Casual, Business Formal and Smart Casual.

Survey responses by men and women on current work attire



Historically, office dress codes for women have been primarily dictated by the male gaze, so more women dressing more casually could also be indicative of push back against the boundaries of work dress (Kale, 2019). In an age of flexible work and with the increasing irrelevance of the 9-5 workday, dress codes are potentially becoming antiquated too, with a greater push for flexible dress.

WFH I felt more relaxed, I wore more t-shirts as long as they appeared presentable. More colours as it brightened up meetings. I didn't have to do my hair as much as it wasn't as noticeable online, same with make-up. I started wearing my nose ring again and no one at my workplace has complained. (Woman, Public Administration & Safety)

Remaining visible

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen many businesses and organisations in Australia move as many staff as possible to work from home arrangements. This has created an unprecedented opportunity to see what such an arrangement could be like on a large scale, particularly for organisations that previously did not allow working from home or lacked the necessary technological capabilities. With social distancing regulations expected to persist for some time, businesses are exploring longer-term work-from-home agreements.

Traditionally, working from home has been viewed as an employment benefit; a privilege to be enjoyed in order to maintain a healthy work-life balance and maintain flexibility. However, the sudden shift to working from home during the pandemic has had a potentially gendered impact as the boundaries between work and home continue to blur (WGEA 2021). Studies have shown that women largely shouldered the burden of unpaid work and care responsibilities during the pandemic (Wood et. al, 2021). Indeed, women are still having to choose between being a caregiver and having a career as more women experience labour market penalties in order to keep up with increased unpaid hours of work (OECD 2021).

When asked to what extent respondents agreed with the statement, "I am more productive when I wear work

clothes when working from home", women in each of the six industries had the highest percentage of responses that disagreed with the statement.

Among these, women from Information Media & Telecommunications had the highest percentage (54%) disagreement with the statement, compared to a much lower percentage of men (24%) who also shared this view within that industry.

This may indicate a dissonance between women's actual productivity and their perceived performance at work. These differences in perception may be explained by studies indicating that women who dress 'in code', in accordance with workplace standards, are more likely to be seen favourably as competent and efficient than those who do not (Gurung et al. 2018). This contrast is further amplified in traditionally male dominated professional spaces where women are faced with the challenging prospect of navigating their 'authentic identity' while constantly being evaluated against masculine norms (Richards & Mattioli 2021, p. 1372).

At the same time, when asked about whether respondents felt their appearance was scrutinised more when working from home, both men and women across all industries largely disagreed.

Remote work has definitely made certain meetings internally feel more casual, and therefore it feels more acceptable to dress more casually. Meetings with external/internal clients are still more professional, but it feels like there is more leeway in appearance. (Man, Information Media & Telecommunications)

Seeing senior leaders dress more casually on video conference can normalise a casual work aesthetic. There is an awareness that work is taking place within the home and therefore comfort is acceptable. However, women from a range of industries also cited 'dressing up' for management and clients when working from home.

If having an interview or meeting with leadership, I would dress up. (Woman, Financial & insurance services)

Gendered expectations around appearance can vary across different workplace environments. While working from home may have relaxed some of these norms and expectations, women are still subjected to greater scrutiny than men over their appearance and attire.

Conclusion

As remote working becomes more prevalent and as more people continue to work from home it may be reasonable to expect a slight waning of these expectations at least for those industries that aren't as client focused.

However, many respondents also perceived the 'COVID casual' to be ***"only a short term thing"***. Overwhelmingly men and women in Finance & Insurance Services cited that if there was a return to the office ***"people will return to business attire"*** and ***"previous standards and expectations would return."***

I feel business clothing will always be required in certain areas of the finance industry. As I am in a client-facing role, expectations around appearance remain the same as pre pandemic (Woman, Financial & Insurance Services)

The pandemic has upended much about how we work, and what comes next is neither the death of the office nor a return to the way things were. Instead, the new reality for many workers will be one of hybridity: employees who are co-located in the same physical space as well as employees working remotely. Hybridity also exposes issues of (in)visibility in contemporary workplaces and the ways in which these uniquely

impact upon women's workforce participation, particularly for those with the added daily responsibilities of caring for children and elderly parents. Hybrid work models may mean that, due to where workers are positioned, employees have different access to resources and different levels of visibility – both key sources of power and influence, and aesthetics and professional appearance will continue to play an important role in men and women's careers into the future.

"For client interactions the same rules for real life apply to online appearance."

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