

WHAT'S TOO SEXY FOR WORK?

The question of what we wear to the office has sparked controversy – and a discrimination claim

Think there's nothing wrong with your body-fitting work wear? Neither did US Citibank worker Debrahlee

Lorenzana, who was allegedly fired for wearing clothes that were "too distracting" for her male colleagues. Lorenzana has since filed a lawsuit against her former employer claiming gender discrimination, but experts have weighed in on the debate, raising the question: is *your* work wear too sexy?

While women like Lorenzana shouldn't have to apologise for their curves, the corporate arena is no place for sexy clothes, says Annalisa Armitage, the founder of My Image Consultant in Sydney. "I personally thought the Citibank worker looked fabulous," she says. "The same clothes on a woman with a less terrific body would not have created any concern at all. But men will always find a woman sexy, even if she's wearing a brown sack, and we should expect this but not encourage it in the workplace. After all, work is a place of work and you should dress accordingly."

Along with causing your coworkers "embarrassment, consternation and awkwardness", dressing sexy could damage your career prospects, says Leanne Faraday-Brash, organisational psychologist and principal of Brash Consulting. "If a woman chooses to dress in a way that commands sexual attention, there's a risk she won't be taken seriously for her intellect, knowledge or skills," says Faraday-Brash.

After helping many companies with staff dress codes, Faraday-Brash says women can be fashionable

without being provocative.

"Anything worn to a nightclub, unless it's a watch, is not suitable for work. Push-up bras and cleavage are best left for Saturday night," she says.

Armitage agrees: "Fitted is fine, revealing is not." She also recommends avoiding sheer fabrics, sequins, lace, girly frills and skyscraper heels.

"If the skirt remains close to her knees when seated and no cleavage is shown, there should be no problem," she says. "Modesty is the best policy – if it works for the interview, it works for the job, too." **Michelle Wranik** □



Lorenzana in some of the controversial outfits.



DOES YOUR EMPLOYER HAVE A RIGHT TO TELL YOU WHAT TO WEAR?

Yes. Employers can set a dress code provided it is reasonable to the industry, is applied to both men and women, and is not discriminatory towards race, religious beliefs and sexuality. Your employer can't order you to wear makeup or a skirt, for example. Visit Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (www.eowa.gov.au) for more info.

PS... An Australian study reveals 22 per cent of women (and five per cent of men) have experienced sexual harassment at work*.