

A Black Man Wore Different Kinds Of Clothing To See If People Treated Him Differently

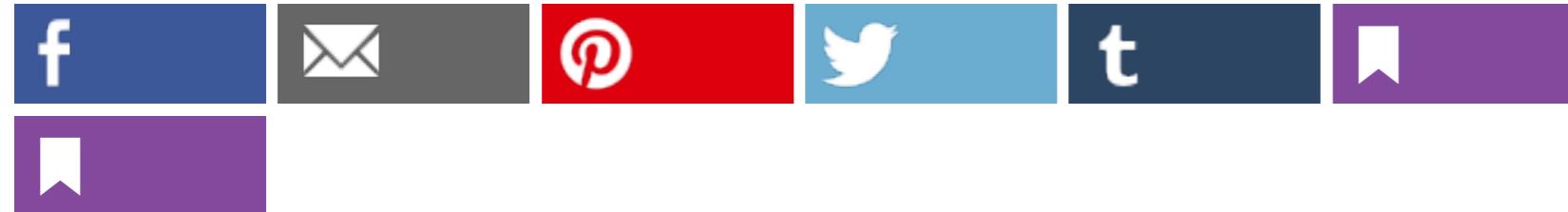
Many black men dress up to avoid being seen negatively. Every day, we are [dressing for survival](#).

posted on Mar. 8, 2016, at 2:01 p.m.



Pedro Fequiere

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I DRESSED UP
AND DRESSED DOWN
FOR A WEEK
AS A BLACK MAN
AND THIS IS HOW PEOPLE REACTED



Charlotte Gomez For BuzzFeed

What's up, y'all? I'm Pedro. I'm 24 years old, and like most black men my age I have to be extremely careful with what I choose to wear.



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Every day, we are essentially **dressing for survival**.

Throughout my life, I've experienced a collection of microaggressions — from employees following me in stores to women gripping their purses at the sight of me. At 13 years old, I was detained by the cops on suspicion of something I didn't do. Just the other day, a woman grabbed her child and hurried into a store to get away from me when I was walking around the block. **I don't want to be another statistic and have my appearance be the blame for it. But I won't conform and change my appearance just to make people feel more comfortable around me.** I dress myself exclusively to fit my mood, which is often "laid-back/something I can skate in" chic, or

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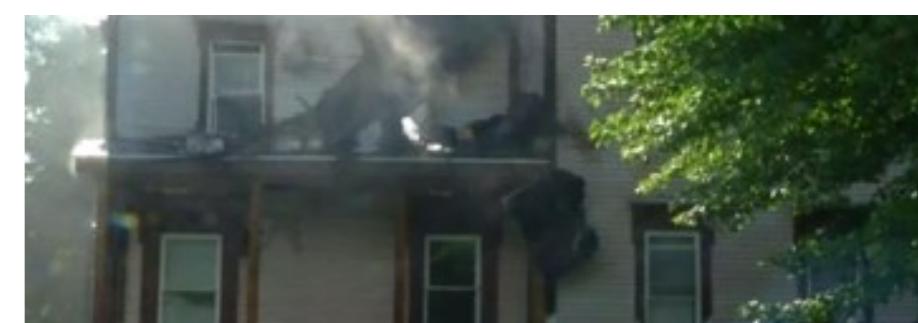


Here's The Tastiest Way To Cool Off This Summer

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25 Dogs That Are So Big You Won't Believe They're Real

whatever. _(__) I'm curious to see how much of an effect my wardrobe choices have on my life as a young black man in Los Angeles.

So to find out, I decided to dress up for a week and then dress down for a week to see how people treated me.

THE RULES

Pedro Fequiere for BuzzFeed

1. I must perform the same activities in both weeks.
2. While dressing up, I must have my shirt tucked in and wear a tie and/or blazer.
3. While dressed down, all outfits must be something I can comfortably sleep in.
4. I will not expose my tattoos in either weeks.
5. I will not change my typical behaviors or act differently than I normally would.

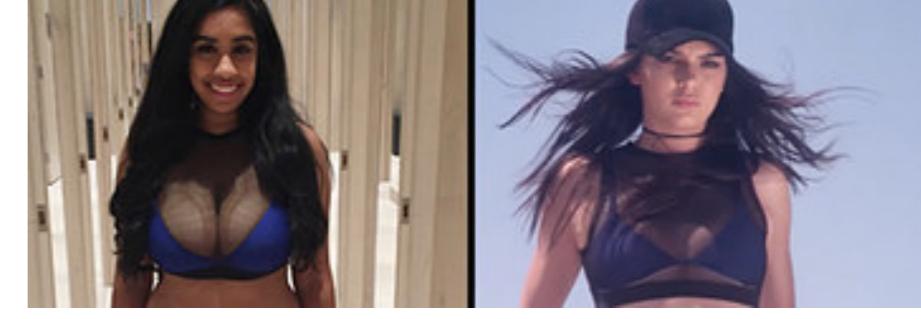
DAY 1

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Tyler Dunlavy for BuzzFeed

Thoughts while dressing up: I felt pretentious, uncomfortable, and embarrassed, especially because of the blazer. A certain Kanye West line came to mind when he says, “So I don’t listen to the suits behind the desk no more / You n****s wear suits ‘cause you can’t dress no more” on “Last Call.” I softened my walk to mute the piercing click-clack of my shoes, my belt had to be constantly adjusted, and on top of it, these pants were giving me a slight wedgie.

Experiences: The woman who worked at 7-Eleven greeted me with a smile and instantly asked, “What is THIS for? Meeting or interview?” “It’s for work,” I said, as I grabbed my change for the bus. She raised her eyebrows and subtly nodded her head. This was within the first 10 minutes of my day, and I thought to myself, *Damn, this is going to be an eventful two weeks.* My bus pass had insufficient funds, but



A string held up by constant stress.

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before I could use the change I got at 7-Eleven, the driver told me it was OK. That was pretty tight. I got to save my change.

For lunch, I headed to BLD, a kind of upscale-ish lunch spot. The service was cool — the server seated me at the front of the restaurant and I received my order ahead of two gentlemen who were there before me. I walked over to Chase Bank and the security guard not only opened the door for me but also gave me a heads-up about signing a waitlist to be assisted by a teller. On my way out after I asked him where the ATM was he chased me down to inform me about the available parking, assuming that I drove, but I had walked.



Tyler Dunlavy for BuzzFeed

Thoughts while dressing down: I felt much more comfortable in my hoodie and

sweats. I didn't have to worry about the click-clack of the dress shoes or if my belt was in its proper place. An anti-suit '04 Kanye West would be proud.

Experiences: I saw the same woman at 7-Eleven and she only asked me if I wanted a receipt. **My bus pass, again, had insufficient funds, and the driver didn't move the bus until I put a quarter in and began to pay the fare.** It was then she told me I was OK to go. So I still got to save my change, but it was slightly different this time.

I went to BLD for lunch again, and was greeted by the same server. This time he looked toward the back of the restaurant for a place to seat me. He ended up seating me in the front, coincidentally by the cash register. I received my food fairly fast and he asked me if I needed hot sauce, paused, then added salt and pepper. I caught him looking at me in his peripheral during my meal. At Chase, the same security guard only greeted me with a head nod. Nobody assisted me as I walked in, and after sitting there for several minutes, I remembered to sign the waitlist. The teller who helped me last week was walking a client out and after passing me a couple times, he finally approached me.



Pedro Fequiere for BuzzFeed

DAY 2

Pedro Fequiere for BuzzFeed



Tyler Dunlavy for BuzzFeed

Thoughts while dressing up: I was much more confident in what I was wearing. I was relieved without the blazer because I felt like I was giving off Secret Service or press conference vibes, and without it I was just some corporate dude doing adult stuff. That comfort was shattered as soon as the click-clack of my shoes announced my arrival. I prefer to be seen and not heard. Although now I have a newfound respect for galloping horses.

Experiences: I went to the gym, punched in my phone number, signed in with my thumbprint, and was greeted with a “Have a great workout, Pedro.” At CVS, the cashier said, “How are you doing, boss?” and I got a “good evening” from the greeter at The Last Bookstore downtown. As my man Ice Cube would say, “[Today was a good day.](#)”



Tyler Dunlavy for BuzzFeed

Thoughts while dressing down: I made sure I wore this outfit the day I drove to work because of the red flannel. I'm conscious of where I'm going and the colors I wear, because I can be mistaken for a gang member. My legs were cold and my slippers' lack of traction made me self-conscious.

Experiences: I wasn't treated any differently at the gym, but people aren't usually in their Sunday best anyway. The cashier at CVS was looking at me in the corner of his eyes but didn't say anything. I crossed the street, and a man in a shirt and tie rolled his windows down and turned his music up. He was playing Future and made sure that it caught my attention. Even though I've had *Dirty Sprite 2* on constant rotation, it weirded me out having this man actively seek my attention with it. At the bookstore, I got standard hellos and goodbyes from the employees.

DAY 3

Pedro Fequiere for BuzzFeed



Tyler Dunlavy for BuzzFeed

Thoughts while dressing up: I've been getting compliments from my co-workers, so I was looking forward to getting snazzy and completing my outfit with a tie. I've also gotten accustomed to waking up earlier and ironing my shirt and slacks.

Experiences: A neighbor, who has literally never made eye contact with me before today, smiled and said, “Good morning.” I went to Lulu’s for lunch and the owner welcomed me with a smile and led me to my usual seat. My order got messed up and I was given fruit instead of fries, but the woman waiting my table quickly fixed that.

On my way out, a group of middle-aged men moved to let me pass through. I headed over to Meltdown Comics, where I felt out of place because of my clothes, yet right at home because I was surrounded by the things I love. At Vacation Vinyl, I got a “What’s up man?” from the guy behind the counter who followed up with “Are you looking for anything in particular?” He got excited when I asked him about a Turnstile record and we started a conversation about hardcore and punk bands.



Thoughts while dressing down: I threw on a simple hoodie with sweatpants that fit better than my previous day's gear. I mentally prepared myself for the microaggressions I was going to experience during my morning routine while reminding myself to act as I normally would.

Experiences: I felt good walking to Lulu's for lunch, but the hoodie-sweats combo wasn't the best move for the warm weather. I saw the same waitress and she quickly announced my order to me before I could get a word in. **On my way back to work, a valet almost ran through me and I low-key had to jump out of the way.** At Meltdown Comics, I found a comic by an artist I went to school with, so I asked the employee how one can submit their work to the store. He asked me about my Tumblr account, and liked my work! That was really cool. In my experience, visual artists have always been accepting, but I especially appreciated that moment of validation.



Pedro Fequiere for BuzzFeed

DAY 4

Pedro Fequiere for BuzzFeed



Tyler Dunlavy for BuzzFeed

Thoughts while dressing up: I felt really fresh! I liked the turtleneck because it covered up my long-ass neck. Not a fan of the blazer, but the turtleneck evened it out. And after the third day, these slacks weren't too bad. Third day's a charm, I guess.

Experiences: I had to run after my bus and hop on at the next intersection. The bus driver smiled at me as I thanked her. When a few black teenagers got on the bus, I felt like their elder in my getup. I went to the Beverly Center and immediately felt so formal and stiff, like a total dweeb. I decided to work my way from the mid-level stores to the luxury ones. At Express Men, the associate was really courteous and told me about the current deals, then left me to shop. I wasn't as comfortable at Club Monaco, where the employees were on shoplifting-prevention watch. They started a

fitting room for me, and **one of the women told me she liked my outfit**, which made me feel less like a dweeb. I headed over to Louis Vuitton and browsed their shoe selection, where **an employee told me, “We have a lot of styles, great colors.”**



Tyler Dunlavy for BuzzFeed

Thoughts while dressing down: I love this hoodie and would probably add it to my actual wardrobe if it wasn't so oversize. I was a little wary about how people were going to treat me at the mall this time around, but I wasn't as self-conscious as I was last week.

Experiences: I went to Express Men and there wasn't an associate in sight so I walked around. Eventually a woman appeared and asked me if I needed anything; I told her I was just browsing, and I caught her staring at me a couple of times as I

looked around. When I requested a size check at Club Monaco, the woman seemed annoyed but she eventually found the shirt. It was frustrating at Louis Vuitton because not only was it obvious that they had two sets of eyes on me, but also because **nobody bothered to acknowledge me as a customer. Before I had the chance to look at anything, or even make it much past the entrance, a security guard approached me asking if I had any questions.** At this point, I was so bothered by the experience that I wanted to leave, but I checked out the shoes only to be ignored by the man working there.

DAY 5

Pedro Fequiere for BuzzFeed



Tyler Dunlavy for BuzzFeed

Thoughts while dressing up: Getting dressed up is cool. I feel fancy, but not myself. I'm glad this is the last day because I'm running out of outfits! Walking around like this makes me feel more important than I actually am. I've also noticed more people wearing suits, in the same way that I noticed everyone with locs once I got my hair locked.

Experiences: At the bus stop, I noticed that my fly was open, which made me realize that I haven't changed regardless of the clothes I wear. My headphones were on full blast as I did my best J Dilla head-nod rendition. **A woman took the seat next to me on the bus, even though there were a good amount of available spots.**



Tyler Dunlavy for BuzzFeed

Thoughts while dressing down: I was relieved and happy that this was my final day. I questioned why I really did this experiment, and “I did it to piss myself off” was only thing I could come up with. It has been a trying week.

Experiences: As I waited for the bus at the bench, a car pulled up on the far right lane and left an unreasonable amount of space between it and the car ahead. The only thing in between the cars was me. Maybe it was just keeping a safe distance, or maybe locking their door was too mid-'90s. **An elderly couple also kept their distance from me at the bus stop and waited at the corner.** As I saw the bus down the street, I got up and stood behind the couple, allowing them to get on before me. They instantly got up and took the bench. The older man finally understood my gesture as the bus pulled up to the stop. **As I walked to my second bus, a woman**

moved her purse to the shoulder farther away from me. I couldn't help but walk with a lot less pep in my step and I actually got emotional putting that in my notes.



Pedro Fequiere for BuzzFeed

FINAL THOUGHTS

Pedro Fequiere for BuzzFeed

During my dress-up week of blazers, ties, belts, and loud-ass shoes my initial discomfort faded as I noticed my treatment improved. **It was really surprising to see how frequently I was made aware of my identity once I was dressed down.** I would love to give people the benefit of the doubt, but they weren't isolated incidents. There were multiple moments where I felt unaccepted and feared.

It's this same assumed uneasiness that can cause a police officer to shoot an unarmed [black child](#), [teenager](#), or [adult](#). This predisposed perception of black men being violent criminals gives others the consent to write off our mistreatment as something we deserve rather than prejudice and injustice. **What I wore while dressing down is no different from what an average college student might wear to class.** But why does a women need to protect her belongings from me in broad daylight? Why must it be for an interview if I'm dressed up? Why does a group of retail associates need to divert all their attention to me when I'm in a hoodie? Or why do they feel I'm more approachable with my shirt tucked in? I don't know, but I shouldn't have to change what I'm wearing to not be feared.

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