

# What's Really in That Man's Uniform?



by Kali Evans-Raoul

A group of friends were talking about what we liked in men. “I love a man in a uniform,” said one girlfriend who never minces words. As I listened to her very clichéd statement, I wondered if she would even give a man in a uniform the time of day. In my 10 years of knowing her, I had yet to see her date anyone wearing uniform. So I started thinking about men in uniforms and what that means and how we as women respond.

Before I had time to answer my own question, another friend said she liked her men in suits, those wearing the “corporate uniform,” Monday through Friday. She said, although her partner was an executive, when he wore jeans and casual attire the folks at his company would mistake him for a service employee and would treat him in a not-so-corporate-manner, but in a suit—a whole different story.

Another girlfriend said her man had extra swagger when he wore a suit. So then I started wondering, is a suit a uniform? Many companies require men to wear a suit and tie to promote professionalism in the workplace. Does that mean that policemen, or the Federal Express delivery guys, those dressed in blue, orange, red or green shirts with matching or khaki pants aren't professional?

Finally, another friend, whose ex-husband is a security guard, said people used to ask him for help when he was in his blue uniform. She recounted a story of a lost child who ran to him crying at a restaurant where they were eating following his shift. She said he would

often get “perks” like discount tickets to the movies and free drinks when he wore his uniform off-hours. Who knew?

With the help of my friends, we came up with a few questions to better understand what's really in that uniform.

What is it about a uniform that transforms a man or appears to transform him into something different?

While a uniform is a set, standard clothing, worn by members of an organization, wearing a dress code can give people a sense of purpose and belonging. Some might argue

it provides “average” men more attention than they might get without the uniform. Rodney Brown, a former restaurant valet and United Parcel Service (UPS) employee, recalls that his uniforms did affect how he was perceived.

“As a valet, I didn't get a lot of recognition or respect,” said Brown. “It didn't seem to matter whether I was in my valet uniform or street clothes, white women still clinched their purses when they passed by me. But my UPS “browns” seemed to make them feel more comfortable.”

What constitutes a uniform?

The list we came up with was endless, but the top uniforms we concluded were military, police, post office, fast food and sports uniforms. Uniforms for many companies demonstrate the commitment to consistency, cleanliness and order within the organization.

We argued suits worn in daily corporate jobs shouldn't be considered uniforms since most companies allow men to have the flexibility to change their ties, even if the man wears the same suit every day. The visual messaging of a uniform seems to break through clutter and prejudice.

“When I was in the Marine Corps, several people were impressed by my having on that uniform,” says the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, senior pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. “They did not know me from ‘Adam's housecat,’ but they had images, perceptions and stereotypes about Marines and just seeing me in the uniform made them fit me (in their minds) into one of those images, perceptions and stereotypes.”

Is the man sexy or is it the job?

My friend, who has never dated a man in a uniform, would most likely date a professional athlete who wears a seasonal uniform. So is it really about the man or what the man does that makes a man in uniform sexy? Even if the man is not an athlete, many women dream of having a strong man around to carry heavy shopping bags. If he's a postal worker, he probably best knows how to deliver a woman's packages so nothing is lost or broken.

“People are friendlier to me in my uniform,” says Felix, my UPS deliveryman. “Women say hello to me that otherwise wouldn't give me the time of day!”

Are some uniforms sexier (more attractive) than others?

The women with whom I spoke reported that different uniforms caught their eye. Some women like the FedEx uniform, while others like the UPS or new USPS summer shorts and sleeveless shirt. Most women said they do find men in military dress blues or whites—um, very, very sexy.



