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Abstract

The article discusses changes in "dress for success" literature, or advice on business attire, directed at U.S. women in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, seeing these changes as a reflection of changing social norms as women entered the workforce in greater numbers. Sources examined include the advice of image consultants and writers in books such as "The Women's Dress for Success Book" by John Molloy and "Looks That Work" by Janet Wallach, and articles in mainstream U.S. newspapers and periodicals.

Disciplines

American Material Culture | Fashion Business | Fashion Design

Comments

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"Look like a lady; act like a man; work like a dog": Dressing for Business Success

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This pithy advice to working women from *Fortune* in 1990[1] may seem a bit uncouth to the twenty-first century reader, but it captures the expectations from this time all too well. Throughout the twentieth century, and especially from the 1970s onward, working women in the United States received a plethora of advice in magazines, books, and newspapers on the ways to dress appropriately in the workplace. Advice about business dress reflected expected career paths. Women were encouraged to follow such advice to communicate their professional aspirations and (presumably) earn success within the workplace. The advice does not appear in a vacuum, however, as the sartorial prescriptions reflected prevailing societal norms. The goal of this research was to consider the ways in which the types of advice supplied by the "dress for success" literature were informed by women's involvement in previously male-dominated management positions within the workforce. Using information disseminated by image consultants in books and magazines, feminist theories, and statistical data concerning women in the workforce, we have analyzed changes in the women's dress for success literature.

Women have long worked for pay, both inside and outside of the home, often however, in what Wendy Gamber calls "feminine pursuits" of the sex-segregated occupations of food preparation, the needle trades, and childcare.[2] While women's work in the creation of consumer goods and services are vitally important,[3] from the 1970s through the 2000s, U.S. women's

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workforce participation surpassed that of men's. It is through examination of the ways women navigated their new roles with the assistance of dress, that we may better understand the societal norms and expectations of a period. The increase in women's opportunities for and attainment of leadership positions in business and management and their use of dress to signal these roles from the 1970s to 2000s casts light on the communicative meaning of clothing.[4] During these decades, the "correct" professional apparel signaled the social status of the wearer (education, scholastic achievement, and position) as well as legitimizing and even normalizing a woman's role within a particular organization.[5] Clothing, particularly business dress had the power to influence the perception of an individual's performance, credibility, intelligence, motivation, and personality, even serving as a powerful symbol of the values and beliefs of an organization.[6]

Advice literature, while not a sure guide to actual dress practices, illuminates expectations within specific social groups at particular times. Combined with other primary evidence, advice literature can reveal prevalent ideals of dress, and a comparison of writings through time suggests how ideals have shifted. A few scholars have delved into clothing advice for various groups. In the nineteenth-century United States, ideals of female domesticity collided with some women's search for better health and wider opportunities for useful work. Writers debated which goals were legitimate and how to achieve them.[7] Health reform movements generated a surfeit of advice alluded to briefly by Rabun and Drake and much more fully explored by Cunningham.[8] Children's apparel was also subject to copious advice, including healthful attire for girls and suitably boyish garments for their brothers.[9] Schorman revealed the detailed coaching given to late nineteenth century men on choosing high quality, manly business attire.[10] During the 1920s, proscriptions and prescriptions for professional apparel covered topics such as appropriateness, functionality, and the avoidance of extremes in appearances.[11]

One problem with advice columns and books, revealed by Wehrle and Paoletti, was plagiarism among writers, so that verbatim instructions appeared among a variety of titles from supposedly independent authors.[12] Researchers thus have had to decide if it is one opinion voiced multiple times, or converging but distinct opinions. In the litigious late twentieth century, plagiarism without penalty is not so easy to commit, and the personalities who write the books and articles are well-known individuals, reducing the likelihood that several writers are working from one script. Knowing something about the authors' credentials and general views helps to evaluate the applicability of their advice. For example, the conservative social views of Edward Bok, editor of *Ladies' Home Journal,* colors the preference for home sewing over ready-made apparel expressed in his magazine's pages.[13] Other sources point to a broad acceptance of ready-mades among American women.

Less problematical in recent advice books, compared to earlier writings, is the divergence of recommended ideals from accepted fashion. Authors now spell out the distinctions between business-worthy styles and short-lived fashions. News articles report on what business people are currently wearing, allowing readers to make their choices in context.

In order to track the changes in the dress for success literature, we analyzed information disseminated by image consultants and writers and published in books such as John Molloy's *The Women's Dress for Success Book*, Janet Wallach's *Looks That Work* and Emily Cho's *Looking Terrific*. Periodical articles from *U.S. News and World Report*, *Time*, *Working Woman*, *Glamour*, *Redbook Magazine*, *Mademoiselle*, and newspaper articles from *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* were examined. A systematic analysis of the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* and our University's Expanded Academic ASAP database facilitated the search for sources. United States (U.S.) Department of Labor and U.S. Census data established

the number and types of management occupations women engaged in from the 1970s to the 1990s. Because this paper concentrates on the 1970s through the 2000s, we made a less comprehensive search of older advice, but did seek out fashion and women's magazines and occasional book chapters that mentioned business-worthy attire. Our purpose was to provide a point of reference for the abundant advice proffered over the past forty years.

Supporting Roles in Business

Women participated in the white-collar workforce even before the twentieth century, but became particularly active starting in World War I through World War II. Writers supplied advice about women's business dress and general wardrobes throughout the twentieth century. Women holding office jobs in the early 1900s were expected to adopt severely plain apparel, reserving frilly touches for after-hours and private time, and dressing at a level appropriate with her "station" in the hierarchy.[14] Writers described proper business dress in very general terms: neat, comfortable, durable, and—the Progressive watchword—"efficient." Hairstyles and grooming were to be tidy and easily maintained.[15]

The proliferation of academic high schools, vocational schools, and colleges with programs in typing, shorthand, and stenography prepared women for female-dominated careers.[16] Office work for women, usually limited to secretarial and bookkeeping functions in the 1910s, called for the staple tailored wool skirt and washable shirtwaist blouse. Not all writers found this uniform becoming, and suggested tailor-made wool dresses or suits with unfussy blouses.[17] The growth of department stores and popular press coverage of ready-to-wear apparel encouraged participation in consumption. Magazine columnists' recommended better quality clothes that would fit well and stand up to daily wear, discouraging overly fashionable details that would quickly become outmoded. Working women were urged to maintain a dignified

appearance, neither provocative nor too severe and to treat their work seriously, not as a mere bridge between school and marriage.[18]

By 1920, American women workers numbered 8,346,796.[19] They had substantially taken over the functions of the business office, where opportunities increased in the 1920s, as business bureaucratized. Contemporary observers also thought suffrage had given women added economic clout, although some disparaged them with the new expression "working girls." Books dealt in verbal generalities, but periodicals used illustrations and showed how current fashion could be selected for the office, meeting the magazines' goal of promoting the clothes of their advertisers. Avoid being a slave of fashion, urged Lillian Eichler. She recommended shunning gaudy or alluring styles and designs that were too new to be acceptable. No woman bent on a career should look like a stenographer. Tweed or jersey suits remained staples. A dress-plus-coat ensemble worked well in chilly weather; a sleeved dress sufficed for summer. Dressy dresses had no place in the office.[20]

During the 1920s, writers emphasized budgeting for a business wardrobe with an extended life. Margaret Matlack set forth three-year budget plans for different salaries, from $1800 to $4000 per year and suggested balancing conservative dresses for several seasons' wear with modish styles for short-term use.[21] *Vogue* recommended clothes that would stand up to a day's wear and that were current in style, not the end-of-season finds with an abbreviated fashion life.[22] In general, 1920s advice became more specific and accommodated broad changes in fashion, such as the prevalence of dresses compared to the ever-present tailored separates of the early 1900s. The importance of appearance to success was definitively stated in *Independent Woman: A National Magazine for Business and Professional Women*: "Part of the business

woman's stock in trade is a smart, trim appearance, and so long as she is in business she must adopt higher clothes standards as her earnings increase" (Figure 1).[23]

"Insert Figure 1 About Here"

Tempting as it is to characterize the 1930s as a uniformly grim time in American economic life, the picture for women was more mixed. Of the 13 million unemployed Americans at the depth of the Depression, 400,000 were women. However, women were able to reenter the work force more quickly than men were because their white-collar work contracted less than men's jobs in manufacturing.[24] The expansion of the Federal Government, beginning in 1933, created jobs for many women. In 1935, 1,964,000 women were office workers.[25] Yet, less than 20 percent of the nation's adult women worked outside of the home.[26] Women in the private sector suffered reduced wages. Surprisingly, women still managed to buy clothes to the tune of about $20 per month. Those rare holders of executive secretary posts earned $3500 to $6000 annually, giving them more discretionary dollars for clothes.[27] The introduction of manufactured fibers, such as rayon and acetate, provided cheaper alternatives to cotton and silk dresses.

Advice to businesswomen (or "girls") varied only slightly from the previous period. Dresses were deemed more economical for office wear, although suits were offered as an alternative. Color coordination became a popular topic. In light of the increasingly close-fitting fashions, one advisor noted the need for a good girdle, corset, or corselet.[28] Advice about having a repair kit in the office for grooming purposes suggests a more modern approach to cosmetics compared to the 1910s and 1920s, when make-up was slowly becoming acceptable.

In a world just recovering from Depression and quickly engulfed in war, civilian matters such as wardrobe advice became a low priority. The female labor force grew by 6.5 million in the early 1940s, a rise of 46 percent.[29] However, substantial numbers of new jobs were in factory

work, where typical attire included coveralls, slacks, smocks, hair confiners, and sturdy shoes. Young women working alongside men in engineering departments were described as wearing "street clothes," with no details given.[30] *Mademoiselle* periodically presented seasonal clothing budgets for young women at different salary levels. The columnist promoted coordination of pieces, for economy and—after the United States entered the war—conservation. An adaptable suit and dresses with or without jackets in dark colors with bright accents offered economy.[31]

Once the war ended, many women in heavy industry lost their jobs to returning veterans. However, some displaced workers returned to the labor force by 1947. Increasing numbers of married women entered the labor force and the number of married working mothers increased by 400 percent between 1940 and 1960.[32] Bea Danville's advice to "career girls" tended toward dark colors, carefully edited, and a mixture of dresses, a suit, and separates.[33] Clothing advice of the 1950s and early 1960s leaned heavily on "typing" of personalities and figures, with a view to personal expression and improvement rather than advancement into the executive suite.

Women's Employment

The decades from the 1960s to 2000 brought notable changes in women's labor force activities, including increased participation and growth in higher paying occupations. In 1960, about 38% of women aged 16 and older were in the labor force; by 1980, over half of U.S. women worked; and in the 2000s, working women accounted for nearly 60% of the female population (see table 1). [34] As women's labor force participation increased, so did their employment in higher paying occupations. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, women's roles in managerial, professional, and related occupations grew from 33% in 1960 to levels nearly equal to men in 2000 (see table 2).[35] Despite these improvements, women's earnings relative to men, while increasing, were still not equal. In 1979, among full-time

workers, women's earnings were approximately 62 percent of men's; by 2006, the ratio had grown to about 81 percent.[36] Much empirical work was devoted to explaining differences in earnings between the sexes, examining discriminatory practices, gender-segregated employment patterns, and the predominant role of women in child and home care.[37]

The increased movement of women into the labor force and into higher paying occupations went hand in hand with the pursuit of higher education. In 1970, just over one tenth of women in the labor force had completed four or more years of college; by 2006, one-third of women held at least a bachelor's degree (see table 3). Further, women made great strides in advanced education. By 1980, women earned more than two-fifths of all master's degrees in the U.S. and approximately one-fourth of all law, medical, and doctorate degrees. Because women's potential earnings increased with education, women realized high returns on their investment.[38]

Institutional and social changes were also associated with rising labor-force participation. Opportunities afforded working women were buttressed by state and federal legislation. Laws such as the Equal Pay Act [1963, extended to management jobs, 1972], the Civil Rights Act (1964), affirmative action (1965), Title IX (1972), and the Higher Education Act (amended 1975) all helped reduce discrimination against women in education and labor force. Individual states also prohibited sex discrimination in employment.[39]

"Insert Tables 1, 2, and 3 About Here"

Entry-Level Management

Women entered the U.S. work world in force in the late 1960s due to economic need, labor demands, changes in legislation, and ongoing modifications in societal norms, such as increases in white-collar openings, a drop in the birth rate, inflationary trends, and the increased number of single, divorced, or widowed women.[40] Women's workforce involvement was also

influenced by "second wave" feminism that pushed beyond the early quest for political rights to fight for greater equality. Although the revolution in societal sex roles was taking place in the 1960s, women's progress in the job market, as measured by their earnings and employment opportunities, were limited. Women's participation in work increased, from 35% in 1955 to 38% in 1960, yet they entered roles in the traditional female sector, particularly clerical work, and teaching and health services.[41]

While the Equal Pay Act, the *Presidential Report on American Women*, the *Feminine Mystique*, and the creation of the National Organization of Women (NOW) contributed to a growing sense of gender consciousness, these changes in women's involvement in work called forth a less single-minded flood of advice on dressing for business success. Some were guides to elegant style, advice for the woman who wanted to look slimmer, taller, or more confident, or primers on personal style imitating Hollywood glamour. Edith Head's *How to Dress for Success* tome included advice for finding and keeping a job – and a man.[42]

Middle Management

While legislation, such as the Higher Education Act supported women's entry into certain male-dominated fields, women continued to flood traditionally female-held jobs as secretaries, nurses, bank tellers, primary school teachers, and librarians. To remedy the lack of inclusion in male-dominated fields such as business, the sciences, and engineering, several government agencies and private organizations sought to promote women through legal action and educational programs and pamphlets for employers.[43] These steps increased women's attainment of higher-level middle management positions in finance, marketing, personnel and labor relations, and properties and real estate. In 1960, women composed less than 6 percent of the executive, administrative, and managerial occupational group in the U.S. Census. By 1970, that

percentage rose to 18.5%, in 1980 to 30.5%, and in 1990 to 40.6% of the total (see table 4). The proportional gains women made in the managerial category from the 1960s to early 1980s were larger than in any other major occupational group.[44]

"Insert Table 4 About Here"

In their newly found roles, women faced enormous challenges in proving their worth as well as outperforming their predecessors in the stereotypical responsibilities of homemakers, wives, and secretaries. Women faced the very real challenge in the 1970s of finding clothing that was attractive *and* appropriate for their new middle management positions. During the 1970s, there was no dress protocol for women managers and business directors, as there was for men throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Former teachers and insurance underwriters (John Malloy), booking agents for modeling agencies (Emily Cho), and fashion merchandisers (Janet Wallach) sought to fill this gap. Numerous authors penned books and articles describing in detail looks that would afford women success in the workplace. The prescriptive "dress for success" movement was born.

John T. Molloy, probably the best-known dress for success author promoted the "Success Suit": a conservative, skirted two-piece suit in a dark color and natural fabric worn with a modest high-necked blouse, plain pumps, and an attaché case. Advocates of this look urged women to adopt the "uniform" as a way of taking a "firm and dramatic step toward professional equity with men." The stated purpose of the success suit was not to imitate men, but rather to provide "a simple set of rules" to advance women professionally and socially.[45]

The tailored business look starkly contrasted with the wrap dresses popularized during the time. Suit designer for Arthur Richards, Suzie Cracker, encouraged women to eschew sexy dresses so that male bosses would not confuse their middle level managers with their "lovers or

secretaries" and writer Polly Bergen urged women to "dress for business, not monkey business."[46] John Molloy echoed this sentiment in the introduction to his *Women's Dress for Success* book in which he wrote, "Women dress for failure because they make [these] mistakes, they let the fashion industry influence their choice of business clothes and they often still view themselves as sex objects."[47] Malloy urged women to show their business goals by dressing for the job they wanted, stressing the importance of clothing in establishing and legitimizing leadership (Figure 2).

"Insert Figure 2 About Here"

The uniform look promoted by Malloy and others changed the clothing industry. Of the top ten suit producers for men in the 1970s, seven added women's lines. Women affirmed their "big spender" stereotype, accounting for over 15% of total sales for Brooks Brothers (who added women's clothing in 1976) and helping to move over $3.5 million of Joseph-Picone women's suits (Figure 3).[48] As pointed out by Susan Faludi, "the uniform" could liberate women from fashion-victim status because suits were not as subject to the wild swings in fashion as dresses and they could be worn with varying blouses and accessories, thus saving time and money necessary for shopping the latest business trends.[49]

"Insert Figure 3 About Here"

Indeed, not all women customers, fashion designers, or writers liked the uniform look for women. Caroline Bird, the feminist author of *The Two Paycheck Marriage*, charged suit makers with "making a fast buck off of the insecurities of women" believing suits "pushed women back to being an object."[50] Some feminists questioned the rationale that looking similar to a man through dressing for success would bring about equal treatment. Journalist Ellen Goodman stated,

When the 'male' standard is regarded as the 'higher' one, the one with the most tangible rewards, it is easier for women to reach 'up' than to convince men of the virtues of simultaneously reaching 'down.' It has proved simpler — though not simple, God knows — for women to begin traveling traditional (male) routes than to change those routes. It is simpler to dress for success than to change the definition of success...[51]

Debating the actual correlation between dressing for success with women's professional advancements, writer Michael Korda, refused, "to believe that women are being kept off the boards of corporations because they don't know what to wear."[52] Indeed, while the prescriptions for dressing for success were heavily illustrated and clear, the apparel industry proffered a huge variety of often-contradictory advice. While Malloy and others were promoting the male-inspired business suit, *Vogue* editor-in-chief Grace Mirabella and *Harper's Bazaar* Fashion Editor Elsa Klensch insisted a woman did not need tailored jackets to have authority, but "gets her own way by using feminine wiles."[53] Writer Emily Cho suggested women managers "dress distinctively and look interesting" foregoing suits and ascots for flattering dresses.[54] The "stratified homogeneity" of dress suggested by some in the 1970s (wrap dresses recommended by fashion editors and suits suggested by some consultants) hinted at women's discrepant roles (figure 4). The introduction of pantsuits further inflamed the dilemma of what to wear, as the very act of wearing them proved controversial.[55]

"Insert Figure 4 About Here"

While *Glamour* magazine introduced the now-common pie chart to help women visualize their daily activities and plan purchases to cover all slices of their lives, the writers do not really explain which styles might help the wearer attain the executive suite.[56] Rather, writers and consultants consistently mentioned dressing to impress with attractive and appropriate dress, hair, and makeup styles and dressing for the role women wanted. Perhaps some of the ambiguity and contradictions in the advice literature came from the lack of role models in upper-level

positions. Further complicating the discussion, women were consistently warned that too much emphasis on clothing and not enough on business and leadership development might lead a woman solely to the dressing room and not to the executive-level boardroom, a persistent theme in twentieth century appearance management.[57]

Attacking the Glass Ceiling

Women's participation in the U.S. labor force equaled male levels by 1980. However, women remained in the distinct minority in the highest-levels of executive positions. According to a 1984 estimate, 49,000 men and only 1,000 women held top policy-making jobs in major corporations. Further, only 367 women, compared with 15,500 men held board positions in the top 1,300 public companies in the United States, and among the 6,543 directorships in the Fortune 500, a mere 2.8 percent were occupied by women.[58] In the federal government, only 6.2 percent of employed women were at or above the level of upper-middle management; men, however, were four times more likely to reach those levels, with nearly 28 percent of all federally employed males located in the highest categories.[59]

Faced with this dramatic imbalance, the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission assessed the barriers hindering the advancement of women.[60] Numerous scholarly and popular studies investigated the many factors (e.g., education; gender-role stereotypes; lack of mentors and training programs; discrimination; access to power) which contributed to or inhibited the success of women in upper echelon careers.[61] Some authors noted the difficulties of successfully combining work and family, little support from senior executives, increased competition, and male *and* female resentment as obstacles hindering women's advancements in the business world.[62] One study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* and reported in periodicals

such as *Science Digest*, *Working Woman*, and *Nation's Business* went so far as to say beauty was a hindrance in women achieving an office in the executive suite.[63]

All explanations seemed controversial to one group or the other as to why women had made so many inroads in middle management but had not broken into the highest levels of management. In an article adapted from the book, *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach the Top of America's Largest Corporations?*, women were advised to do the near impossible: "take risks, but be consistently outstanding," "be tough, but don't be macho," "take responsibility, but follow others' [even subordinates] advice." Without outrage or anger, the authors stated, "be ambitious, but don't expect equal treatment"—advice that was surely not inspiring or encouraging to emerging professionals. [64]

There was an increased realization in the 1980s that geographic location, specific industry, company policy, job responsibility, and personal tastes were necessary factors (overlooked in the 1970s) when "dressing for success" (Figure 5). The work of Evans and Thornton suggest that feminist discourse in the 1980s shifted from an emphasis on being controlled by fashion—a perspective dominant in the 1970s—to an emphasis on choosing to control fashion.[65] Feminist writer Betty Friedan lamented, "I think it is too bad that dressing for success had become a symbol of trying to copy men. We're at a halfway point, exchanging the rigidity of one role for the rigidity of another. It really isn't liberation yet."[66] One may see the beginning of this shifting perspective in women's shying away from the "tailored boredom" of mannish suits, bowties, pumps, and attaché case—uniform of the 1970s—into a greater diversity of knit suits, silk dresses, blouses and skirts in the 1980s.

<div align="center">"Insert Figure 5 About Here"</div>

There remained, however, emphasis on dressing conservatively early in one's career. The gray flannel business suit remained the benchmark for women entering lower level management

positions and for interview attire. Yet, the "dress for success" literature, and society as a whole, deemed softer silhouettes, lighter and brighter colors, and versatility dressing with simple pieces such as dresses, blazers, and cardigans appropriate for middle and upper management positions.[67] In a *Glamour* special report on "clothes and clout," women in diverse business settings from the corporate world to creative ad firms stressed their desire to "liven up business suits without divesting it of authority, looking feminine without looking frilly and shopping wisely given high prices and limited time."[68]

In books such as Janet Wallach's *Working Wardrobe: Affordable Clothes that Work for You!* and Gerrie Pinckney and Marge Swenson's *New Images for Women*, working women were urged to consider their personalities when choosing business attire; a persistent theme from the 1920s through the 1960s.[69] Through quiz questions such as "Your favorite acting role would be: a) Faye Dunaway in *Network*, b) Joan Collins in *Dynasty*, c) Lauren Bacall in *Woman of the Year*, d) Sally Field in *Absence of Malice*, e) Jane Fonda in *Julia*, or f) Diane Keaton in *Annie Hall*," Wallach's book profiled women as either corporate, communicator, or creative types. These profiles dictated the silhouette, fabric, and color selections Wallach found appropriate to the personality types. Designers and brands such as Kasper, Chaus, and Evan Picone served as resources for corporate women, Ellen Tracy, Bill Blass, and Liz Claiborne best suited communicators, and Calvin Klein, OMO Norma Kamali, and Oscar de la Renta best fit creative types.

Writers often used Wallach's synopsis of clothing specifications based upon personality types and individual characteristics in the 1980s. Pinckney, Swenson, and Carole Jackson of the company *Color Me Beautiful* divided all women into four types: winter (dark hair and skin), summer (pinkish skin), spring (peach skin and golden hair), and autumn (beige skin and dark

hair). Figure analysis, professional aspirations, income, and lifestyle needs provided less esoteric subdivisions.[70] Advice concerning accessories and fine points of grooming skin, hands, makeup, and hair were new topics for authors and image consultants.

In the 1980s, specialty stores, including La Cabine in New York and Jack Henry in Kansas City, and department stores such as San Francisco's I. Magnin and Boston's Filene's created special sections devoted to career clothes (figure 6). The increasing complexity and variety of available goods, as well as competing role demands and specializations, increased the need for personal shoppers and consultants in the 1980s. As woman were promoted to 60-plus hour workweeks, personal shoppers [of the expensive consulting breed and the inexpensive department store and specialty shop variety] advised professionals what to wear, selected everything from earrings to pumps, and personally delivered purchased wardrobes.[71] Retailers such as Dayton Hudson Corp., Lord & Taylor, and Bloomingdale's heavily advertised their "personal shoppers" and "wardrobe consultants" to boost sales and win customer's loyalty.[72] Employers such as General Electric, Merrill Lynch, and Price Waterhouse and graduate schools of business such as Harvard, Columbia, and the University of Tennessee, hired image consultants to teach women how to select and coordinate clothes for work.[73] These speakers expounded on overall elements of style including the importance of separates to mix-and-match, quality goods over quantity of goods, the necessity of proper fit and proportion, and the importance of clothing to take the woman from day to night. As researchers and authors discussed the possibility of career and motherhood, and working women campaigned for such a combination, sartorial consultants stressed versatility and comfort in clothing selections.[74]

"Insert Figure 6 About Here"

When women joined the ranks of middle and upper management in the 1980s, jewelers witnessed an increase in purchases made by women for themselves. High-priced jewelry designers reacted to this shift in purchasing behavior by offering their goods in department stores such as Bloomingdale's and Macy's. Leading jewelry stores such as Tiffany & Co., Cartier, and Black, Starr & Frost, expanded their lines to include "quietly handsome pieces" more fitting with the executive polished look than pieces encrusted with stones suitable for the CEO's wife.[75]

Corporate Leadership versus Self-Employment

By the 1990s, while corporations struggled to improve competitiveness, flexibility, and even prospects for their survival, many firms restructured their management styles to incorporate new models of leadership. Leadership styles that emphasized persuasion over power and cooperation over competition provided fodder for discussions concerning the supposed "feminization of management." Women rising in corporate ranks were encouraged by the popular press to capitalize on their supposed natural talents of nurturing and effective communication skills.

Literature trumpeted lead stories such as "Women smash business myths," "Vive la difference: Female characteristics as applied to business," "Ways women lead," and "The female advantage," but men continued to hold the lion's share of upper management positions (Figure 7).[76] In 1993, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that women would not reach parity with men in terms of upper level management positions until 2023. According to Robin Ely,

> Until women receive adequate representation at the top levels of the organization, sex role stereotypes will persist, largely to the detriment of women, as the basis for women's *own* sense of how they differ from men and as the basis for their *own* sense of their individual and collective value to their organizations.[77]

"Insert Figure 7 About Here"

While legislation in the early 1990s made it a federal crime to discriminate in hiring or compensation because of gender, by the late 1990s, women earned just 76 cents for each dollar earned by a man with the same job title.[78] This wage gap was heatedly debated among professionals and was often explained in part by the greater career interruptions experienced by women. Several authors in the 1990s noted that since biology would not change, the corporate worlds' handling of maternity leave and compensation would need substantial alteration. This was particularly significant, because from 1975 to 2000, the labor force participation rate of mothers with children under the age of 18 rose from 47 to 73 percent.[79] To meet the needs of this growing demographic, the catalog company Mothers Work (renamed Destination Maternity Corporation) offered value-priced to high-end career maternity apparel in luxury stores Pea in the Pod and value-priced Motherhood Maternity. The growth of the company from $31 million in 1993 to $602 million in 2006 attested to the working woman's need to look professional, even when pregnant.[80]

When corporations made insufficient changes in handling maternity leave and childcare problems, the career paths of many women shifted. The 1990s and early 2000s brought a dramatic increase in the sheer number and success of women entrepreneurs. In 1992, female-owned businesses employed more of the U.S. population than Fortune 500 companies did. While debates continued throughout the 1990s as to the relevance of affirmative action programs and related laws to reduce employment discrimination against women, women founded their own businesses in record numbers. By 1996, women owned an estimated one-third of all U.S. businesses. The number of such businesses grew twice as fast as all firms between 1997 and 2002, jumping 14 percent to 6.2 million, according to the Center for Women's Business

Research. By 2008, America's 10.6 million women-owned businesses employed 19.1 million people and contributed $2.46 trillion to the national economy.[81]

Telecommuting, flextime and self-employment created complications in characterizing women's employment and resultant flexibility in advice literature. Women who glorified (or simply wore) power suits and polished "images" in the previous decades had increased opportunities to shift their dressing for success to dressing for their own needs.[82] Feminists held contrasting views on the importance of dress for success. In the *Lipstick Proviso* Karen Lehrman wrote, women have the prerogative, indeed the right, to embrace their femininity and dress and act according to their own whims and desires, if that meant wearing "slinky dresses and heels or baggy overalls and combat boots."[83] In contrast, feminist authors Susan Faludi and Norma Wolfe argued that the ever-changing rules of the dress for success movement represented a ploy by advertising executives to make women feel inferior and then foist expensive clothes upon them to improve their status.[84] The contradictory nature of these opinions is in part explained by Elizabeth Wilson's argument that the relationship between women and fashionable dress is often viewed as either stifling or creating the self.[85]

Without a doubt, women's increased involvement in all facets of the business world in the 1990s and 2000s inspired greater confidence in individual dressing as well as leaving the door open to professional image coaches. With so many workers situated behind computers in the 1990s, many companies including Ford, IBM, AT&T, Dow Jones, and Internet start-up firms relaxed their dress codes. In 1998, 60 percent of U.S. companies had some degree of business casual.[86] Retail firms such as Brooks Brothers, Eddie Bauer, Dockers, and Banana Republic tried to meet the needs of executives by offering on-site boutiques at business locations, providing fashion consultants, and "800" numbers through which individuals could consult with "casual

counselors." As men were deciding if business casual meant a less formal shirt and no tie or blue jeans and t-shirts, many female executives were also trading in their expensive business suits for more casual and inexpensive clothing that could move from the executive offices to the grocery store to a late night dinner entertaining clients. Some sources even recommended dressing for each particular day's activities, with an emergency change of clothes in the office closet for quick upgrades.[87] Sharon Stone epitomized the casual confusion so evident in the 1990s when she appeared at the 1996 Oscars wearing a Valentino ready-to-wear skirt, an Armani dress worn as a coat, and an androgynous, black Gap turtleneck. This signified the great ambiguity between casual, work, and formal dress.

Apart from the paradigmatic shift from business professionalism to corporate casual, many women, particularly successful baby boomers, found a general lack of desirable clothing choices in retail outlets. Growing competition from other types of products led to 40% increase in personal consumption from 1989 to 1995 but 12% *decrease* in purchases of women's apparel. Personal care services and products boomed in the 1990s. Facial treatment goods like anti-wrinkle crèmes and mud masks grew 5% over a five-year period in the early 1990s; sale of bath products grew nearly 30% in the same period; and fitness club and gym memberships rose 108% between 1987 and 1995. Women also spent their money on gardening, leisure trips, and stock market investments. Couture designers had to change their product lines to meet the changing needs of corporate women in the 1990s. Anne Klein closed its top lines in April 1996, concentrating on its lower-priced, more casual collections. Businesswomen also found other venues in which to shop in the 1990s. Discount stores, such as Target, Ross, and Wal-Mart increased their share of the women's clothing market to 21% in 1996, as women found new freedom in finding and wearing "bargains" with pride.[88] First Lady Michelle Obama embodies

this mix-and-match philosophy as she regularly pairs garments from lower priced retailers J.

Crew and H & M with pricier designer items from Jimmy Choo and Narciso Rodriguez.[89]

While advice literature continued to recognize suits as the cornerstones of corporate

apparel for women, the establishment of business dress set the stage for industry-specific norms.

At least one book dealt with the levels of dressing for an interview, early years on the job, and

advanced executive status, with increased color, pattern, and flexibility at each succeeding level.

In the financial world, the power-dress code for women in finance included colorful dresses,

feminine-fitting suits, bold handbags, and tall boots with skirts. Even panty hose, a mainstay of

the 1970s dress for success looks became optional in the most conservative fields.[90] In spite of

these freedoms of expression, in 2008, one business-etiquette consultant advised women to wear

lighter-colored suits the higher she climbed on the corporate ladder "to be less intimidating,"[91]

advice presumably never offered to black-suited businessmen.

Despite great gains made by women in managerial and executive positions, the advice

literature continued to stress the "shifting style rules" for women in power. Business casual

dressing remained a minefield, particularly for women, who could lose hard-won authority by

looking too amiable. Further, with the varied norms in business casual, switching companies

could mean great expenditure of money and time in acquiring a new business-casual wardrobe.[92]

While types of career dressing advice, such as the necessity of wearing pantyhose, were

specific to women, advice in the 2000s also reflected economic up- and down-turns. During a

time of great prosperity and low unemployment rates, a 2007 article heralded "entitled" young

lawyers wearing Ugg boots and clingy t-shirts. In 2009, the same writer stressed the return of

power dressing even among mailroom clerks as fear of unemployment signaled the heightened

need of, at least, looking important.[93] Common themes of advice in the 2000s continued from

previous decades of the investment in good quality, classically styled clothes. Depending on the mode of the moment, these books and articles included everything from wool suits to pantsuits with fine knit tops and loafers, or skirts with knit twin sets.[94] Putting into action feminist theory that parity was not based solely on gender, but also racial and class hierarchies that contributed to oppression, the non-profit charity, "Dress for Success" provided women of limited means with interview suits as well as grooming advice to enhance their chances of business success.[95]

Conclusions

During the twentieth century, a few notable differences appeared in advice literature. The core of a businesswoman's wardrobe shifted from dresses to suits between the 1940s and the 2000s. In part, this may reflect a closer correspondence between women's wear and men's wear, as women have assumed many of the roles once exclusive to men. Perhaps, too, it represents a shift in the composition of ready-to-wear: fewer "tailored" dresses are produced, compared to festive, seasonal, and informal dresses in the dressmaker tradition rather than the tailor's mode.

Budgeting, a staple of advice for businesswomen in the early twentieth century largely disappeared from the advice literature since the 1970s. Instead of specific prices or budget tallies, writers give tips for assessing quality in apparel, allocating limited money to important garments, and shopping with savvy. Perhaps greater inflation, particularly in the 1970s through early 1980s, dissuaded authors from committing to price points for anything. Sources of apparel have widened over the last 35 to 40 years to include specialty stores, chic discounters, and conventional department stores. Particularly since the mid-1990s, the Internet has opened almost limitless options, including resale via e-Bay and other specialty websites. "Shopping in your closet" has become a cliché of advice literature, to dissuade women from making duplicative purchases or falling for a nifty garment that does not work with what they already own.

Much prescriptive advice on how to dress for success, and the nature of success, has changed from 1900 to the present. The shift from manufacturing to services as primary business types and the movement of women from behind desks as secretaries and shop girls to managers and executives contributed to the variety of the dress for success literature. Industries and businesses unimagined in 1960 became powerful in the 2000s. Business travel put new stresses on wardrobes. Mannish apparel that sought to legitimize women's roles within an organization in the 1970s was replaced with feminine skirts and blouses that signaled new freedoms of expression in the 2000s. Yet, many of the underlying principles of the 1970s to 2000s career dressing advice remained the same: Have clear goals, wear business suits to interviews, know what colors and fabrics are best suited for your complexion and career path, and always recognize that clothing is a billboard for the self and should be chosen with care. Despite women's increased responsibilities, visibility, and confidence in upper management corporate positions the emphasis remains on dressing "careful[ly] and correct[ly]."[96] Women continue to walk the line between femininity and masculinity, balance dedication to the organization and care of family, and navigate the rules of matching their clothes to their skills, education, position, and ambition. Fortune magazine's advice to the 21st century worker might well read, "Look like a professional, act like a professional, and work like a dog."

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