

Clothing, Image, and Presence: Women in the Corporate Workplace

by

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A fair exterior is a silent recommendation.

Pubilius Syrus, circa 42 B.C.

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1. Introduction

Clothing, appearance, grooming, and presence are all aspects that interact to create an individual's physical and psychological identity in the workplace, and can all either serve to enhance or detract from a person's overall career success. For instance, these factors serve as the building blocks of first impressions. They also help to determine an individual's actions within a corporate setting, and help to establish how others will treat the individual in question. Women, in particular, must be sure to manage these aspects effectively and efficiently as they have a very special relationship with appearance, as well as the corporate world. Throughout history, and in fact more so in contemporary cultures, women have been valued based on their beauty (Wolf 10), as opposed to men who have been traditionally valued for their intellect and physical strength. In fact, researchers have observed that while boys learn to view their bodies as a means of achieving mastery over their environment, girls learn that a main function of their bodies is to attract others (Stephens, Hill and Hanson 144). Research by Jonathan Gottschall indicates that this "beauty myth" is not bound by cultures – it is in fact an evolutionary phenomenon. He states that: "...greater emphasis on female physical attractiveness will be the rule across human culture areas" (Gottschall 185). Granted, this is merely one study, one snapshot of the field, however it is nonetheless telling and worthy of further examination.

This obsession with outward, physical beauty is problematic for a number of reasons, one of them being that this value placed on appearance serves to detract from women's intellectual value, which is directly applicable to their presence and success in the workplace. Despite advances in this regard, young women continue to be victims of this beauty obsession,

which is effectively harming many women physically, financially and emotionally (“America’s Beauty Obsession”). For instance, at least nine out of ten people suffering from an eating disorder are female (Stephens, Hill and Hanson 137). According to Naomi Wolf, author of *The Beauty Myth*, the more obstacles women have surpassed, the more strictly and intensely images of female beauty have been used against them (Wolf 10). Wolf argues that these images of idealized beauty are in fact used as a political weapon against women’s advancements (10). A prime example of appearance affecting women’s success in the workplace was demonstrated in a study conducted by Susan Averett and Sanders Korenman, where they found that obese women have a lower family income than women whose weight-for-height is within the recommended range (304). These results persisted even after confounding variables, such as the idea that perhaps women who make less money have worse diets, were controlled for. The workplace setting is a complicated world to navigate for women, one in which they are rarely given explicit feedback on their appearance, as doing so can often be construed as inappropriate. This lack of feedback is problematic for a couple of reasons; firstly, this territory is rife with double-standards, and secondly, women are required to dress in gender-appropriate ways (ie: ‘feminine’), however the definition of gender-appropriate and feminine clothing is not well-defined.

If there is one environment where appearing and dressing appropriately is of the utmost importance, it is within an office environment. The corporate office is a space often wrought with confusion and fear when it comes to navigating complex gender dynamics. The pressure that women face to adhere to cultural beauty norms, both on a personal level and professional level, and often despite receiving little to no feedback, is compounded by the relatively “new” relationship that women have with the corporate world. Traditionally in the

West, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, men's place was in the office, and women's was in the home (Veblen 113 and 119; Rhode 1164; Davis 175), especially after women married, even up until the 1940s (Goldin 7; Rhode 1164). However, this dynamic is changing as our society develops and grows, and, as such, we are beginning to see more women enter the corporate world and sometimes even reaching its upper echelons. Yet, a huge gender gap in the workforce still exists. For example, in Ontario, women's full-time employment rate remained at 57% between 2010 and 2014. This indicates that proportionally, essentially none of the full-time jobs created during this time period went to women (McInturff 12). In addition to their relative lack of presence within the working world, women often earn less than their male counterparts. For example, in Ontario, women who work full-time earn 24% less than their male counterparts (McInturff 16). It is therefore clear that understanding the visual and how women present themselves is of the utmost importance during what appears to be a tipping point; women's issues are at the forefront, and many are fighting for gender equality in corporate settings.

The purpose of this paper is to examine in detail the existing literature addressing the history of Western women in the workplace, the importance of first impressions, gender discrimination and stereotypes in the workplace, and the cognitive and behavioural effects of clothing on both wearers and perceivers. These topics will be analyzed across various fields of study, such as economics, psychology, sociology and gender studies. This review focuses on women as they relate to appearance and professional settings because many of the issues faced by women in professional settings are unique. It would not, therefore, be appropriate to address these issues as they relate to both men and women within the same framework;

women's experiences in regards to these notions deserve special attention. Once these theories are explored and analyzed, they will be expanded upon using ideas of executive presence and how it affects these particular areas of study, as well as how it can be used by women to overcome many of these issues.

The term "executive presence" will be used in this paper to explore themes of women in the workplace, professional dress and first impressions further, and to provide a framework for their analysis. Executive presence is an umbrella term that encompasses aspects such as first impressions, communications skills, charisma and appearance. The term has been a buzzword within business and leadership circles since the early 2000's and even earlier (Kaufman and Fetter 1983), and has served as an undefined characteristic for which business professionals and executives alike strive. Recently the term has been more specifically defined and has been appearing in academic research within the fields of business and medicine (Shirey 2013; Service and Reburn 2014; Beeson and Valerio 2012), and is further being explored as a foundational element of leadership potential. Sylvia Ann Hewlett, an American economist, founded the Center for Talent Innovation out of New York, a global think-tank dedicated to conducting ground-breaking research surrounding global talent management across gender, geography and cultures. One of the major research projects conducted out of the Centre for Talent Innovation sought to define exactly what executive presence means and what it consists of by way of a massive study conducted in 2012 which surveyed nearly 4000 college-graduate professionals working at some of the largest corporations across America. Through this large-scale study, she and her team were able to show that executive presence is comprised of three pillars: gravitas, communication and appearance (Hewlett et al. 1-2). Since this study was conducted, academic authors and researchers have begun to incorporate the term

into their research, and now see it as a measurable tool that helps to indicate leadership potential, among other factors (Shirey 2013; Service and Reburn 2014; Beeson and Valerio 2012). These pillars will be further examined and analyzed and will be applied to various themes explored throughout this paper, as will ideas about how executive presence can be used specifically by women in the workplace. Notions of executive presence can be applied to anybody no matter what position they may hold within their workplace. Executive presence training, including but not limited to, elements of appearance, could serve as an educational tool to help women at any level in business manage problematic elements within the workplace. Therefore, these notions will be problematized, critiqued and analyzed in the hope of understanding why these gendered problems continue to exist, and to possibly seek ways to remedy them.

2. Preface

It is no secret that first impressions are important; they have been so throughout the evolution of our species. As we were evolving, a particular defence mechanism developed that allowed for the incredibly quick judgment of another of the same kind (Ambady and Skowronski 16). The ability to quickly judge another was of incredible value, especially if a threat was detected requiring a fight or flight response. This phenomenon has been studied extensively within the fields of anthropology and biology, in which evaluations have been made regarding the importance and effects of first impressions, as well as biases that occur naturally. These unconscious effects have both positive and negative consequences, as this mechanism serves

to save humans processing time, however our first impressions of others are not always accurate. Despite the fact that in Western societies, we no longer “hunt and gather” our food (in the primitive sense of the term) and our linguistic abilities have substantially improved so that we may converse with each other in a civilized manner, the formation of first impressions based on visual symbols still holds its purpose. We navigate our world at an incredibly fast-paced speed, and the ability to form quick judgments allows us to do this more effectively. In fact, the power of the image has never been more pronounced or important than it is in this current era of extreme technological advance. As Kim Sawchuk states: “we are living in an age which anticipates an image” (60), suggesting that we have become accustomed to, and expect, the availability of images and pictures to guide us. From architecture to art, fashion to television, literature to computer screens, we rely on semiotics and visual literacy to help us navigate the world around us. In his renowned work *For a Critique of the Political Economy of The Sign*, Jean Baudrillard discusses how, in this era of postmodernity, we actually consume images and not things (147). Meanings, therefore, are constructed using images themselves. Visual literacy, which can be defined as the “ability to construct meaning from visual images” (Giorgis, Johnson, Bonomo, Colbert et al. 146), is directly applicable to the formation of first impressions. There are a number of visual elements we (automatically) perceive and process when we first look at another person which guide the formation of our first impressions; these include face shape, facial features, grooming, body language and clothing.

Women have a special connection with this visual world. Case in point: women’s fashion choices appear to be much broader in scope and typically more elaborate than men’s (Lipovetsky 61), as men’s clothing has “resisted the dictates of fashion” much more so than women’s (Davis 172). In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, men’s dress codes

focused on work and sobriety, while women's focused on attractiveness and dependency (Davis 172). Edward Sapir, an influential anthropologist who is considered one of the most important figures in the discipline of linguistics, gives an example of this difference in his chapter *Fashion*: "Fashions for women show greater variability than fashions for men in contemporary civilization. Not only do women's fashions change more rapidly and completely but the total gamut of allowed forms is greater for women than men" (Sapir 379). Joanne Entwistle, a leading fashion scholar, seconds this notion and boldly states that women have traditionally been seen as the "subjects" of fashion (Entwistle 321), highlighting women's special relationship with the visual world through fashion and clothing. For instance, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in European societies women engaged primarily with fashion to display the wealth and success of their husbands (Partington 149; Veblen 119). As Edward Sapir states, "She is the one who pleases by being what she is and looking as she does rather than by doing what she does" (Sapir 379). In this context, clothing was used by women as a method of communicating their husband's wealth to the outside world. However, by enticing women to appear attractive, sexual and beautiful, clothing also forced them to adopt a certain demeanour: that of proper, polite and in place (Eco 192).

In terms of the corporate world and within a contemporary context, this relationship becomes particularly confusing. As Mary Roach and Joanne Eicher state in their chapter *The Language of Personal Adornment*: "In America, women's dress is generally more ambiguous in its symbolism of occupational roles than is men's" (13). The authors go on to explain that because women's roles (such as homemaker) were traditionally unpaid, they did not have clear positions within the American occupational structure, and therefore "no form of dress that clearly distinguishes them as belonging to a particular occupational category; for nineteenth-

century society developed an expectation of women to indulge in personal display through dress, contrasted with an expectation of men to eschew such display and to garb themselves in somber symbols of the occupations provided by an industrializing society” (Roach and Eicher 14). The implications of this statement are far-reaching: because women’s (appearance) roles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries centered on outward displays of a “fashionable” appearance to reflect the success of their husbands, they were (and are, albeit possibly less so) ill-equipped to navigate fashion and clothing in a different context than they were traditionally used to. This fact, coupled with the much broader scope of clothing and fashion available to women, poses an issue for many women in corporate settings. It is fairly safe to say that some type of suit is appropriate for men to wear to the office, but it is far less clear what appropriate attire is for women.

Not only do women have a special relationship with the visual and with their engagement with the world of clothing and fashion, but in contemporary society they are also judged on their visual appearance, so much so that often their appearance is used to make assumptions about their cognitive abilities. For example, middle-class, Western cultures in Europe and North-America still use gendered terms and relationships drawn from biology to describe other phenomena that are completely non-biological, like politics, morality and social relations (Kwolek-Folland 9). The idea is that inherent gender divisions, male versus female, and the stereotypes that accompany them, are natural because they “...grew out of a scientific explanation of biological sexuality” (Kwolek-Folland 9). This notion is also tied to the fact that the qualities that are often thought of as physically beautiful in women are simply symbols of female behaviour that a culture or period in time considers desirable, meaning that “beauty” is always prescribing behaviour, and not appearance (Wolf 10-11). The implications of this

reasoning are significant: connections between the human body, gender, words and acts are reinforced, leading to gendered bodies being judged and interpreted on “unequally valued dualities: good/bad, matter/spirit, male/female” (Kwolek-Folland 10). These aspects indicate that appearance, gender and cognitive abilities have been intertwined for a long time.

How, then, do women manage their appearance in this complicated visual world? It is one thing for women to manage their appearance in their personal lives and among friends and family, however it is entirely different when discussing image management in the corporate workplace among colleagues and superiors, especially in situations where the gender divide is often clear. Arguably, there has yet to be a more prominent place in which a woman’s appearance is held to such impeccably high standards where it is constantly being judged, scrutinized and surveyed (other than, of course, the modeling world and fashion industry). It would be one thing if the importance of appearance within a business setting existed in a world where equality could be found in the workplace, however it holds an entirely different meaning in the seemingly still-discriminatory corporate environment. Despite popular belief, we have not yet achieved gender equality, and evidence of this divide is abundant in the corporate workplace. In fact, women are often perceived as not ready for the managerial climb (Kaufman and Fetters 203; Rosen and Jerdee 512), are not given equal opportunities to access systems that would help them reach the upper echelons (Epstein 969), or are simply perceived as an “inappropriate” choice for many upper level positions (Epstein 996). Gender discrimination and stereotyping are rampant within these settings, and may serve to undermine and challenge women’s roles in the workplace. According to Raymond Gregory, author of *Women and Workplace Discrimination: Overcoming barriers to gender equality*, “...discrimination against women remains the major barrier to their full equality in the workforce” (2). The

analysis of gender stereotyping in the workplace is therefore integral in order to adequately propose methods of addressing this discrimination.

3. Historical Perspectives of Women in Corporate Settings

In speaking of the history of women in a corporate workplace environment, a distinction must be made among cultures. The history of women entering the corporate world differs substantially across the globe and deals with different timelines, motivations and outcomes. This paper focuses on the history of women in an office setting from a Western perspective and focuses mostly on a North-American context. The ideal would be to look at this history from a purely Canadian perspective, however there is little academic research done from this viewpoint. Thus, mostly American histories will be analyzed, in the hopes that some of the findings are, at least to some extent, generalizable across the border and into Canada. It is arguable that American and Canadian cultures and values are similar in many respects, and both countries are developed, in close proximity to each other, and their economies possess close ties. Studies have found many shared cultural values, both in private, such as similar attitudes towards sexual minorities, explored by Morrison, Morrison and Franklin (2009), and public spheres, including workplace environments. Furthermore, when examining codes of conduct in businesses between Canadian, American and Australian companies, the focus on “Relations with consumers” is fairly similar between America (23.3%) and Canada (33.3%), but quite different in Australia (9.6%) (Wood 289). These similarities point to the fact that both Canada and the United States have had a shared corporate foreign focus for much longer. In addition,

the shared Anglo-Saxon nature of both Canada and the United States contributes to their similarities. As opposed to Latin North-American countries, these countries both value external realities, as opposed to interpersonal realities (Albert 333) and competition (Stewart and Bennett 105; Albert 333). These studies suggest that it is appropriate to use the United States as a reference when exploring these themes and their applicability in Canada.

Many people would likely agree that women's relationship with the corporate world is quite different from men's. The main reason for this discrepancy is that the history of women as workers within corporate settings is quite different than that of men. As discussed briefly in the overview, women's place was traditionally in the private sphere, and men's in the public. Women typically worked in the home; they raised and looked after the children, they cooked and cleaned, they made clothing, and perhaps they worked on the farm (Kwolek-Folland 44). Men's place, on the other hand, was customarily in the working world; they were the ones who "brought home the bacon," so to speak. In the nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries, men were predominantly considered the "workers" and the heads of the household and as such, for a long time, they held the financial power. Despite much progress having been made in the twentieth century in terms of women's rights, the cultural expectation remained that middle and upper-class women should not work. By and large, men were valued based on their occupational positions, and women through their marital status. In the United States and Canada, being married was often the sole focus of a woman's young adulthood. In fact, in 1942, a federal National Selective Service program was put in place to recruit women into the industrial labour force during the War, due to the severe shortage of workers. The program, however, sought only to register *single* women, excluding married women entirely despite the severe need (Anderson).

Marriage was such an integral aspect of Western culture during this time that there were laws in place that barred married women from working (Goldin 160). In fact, it is estimated that during the first third of the twentieth century, 90% of all clerical workers were single (Boyer 217). If, by chance, a woman was able to enter an office in a clerical position, she would promptly be fired the minute she married. These laws were known as the “marriage bar” and were in place for two reasons. Firstly, they prevented married women from entering the workplace to begin with, often referred to as the “hire bar.” Secondly, they changed women’s rights in the workplace once they were married, referred to as the “retain bar.” The former is fairly self-explanatory, in the sense that many fields that typically employed women, such as education, insurance or banking companies, forbade the hiring of a woman if she was married. The “retain” bar, on the other hand, was slightly more complex. This law typically allowed women who married to stay in their position as part-time workers, as substitute teachers, for example, who could be dismissed at will, with no warning whatsoever (Goldin 161). It is no coincidence, then, that “office marriages,” both official and companionate, were encouraged (Boyer 223; Kwolek-Folland 66). These relationships which formed in the office (between a receptionist and her boss, for example) assured that once women were married, they would no longer be part of the corporate office in question, and the men could get back to business as usual. These attitudes were so ingrained that even when these laws began to change, the notion of “marriage” remained an important one; even proponents of women in the office used the argument that office life would prepare women to be better wives, by teaching them organizational skills and self-knowledge (Boyer 222; Kwolek-Folland 56). According to Kate Boyer, who writes from a Canadian perspective, “corporate narratives reinforced the notion that women employees were both looking for a marriage partner, and ready

to leave their jobs when they did” (223). This theme is very salient when looking at the history of women in corporate settings, as it exposes not only the discrimination that women faced within the office by creating sex-based power structures, but it speaks to wider themes of gender bias and discrimination within society itself.

There are a number of reasons why this traditional landscape began to change. Firstly, the rise of the feminist movement in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in both Europe and North America played a critical part in the entrance of women into the corporate world. Although today there are various forms of feminism, the aim of the movement in its infancy was to fight for equal rights and the liberation of women within society (Quast). Women began to recognize, and have the courage to speak out against, their subordinate place in society; they saw that their place within their communities was not valued to the same extent that men’s was, and they began to actively fight back against discrimination. These women took part in many protests, traveling across their countries in an effort to spread awareness, and they effectively managed to change laws and influence thousands, if not millions, of people. These brave women set the groundwork for what is still these days known as the feminist movement. Despite their successes, there is still much to be done today to help elevate women’s status within our society, particularly within workplace settings.

It is interesting to note the role that fashion and clothing has played both in the subordination of women and also in their liberation, including the feminist movement, particularly in the United States. The corset and the high heel shoe (Veblen 113) are repeatedly mentioned in both popular and academic literature as tools that were used to suppress women within society; they often had adverse health effects, such as organ movements with the corset, and deformed feet in with the high heel, and rendered their wearers unfit for work (Veblen 114).

Thorstein Veblen, an American economist and sociologist and pioneer of the notion of conspicuous consumption, argues that women wore these items as a way to show their pecuniary standing within society, since these items dictated that their wearers *did not need to work* because they were wealthy enough to afford not to (Veblen 119). Their husbands made enough money to sustain the family, and therefore they could afford a life of conspicuous consumption which, one could argue, included spending time and money on one's appearance. In this sense, these items of clothing could be seen as empowering, as they allowed the wearer to feel wealthy, powerful and unique amongst others. However, it is also necessary to examine these kinds of items from another perspective, one where they actively *prevented* these women from working any type of job. Many elaborate aspects of women's dress in the eighteenth, nineteenth and even into the twentieth centuries, including the corset and high heel, can be seen as items that could prevent a woman from engaging in a working environment. An obvious example is the hobble skirt, designed by Paul Poiret. Poiret, one of the pioneering designers of the early twentieth century in France, was said to have "liberated women" by abandoning the corset in his designs (Lipovetsky 60), yet he subsequently bound the knees when he designed the hobble skirt. Constricting, contorting and often unhealthy, these types of garments would render their wearers unfit for any type of physical activity.

It is also worth noting that during this time period, in Europe as well as in North America, many prominent designers of these garments were men. In fact, according to *The Great Fashion Designers* by Brenda Polan and Roger Tredre, thirty-eight of the top fifty designers selected as the best between the late nineteenth century and the late twentieth century were men. Was this simply a coincidence, or was there perhaps something more purposeful

happening? These designers, of course, did not dress everyone; they were the elite couture designers that only the wealthy could afford. However, their designs were often the ones that were copied and sold to the masses, and as such they dictated trends and taste (Kawamura 65). There is a very intimate link to be found between fashion and clothing and women's place within society. As Elizabeth Wilson acutely notes: "Fashionable dressing is commonly assumed to have been restrictive for women and to have confined them to the status of the ornamental or the sexual chattel" (Wilson 13). In this loaded sentence, Wilson points out that clothing and dress not only rendered women unable to work, using words like "confined" and "restrictive," but poignantly notes that clothing was effectively used as a tool to sexualize women and reduce them to the mere "chattel" of their husbands.

It is clear that, for a long time, fashion could be seen as a tool that kept women out of the working world and served to "reduce" their status within society. This was most obvious in Europe, the epicenter of fashion, but its effects could also be seen in the United States. Conversely, and with help from the feminist movement, women began to use clothing to move their cause along. The starkest and possibly most remarkable example of this was the way members of the NWP (National Women's Party, leader of the women's suffrage movement in the United States), re-appropriated dress that was used to bring them down, turning it into a visual symbol of their political movement, an action which helped their cause substantially. Katherine Feo Kelly, in her paper entitled "Performing Prison: Dress, Modernity, and the Radical Suffrage Body" details the events that occurred in the early 1900's, when members of the NWP were arrested and become political prisoners. Upon their arrival at the prison, clothing (and often, a lack thereof) was used to create 'docile bodies', a notion put forth originally by

Foucault. This idea focuses on the fact that the body can be subjected to power, and can subsequently be transformed, used and improved (Foucault 136), often times by the use of specific clothing, such as a soldier's uniform (Foucault 181). The NWP members who were imprisoned began to feel like criminals based on their apparel, although they did not associate themselves with crime or criminality. The clothing they were forced to wear began affecting their behaviours and attitudes in prison and the members indicated a preoccupation with how the body's interior might be affected by its exterior surroundings (Feo 303). When these women were finally released, as well as throughout their imprisonment, NWP members took garments that were very similar to those they wore in prison and used them to create a nonviolent visual rhetoric, which effectively shifted NWP tactics and led to an extremely successful national tour (Feo 300). These women took something that was meant to demean and undermine them and successfully turned it into something positive that could work with their female bodies to create power and success.

Along with the formation and rise of the feminist movement between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, the effects of both World Wars, particularly World War Two, are significant when discussing the entrance of women into corporate settings (Boyer 216; Quast). Needless to say, thousands of men left to fight in the war, which created a significant gap in the labour force; this was a huge opportunity for women to enter the corporate working world. In addition to affecting change in the labour force itself, this influx of women workers was also responsible for changing societal attitudes towards women working in general, where now it was *acceptable* for middle-class women to work. Perhaps it was due to the fact that, despite "popular belief" (Rhode 1163) women could in fact work, marry *and* have children, or perhaps the shift was simply due to an acknowledgement that women entering the

workplace was a necessary change. Many women also entered the workforce due to inevitable economic needs; the cost of living was rising substantially post-War, hence many women were required to work in order to help financially support their families (Quast). By the 1960's and 1970's, even the American government was taking note, and many laws were instated with regards to equal rights, including the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (Quast) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act in 1972 (Wolf 33). It is therefore clear that during the twentieth century, the acknowledgement and subsequent action of the government in terms of women's equal rights was flourishing and changing women's positions within society.

Another significant reason for the influx of women into the labour force was the rise of the service sector and the decline of the manufacturing sector (Quast). The major shift from manufacture to service that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century American business world resulted in the rise and expansion of the financial industries, particularly banking and life insurance and was a significant reason for the large influx of women into the corporate world. This expansion was correlated with rising numbers of women entering the workforce, especially as clerical workers and typists (Kwolek-Folland 30, 41), which was also the case in Canada (Boyer 212). Although many Canadian women were laid off after the War, by the 1920's they had begun to re-establish wartime levels of employment (Anderson). Both in the United States and Canada, the fastest growing occupations for women were clerical positions. The financial institutions that provided these clerical jobs reached a much wider audience with the help of eased communication as well as advertising and, as a result, a host of specialized positions materialized (Kwolek-Folland 23) which women helped to fill. In fact, by 1911 clerical work was the third largest source of employment for women in Montreal (Boyer 212). This change, however, did not come without resistance. Many of the critics, of course,

were none other than the men with whom these women were beginning to work. Not only did the increasing presence of women in the corporate office shatter the male community that these men were so used to, but also it served as a *visual reminder* for them of the unwelcome transitions to modern office work (Kwolek-Folland 39). In addition to fearing this new change at work, some male workers feared the “desexing” of women, and the possibility that they would lose interest in marriage (Kwolek-Folland 56). Considering Western society’s long tradition of the importance and significance of marriage in the family system, and the importance of a woman becoming a wife, this was, in a sense, a rational fear to have. The fact that men had such adverse reactions to women entering “their” sphere could be seen as a basis in and of itself for the substantial amount of discrimination that still exists today.

As briefly mentioned, it was strongly believed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that women could not, physically and mentally, be both mothers and caregivers, as well as a professional in the workplace (Rhode 1163; Boyer 220). Much of the opposition “stemmed from assumptions about [women’s] intellectual, physical, and psychological unfitness” (Rhode 1166). In fact, a prominent physician in the late nineteenth century, Dr. Edward Clarke, suggested that women who redirected their “biological reserves” to cognitive, as opposed to reproductive organs, would potentially experience a host of negative physical side effects, such as permanent sterility (Rhode 1167). It is necessary here to contextualize the sheer impact that statement would have had, coming from a prominent doctor during this period of time. American doctors during the late nineteenth century often enjoyed what we would call today “celebrity status” and apart from helping patients heal using medical science, they also inspired their patients with hope and confidence (Rothstein 10). The fact that physicians during this time could have such significant effects on their patients by merely inspiring

them is testament to the sheer amount of faith that patients placed in their doctors. Dr. Clarke himself had a far reach, despite his generalizing from a “handful of patients” (Rhode 1167), and his comments had substantial influence. Related health concerns of women who worked included the idea that women were too emotionally unstable for “significant vocational stress” (Rhode 1167); it was believed that women could not cope with stresses of the world, and therefore could certainly not cope with stresses related to the office, business or economics. What is not clear through this analysis, however, is why women were seen as fit for the grueling work of factories and field labour. One could potentially view this, then, as a distinct and significant way of actively keeping women out of the office. One of the many goals of the feminist movement was to, of course, prove that women could physically and mentally work in a corporate setting, *as well as* be wives and mothers.

Despite having experienced almost radical change since the nineteenth century, women have seen only partial success. As Deborah Rhode states in “Perspectives on Professional Women,” “Although women have been moving into upper level professions in greater numbers, they have not attained the positions of greatest power, prestige, and economic reward” (1163). She also poignantly states that although formal barriers to entry have disappeared, informal ones have remained, such as underlying gender stereotypes (Rhode 1163). It is arguable that these “informal barriers” are just as powerful as the formal ones. The fact that gender stereotypes still exist in the corporate sphere today serves to actively undermine women’s roles in the workplace, both from a personal perspective (that of the women workers themselves) but also from a wider, more general viewpoint concerning office politics on a larger scale. It is worth noting that participating in a corporation’s office politics is an effective way of entering the business inner circle (Reardon XVII). Politics has often been seen as a

man's game (Collier 89) and it is no different in business settings. The ever-present gender discrimination and stereotyping within the corporate world serve to further complicate women's participation in office politics, which in turn serves to undermine their careers in general, and possibly prevents them from taking steps to mitigate this discrimination, thus creating a negative feedback loop.

3.1 Fashion and Empowerment in the Workplace

Alongside the rise of women in the corporate workplace in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is necessary to examine the role that fashion has played within women's successful entrance into the corporate world. Fashion can be considered, in this context at least, as a tool used by women – and against women – while embarking on the new journey into the corporate office. To understand its role, it is important to examine women's special relationship with fashion further. One theory (Roach and Eicher 19) is that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries American society generally adopted more discretionary controls over women's time than men, as men were more often out of the home and at the office working. Essentially, middle-to-upper class women, as well as the social elite, often had more time on their hands which may have been used this time to adorn themselves more intricately; it might have been considered a "hobby," or a method of personal display to show one's status. Consequently, dressing as a recreational activity became more characteristic of women and subsequently the "habit" continued as women entered the corporate workplace. Women continued to use clothing to create favorable first impressions of themselves, which was of the utmost importance during this time filled with gendered tension. However, this

does not explain why women's clothing is so different and so much more broad in scope than men's, nor does it speak to how and why the predominantly male designers (Davis 175) came up with such elaborate, extravagant items for their female customers to wear. When discussing the difference between men's and women's fashions, one cannot ignore The Great Masculine Renunciation in the early twentieth century, when male dressers abandoned notions of beauty in favour of notions of usefulness (Bourke 23). Women did not experience renunciation in the same manner, and while men began to put cut and fit above everything else, their female counterparts prioritized ornament, colour and display (Wilson 29).

In a slightly more contemporary context, women in the corporate world used fashion to construct themselves as respectable career women, which had multiple effects. First, it brought public visibility to the professional career woman; second, it helped to show the broader historical developments in the changing nature of work in general; third, it distinguished a new type of consumption for women (Entwistle 312). It must be noted that women had something to prove when they made the bold move to enter the corporate world. While fighting the norm, and fighting extremely strong gender stereotypes and discrimination, women were also facing significant competition among each other. Fashion and clothing was used as a method to both demand respect and also to set themselves apart from their colleagues. It must be noted, however, that fashion was also used against many women during this period, and was sometimes even used as an excuse for their termination. For instance, Boyer notes that in the early twentieth century in Montreal, women employees in banks were called upon to carefully manage their behaviours and appearance in order to avoid arousing male colleagues (220). Failure to do so often ended in the female employee's termination, despite the male employee having been the distracted one (Boyer 219).

As a consequence, there were many books and manuals created in the 1970's and 1980's that were dedicated to teaching women how dress for the corporate office, the most famous of which is arguably John T. Molloy's *Women: Dress for Success*. Molloy, a researcher who studied the effects of clothing on others, was an extremely influential figure during this crucial time for women. His "Dress for Success" manual, along with his theories on dressing, led to the popular term 'power dressing.' According to Entwistle, "... 'power dressing' offered women a conception of power located at the level of the body and rooted in individualism" (320). Although the term 'power dressing' is now considered dated, the core traits of what it means still exist today, and its significance in the workplace, especially for women, cannot be denied. What led Malloy to develop a "system" to teach women how to power-dress? During a time when there were large shifts happening in the workplace with many women beginning to work in office settings, Malloy presented the argument that most women dressed for failure: either they let fashion dictate their choice of clothes (meaning they followed trends too closely), or they saw themselves merely as sex objects. In addition, most women dressed according to their socio-economic status, which naturally makes sense, although Malloy saw this as a drawback – he believed women should dress for their *desired* socio-economic status. Based on these observations, Malloy concluded that these were all factors that prevented women from gaining access to positions of power in the business and corporate world - fashion had essentially dictated women's glass ceilings. Malloy saw "science" as the only way that women should be choosing their clothes. By science, he was referring to his methodical observation of many women over time, and his development of a systematic way of power dressing.

Malloy's notions of power dressing for women can be applied to ideas of women adorning corporate "uniforms," as these uniforms can often be used to increase power and

presence in a corporate setting, which Malloy recognized through his research. Uniforms in this context can refer to both the traditional attire most women were wearing in offices at the time, such as structured dresses, nylons and a hair up-do, as well as actual uniforms which women were required to wear in certain office settings, such as a skirted suit which was suggested by Malloy (35). The uniforms played an important part in “structuring the career woman’s everyday experience of herself, serving as a mode of self-presentation that enabled her to *construct* herself and be *recognized* as an executive or business career woman” (Entwistle 312). Here, the cognitive effect of clothing worn is noteworthy. Clothing, in this case the uniform, helped in forming the woman’s experience of herself as a career woman – it allowed her to both see herself, and be seen by others, as a professional career woman. In other words, the discourse of power dressing provided women with a means of *fashioning* themselves as career woman. In this sense, examining the history of the word fashion, very briefly, is important. It was circa 1300 when notions of fashion, style and manner of dress was first recorded (Kawamura 3). The French origin of the word, *mode*, derives from *modus*, meaning “manner” in English. In terms of the English “fashion,” its roots are Latin in nature and derive from *facio* or *factio*, which means “making”, or “doing” (Kawamura 3). The word evolved naturally, but its roots were always in the idea of “making” or “to make.” In this sense, it is clear to see how women entering the professional sphere used clothing and fashion to construct, or make, their professional identities.

As was made clear by scholars such as Thorstein Veblen and extending to the later work of Joanne Entwistle, fashion was, and still is, used as a tool by women to construct visual identities of themselves as professionals. It was, and continues to be, used to help women create favorable first impressions of themselves in a workplace setting, and can arguably be seen

as an influencing factor in terms of how others view women in corporate settings. However, fashion within this context is a double-edged sword; it can often be utilized by men as a sort of scapegoat for the discrimination against women in corporate settings.

A historic example of the very real way fashion negatively impacted women in the workplace is the following quote, taken from an article in Fortune Magazine in 1945 and quoted in Angel Kwolek-Folland's book *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930*: "What kind of nation is this callipygian nation of silk knees, slender necks, narrow fingers, and ironic mouths which has established itself upon our boundaries?" (41). By "our boundaries," the author is referring to the corporate office, and specifically the corporate office traditionally run by men. The rarely used term "callipygian" means "having well-shaped buttocks" ("Callipygian," Merriam-Webster) and was a popular term in the mid-twentieth century, which is when this particular Fortune Magazine article was. The mere use of this term in a sentence in which the employment of women is discussed serves to show the impact that women's appearance alone had on opinions of them and their abilities in a workplace setting. The majority of the quote focuses on physical features: slender necks, narrow fingers, ironic mouths. Needless to say, these physical features have nothing to do with a woman's ability to do her job, so why are they discussed as such? This can be related to the physicality of the female body being used as a reason for not believing them to be fit for work in an office. Prevalent attitudes suggested that women were frail and should focus on using their bodies to bear children, not to work in an office. Apart from mentioning various physical features, this author also mentions a "nation of silk knees," referring to women's hosiery. It is somewhat ironic that this author mentioned hosiery in an arguably negative way, but women

in the mid 1950's were required to wear hosiery in an office setting, in order to appear presentable and be taken seriously, in addition to needing to act "appropriately" and be modest. This is a very clear example of the insurmountable tension that women faced during this time. Items of clothing items that women were required to wear, often specifically by their superiors but also as more broad societal attitudes may have suggested, were subsequently used against them, perpetuating discrimination and stereotyping in the workplace.

Philip Warkander, in his article "No Pansies!!': Exploring the Concept of 'Style' Through Ethnographic Fieldwork" again reinforces the use of clothing as a method of gender discrimination in a more contemporary context: "...I suggest that within a contemporary context, the concept of fashion has been used to categorize individuals as feminine, subsequently also defining them as socially mobile (implicating vulnerability) and therefore subordinate to others, labeled as seemingly stable" (6). One need only think of a man's work uniform – the suit and tie – to see the implications of this; for men, dressing for work is a relatively straightforward process, and for women it is not. The suits that men wear, and have worn for hundreds of years (despite the fact that they have gone through many transformations, they have nonetheless remained relatively constant in comparison to women's formal clothing) are a stable and constant way that men create their own visual identities as professional workers within the corporate world. The fact that this "uniform" remains relatively consistent is one way that men's professional identities also remain relatively consistent. This is what Warkander is referring to when he discusses men's seemingly "stable" state within the workplace, in contrast to women who must constantly negotiate their wardrobe, their appearance, and the rapidly changing styles that are offered to them in order to attempt to create a visual identity that is somewhat constant. However, Warkander argues that the way the fashion system

works for women helps to create an atmosphere of instability, which can directly be applied to the workplace and can be seen as a basis for much of the discrimination that women faced, and continue to face, in a corporate setting.

In summary, it is clear that up until at least the mid 1900's, women faced many overt obstacles in terms of merely their ability to *enter* the business world. An example of a very tangible way women were kept out of the office environment was the marriage bar. Women faced hindrances from governments as well as their male counterparts. Despite these seemingly insurmountable hurdles, women managed to overcome many of these obstacles and successfully entered the corporate workplace. One of the aspects that helped them accomplish this, and perhaps helped to provide a smoother transition, was through the use of clothing and fashion. These women recognized that the way they presented themselves to others, especially in the context of the corporate office, significantly affected their abilities to secure the job in question, stand out within the position, as well as potentially move up the corporate ladder. Women continue to face many obstacles within the business world, including lower employment levels and unequal wages, however there has clearly been significant progress over the last hundred years . Despite these positive advancements, the shifting business atmosphere is arguably evolving at a leisurely pace. Notwithstanding major advancements in technology, medicine and politics, the role women play in the business world is not reflected to the same degree. It is therefore worth examining why this may be, and attempting to indicate ways in which equality in the workplace might be expedited.

4. Gender Stereotypes, Discrimination and Harassment in the Workplace

There has been a fairly substantial amount of research conducted on notions of professional dress, appearance, first impressions, discrimination and physical attractiveness in the workplace. The bulk of this research has been conducted from an American perspective, by American researchers and using American participants. Although Canada and the United States share many similarities in terms of culture and business, they are two distinct countries with different laws and social systems. Therefore, despite the growing amount of research being conducted on these topics, there is a significant need for Canadian research so that we may better understand these ideas and how to use them to our advantage as Canadians. In addition, much of this research has been conducted using male and female participants. While this provides a picture of the overall effect of clothing and first impressions on the working population, it can be argued that, because men and women are held to completely different standards in terms of appearance (Warkander 2014; Hewlett 2012), more studies need to be done focusing solely on females in a workplace setting.

When looking at the history of women in the corporate workplace within a Western context, it is clear that much has changed over the past hundred years, and women have become a crucial and accepted part of the workforce. Despite this extraordinary progress, women are still subject to harassment, discrimination and stereotyping within corporate workplace settings, and gender equality still does not exist, contrary to popular belief. Why does this discrimination still exist? How are stereotypes formed and what negative impacts do they create? Why are women often the sole recipients of sexual harassment, and what role

does clothing play within these circumstances? How might we move forward from discrimination and stereotyping to create a more equitable corporate environment? These are all questions that will be addressed in this section in order to better understand the current corporate environment and how it may be changed and adapted to foster an equitable workplace atmosphere.

When references to stereotyping and discrimination are made in regards to the workplace, one typically need not pause to think about which gender is the one being stereotyped or discriminated against. Why is it that women, more often than not, are the ones being discriminated against. As mentioned in the previous section, perhaps it was, and still is, a defence mechanism put in place by male employees to protect against fears of women entering their “spheres,” and either taking over or disrupting the flow of business (Gregory 11). From the beginning through the mid-twentieth century, men were so concerned about women entering the corporate workplace that there was, for example, much effort put into separating men and women on the job. There were distinct, gendered spaces within the office, such as separate lunchrooms based on gender (Kwolek-Folland 123). This notion of separation persisted outside the confines of the private office as well, and into the more public, service spaces of many corporations. Men were often part of the public sphere of the business, and women part of the private (Kwolek-Folland 9). Some corporations in the early twentieth century, such as the Head Office of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in New York City, even went so far as to install separate elevators for men and women (Boyer 220). The same theme, separate gendered spaces, could be seen in Canadian business rhetoric as well. For instance, when faced with his first female employee in 1901, a bank manager recommended putting up a screen to hide her completely from public view (Boyer 220). Discrimination against minorities in the

corporate workplace, whether women, immigrants or homosexuals, is certainly not a new concept, however it seems that despite the recent changes within the corporate world, the increasing number of female employees within these settings, and our increasing acceptance of this change, an uneven presence of stereotyping and discrimination within this framework seems to persist. Despite a general sense that gender discrimination is ending, it is still alive and well, particularly within workplace settings (Gregory 2).

When discussing *appearance* and how it may lead to discrimination, it is hard to believe that this type of behaviour exists within a corporate, professional setting, yet it is still very rampant. Shockingly, in Canada, there is *no* law in place that prohibits an employer from *not* hiring a prospective employee due to their appearance alone (“Employees”). South of the border, there is only one state (Michigan), a small number of American cities, and a small number of countries that explicitly prohibit appearance discrimination in employment settings (Adamitis 196). One need only look to Abercrombie and Fitch to see that workplace discrimination based on appearance is still alive and well. Abercrombie and Fitch is an American apparel company that was founded in 1892. Over the course of its long, storied history, the corporate culture and goods offered have changed dramatically (Schlossberg). In its infancy, it was a destination for professional gear for the avid outdoorsman. Today, it is a destination for pre-teens and teenagers alike looking for often skimpy, casual apparel. The company has recently faced scrutiny for supposedly hiring only “beautiful” people and discriminating against less-attractive applicants. The unique aspect of this case is that Abercrombie and Fitch discriminates against both men and women, unlike in many cases where it is mostly, if not to-

tally, women being discriminated against. The fact of the matter is simply that workplace discrimination based on appearance is still alive and well, and in one way or another accepted and understood.

Abercrombie and Fitch is an apparel company, and as such is focused on aesthetics and appearance. However, in corporate settings the focus is typically not on the visual, so why are women being discriminated against, not only because of their gender, but because of their appearance? As discussed in the previous section, gender, appearance, and cognitive abilities are often intertwined which is why this type of discrimination is so problematic, especially in a setting where cognitive abilities are valued so highly. In addition, it is important to note that not only are women held to a stricter standard of appearance, but at the same time they are denied feedback on what those standards are (Hewlett 2). In fact, in a study conducted by the Center for Talent Innovation, researchers found that only 32% of female employees received feedback from a male superior on aspects of appearance, compared with 47% of males (Hewlett et al. 2). Still, women are expected to look their best, dress their best, and appear appropriate yet authoritative, feminine but not sexy. Women lack feedback on their appearance (and, in addition, on matters of executive presence which will be further explored) because employers are more often than not reluctant to comment on women's appearance: it invites the question as to why employers are looking in the first place (Hewlett 109). This creates an awkward and potentially dangerous dynamic. Direct feedback should be given from a direct superior, however given the tense gender climate in many office spaces, the last thing a male supervisor is going to do is tell his female employee that her blouse is cut too low, or that she should wear less, or more, makeup. Commenting on someone's appearance is never easy and can often be taken the wrong way. This problem is also amplified because "what a woman

wears is still a matter of greater moral concern than what a man wears. Evidence of this can be found in cases of sexual harassment at work” (Barnard 245). This begs the question: what exactly does discrimination mean?

4.1 What is Workplace Discrimination?

For quite some time the prevailing theory of discrimination focused on notions of discrimination as an outcome of antipathy. However these theories have been expanded upon, and some theorists (Heilman 1983; Dipboye 1985; Eagly and Karau 2002) have now come to recognize that “...it is not the negativity of gender stereotypes but their mismatch with desirable work roles that underlies biased workplace evaluations” (Heilman and Eagly 394). For instance, as Madeline Heilman and Alice Eagly point out, even positive attributes typically associated with women, such as niceness and warmth, are used against them in negative ways (394), in much the same way that clothing typically associated with what women wear in the workplace, and hence seen as traditional, feminine, and appropriate, is used against them (recall the quote from Fortune Magazine on women’s nylons, and other items such as stilettos which many women are required to wear in the office, but possess many negative connotations). Attributes such as niceness and warmth, for example, are usually not associated with what it takes to be in a managerial position; typically, masculine attributes such as competitiveness and self-confidence are associated with such. Essentially, discrimination occurs when a mismatch between a group stereotype (for example, women) and a job role (for example, manager or CEO) fosters negative performance expectations, in turn producing biased evaluations (Heilman and Eagly 393). In their research on gender stereotypes and discrimination in

the workplace, Heilman and Eagly do an excellent job of defining the relationship between the role of stereotypes in the workplace and state that it is their mismatch with desirable work roles that causes the problem (such as the stereotype of niceness typically attributed to women, and roles such as manager, which aren't typically attributed to characteristics such as niceness). Despite the fact that their work is placed within an American context and does not speak to discrimination based on *appearance*, but is focused solely on personality traits, it is still relevant to our exploration. As we have observed, personality traits and appearance traits are often grouped together, and therefore it is possible to generalize their findings, at least to some extent, when looking at appearance discrimination. For instance, overweight women are expected to be less intelligent, popular and outgoing than their "thinner" counterparts (Stephens, Hill and Hanson 143).

Workplace discrimination based on gender is most striking when observing the number of women, or lack thereof, who hold high-level positions in the corporate workplace. For instance, Forbes Magazine conducted a review of proxy statements of the 1000 largest U.S. industrial and service companies, which indicated that *less than one half of 1%* of the highest paid officers and directors were women (Heilman 877). Granted, this study is a few years old (1997), and much has changed since Forbes conducted this research, however, current numbers are not so different. For instance, women's representation on corporate boards is significantly lacking. Specifically, women represent less than 15% of corporate board members in the United States, Canada, Australia, and many European countries, and as low as 0.2% in some Asian countries (Terjesen and Singh 55). Catalyst, a Research and Strategy Development company focused on the corporate workplace, compiled a list of women CEO's at S&P (Standard and Poor's) 500 companies in the United States. There are *currently* 23 CEO positions held by

women, accounting for only 4.5% of CEO positions within these companies (“Women CEO’s”). Interestingly, there is a significant lack of data on CEO gender (Wolfers 533). Wolfers references the ExecuComp data (S&P’s objective executive compensation data), which tracks S&P 1500 firms from 1992-2004, and finds only 64 female CEOs compared with 4175 male CEOs; over this 15-year sample, a minute 1.3% of CEO-years were worked by women (Wolfers 533). In addition to their relative lack of presence at the top-tiers of corporations, women still do not get paid nearly the same amount as their male counterparts. For instance, in the United States men earn 24.1 percent higher base pay than women (Chamberlain 2), and in Ontario, Canada, men earn 26 percent more than women for equivalent work (Antonie et al. 465). Some theorists (Heilman 877) directly blame workplace discrimination on this large discrepancy. Once again, we must be cautious when analyzing these numbers – this is a mere snapshot of the field, and deals exclusively with American companies, and is therefore not completely generalizable to the state of the field in Canada. What it does show, nonetheless, is the significant lack of women in high-level positions in some of the world’s top companies. The question we must ask ourselves is why, and what can be done about it. It is arguable that discrimination, both based on gender and appearance, is partly to blame for this huge gender divide.

There are people who suggest that gender discrimination is warranted, meaning either women do not possess the necessary skills to be in top leadership roles or that they lack the motivation to reach the top (Heilman 878). Some believe that gender discrimination is in decline and that it is only a matter of time before women reach the top ranks in higher numbers. Proponents of this theory, called the Pipeline Theory (Heilman and Eagly 2008; Gregory

2003) believe that “women’s absence from the top levels of management is a natural consequence of them not having been in managerial positions long enough for the natural career progression to take hold (Heilman 877). There is no scientific evidence to support these claims however, indicating that any perceived differences in abilities and behaviours between men and women in managerial positions is more supposed than real (Heilman 878). Yet another theory of workplace discrimination involving gender is called the Rational Bias Theory. This theory suggests that employees may “rationally” choose to discriminate “as a consequence of particular attributional and instrumental conditions” (Trentham and Larwood 2), such as gender or appearance. The heart of this theory lies in external pressure: employees may feel that their superiors expect them to discriminate. This theory also involves the idea that business norms encourage discrimination, and compliance with these norms is essential to success. What these two theories hold in common is that they both blame others - in this case, superiors, and in the Pipeline Theory, the women themselves - and effectively disregard those who are actively discriminating.

4.2 What Are Sex Stereotypes?

What exactly are sex stereotypes and how do they instigate workplace discrimination? According to Heilman, a sex stereotype is “a set of attributes ascribed to a group and believed to characterize its individual members simply because they belong to that group” (879) and stereotypes often form the basis for discrimination. In terms of sex stereotypes in the workplace, clothing and image tend to significantly come into play. For instance, a colleague might think that a female employee wore a short skirt to use her sexuality to get ahead and will

therefore treat her with a lack of respect. Others question why women are seemingly “expected” to wear high heels and stilettos in the workplace in order to connote credibility, when there is ample evidence that they cause severe health effects (Linder 296; Wright 11, 13). Both of these items, the skirt and the stiletto, are part of a women’s corporate uniform, however they can easily be used against her by stereotyping her and portraying her as someone who is trying to use her sexuality to get ahead. Again we see the complicated relationship that women have with clothing; it can be used to help women advance in their careers and be a significant roadblock at the same time. The same can be said about the influence that *overall* appearance has on women in the workplace. Heather James, in her article entitled “If You Are Attractive and You Know It, Please Apply: Appearance Based Discrimination and Employers’ Discretion” states: “...several positive qualities such as happiness and success are associated with attractiveness” (637). We can therefore determine the significant impact that clothing and appearance can have on others. A presentable woman with a pretty face and well-put-together attire might be perceived as more competent than an average looking women in a drab suit – despite the fact that they may have exactly the same credentials (Forsyth 1990; Forsythe, Drake and Fox 1985; Riggio and Throckmorton 2006). Although attractiveness has its benefits (such as earning higher wages and perhaps securing the job in the first place), studies have indicated that attractive women are also more likely to be the subjects of harassment, traditional stereotypes and scrutiny, than unattractive women (Browne 100). One potential reason for this is that it is assumed that attractive women will marry and start a family, thereby subjecting them to traditional female stereotypes. Many scholars agree that appearance and beauty matters more in American society, and hence in business, than it ever has before (Mujtaba, 2010; Mahajan 2007; Corbett 2011). In theory, there may be nothing wrong

with that, however it unfortunately leads to appearance discrimination and sex stereotyping in the workplace. In fact, “employers often make hiring decisions based on the appearance and attractiveness of the job applicants” (Cavico, Muffler and Mutjaba 791; Riggio and Throckmorton 2006; Rooth 2006; Shannon and Stark 2003).

There is, actually a financial consequence of hiring attractive personnel. According to Daniel Hamermesh, an economist at the University of Texas and author of *Beauty Pays: Why Attractive People Are More Successful*, “over a lifetime and assuming today’s mean wages, ‘attractive’ American workers on average make \$230,000 more than their very plain-looking co-workers” (47). This leads us to the inevitable: hiring for aesthetic purposes can thus be considered a business strategy for success in this highly competitive marketplace. There is concrete evidence that employers will hire based on looks alone (recall Abercrombie and Fitch). A study conducted by Dan-Olof Rooth entitled “Obesity, Attractiveness, and Differential Treatment in Hiring” explored the differential treatment in the hiring of obese individuals in the Swedish labour market. The research discovered that the participants who were sent to a mock interview with a weight-manipulated photo had a lower callback response than those who did not use a weight-manipulated photo (Rooth 710). Specifically, the numbers were 6% lower for men, and 8% lower for females (Rooth 710). The difference between the numbers for males and females is significant, although not surprising. The effect of physical appearance in this case, as it relates to weight, had more of an effect on the female applicants than the male applicants, showing that the effect of appearance for women is stronger than the effect of appearance as it relates to men. Although this study focuses on aspects of appearance that

are not discussed in this paper (weight), it is still nonetheless eye-opening and worthy of consideration. Weight affects appearance, and appearance affects the likelihood of getting hired, more so for women than men.

How does being perceived (both by self and others) as a minority in the workplace affect women's thoughts, feelings and experiences in the workplace? What are the effects of discrimination based on gender and appearance? Kanter, a proponent of gender-neutral theory, explains that the negative experience that women have on the job, with an emphasis on not reaching gender equality, is due to their "token" status (209). Supporters of this theory believe that as the number of females in the workplace increases, their situations will improve greatly, and, in theory, this makes sense. However, Kanter wrote her book, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, in 1977; since then, many more women have entered the corporate world, yet these same problems still seem to persist. In addition, research since then has found no evidence of a causal link between the number of women in office and subsequent occupational consequences (Zimmer 64). Lynn Zimmer states: "simply because of their obvious contrast to dominants, tokens are highly visible and intensely scrutinized by others" (66), once again exhibiting the microscope effect that women have to endure on a daily basis. This is also a good example of why appearance management and dressing professionally and appropriately for the job can have either positive, or detrimental effects.

The history of women entering the corporate workplace is wrought with struggles surrounding gender and appearance discrimination. Gender discrimination, appearance discrimination and sex stereotypes are still rampant within today's corporate culture. Women face the brunt of this discrimination for a number of reasons. Firstly, women's appearance is held to

impeccably high standards, much higher than men's. In fact, the objectification of women's appearance is currently so ingrained in Western culture that the relationship that women have with fashion is, in a sense, fetishistic in nature (Gamman and Makinen 61). According to the authors: "Modern women often see themselves in fragments – a good pair of legs, tits or eyes, etc. Some women get fixated on emphasizing their lips (by constantly putting on lipstick) or maintaining impractical ultra-long varnished nails at the expense of free movement" (61). Here, Gamman and Makinen reference the "modern" woman, which suggests the contemporary working woman, and how, like in the past, women's appearance and the way they engage with it actually serves to hinder their movements (recall the corset and hobble skirt). The authors go on to state that this behaviour, this obsession with aspects of women's appearance, can be linked to the overall effect of the objectification of the female form. In this sense, women and their bodies have become commodities. Secondly, hiring someone with an attractive appearance, especially as it relates to females, can be considered a smart business move. Thirdly, women lack feedback on their appearance from their superiors, further perpetuating the problem and creating a negative feedback loop. Lastly, appearance and cognitive abilities are often connected. Based on what has been discussed so far, this connection perhaps seems out of place and misguided, however there *is* a connection between clothing and cognition, which will be further examined in the next section. This link is important as it can serve as an explanation as to why women's cognitive abilities are often tied to their appearance, as well as providing evidence of the importance of appearance and clothing as it relates to a corporate, or business, environment.

5. The Importance of Clothing Behaviourally and Cognitively

Just as first impressions can have significant consequences, clothing can *as well*, both on the wearer and the observer. Many people do not fully grasp the effect that the clothing they choose to wear has on others, as well as themselves. A prime example of this is the very popular saying: “never judge a book by its cover,” or even: “there is more to them than meets the eye.” While these sayings hold true to some extent, they are a testament to societies’ deep and unrelenting desire not to immediately take into account outside appearances as they may relate to an individual’s intelligence, personality or behaviours. While there likely *is* more to someone than meets the eye, the information we glean from observing someone cannot, and should not, go unnoticed. There are a few reasons for this. Firstly, there have been many studies conducted that indicate the cognitive effects of clothing on the wearer, where clothing effectively alters the wearer’s cognitive processing (Adam and Galinsky 2012; Slepian et al. 2015). Secondly, there is scientific evidence that what one is wearing affects how others they encounter will subsequently treat them (Harris et al. 1983; Bickman 1974; Tracy Morris et al. 1996); this, of course, is linked to first impressions. William Thourlby, an American writer and actor, states that we can, in effect, control the way others treat us, simply by controlling our own appearance (20). This is certainly a bold statement, but one that is, as will become clear, a matter of fact.

An excellent example of the very real way clothing can affect cognition is a well-known study within the field of psychology, entitled “Enclothed Cognition” and conducted by Hajo Adam and Adam Galinsky. This study effectively depicts direct cognitive effects of wearing different items of clothing during specific mental tasks. According to the researchers, “Enclothed cognition involves the co-occurrence of two independent factors: the symbolic meanings of

the clothes *and* the physical experience of wearing them” (Adam and Galinsky 2). The authors argue that similar to physical experiences, the experience of wearing clothes “triggers associated abstract concepts and their symbolic meanings” (Adam and Galinsky 2). Specifically, the research focused on the cognitive effects of wearing a lab coat, such as a doctor’s coat (which is associated with attentiveness and carefulness) versus wearing a painter’s coat (which is not associated with the same characteristics as a doctor’s coat). In point of fact, it was the exact same coat, but presented and labeled differently to participants. Participants were either instructed to wear the “doctor’s” coat or the “painter’s” coat and complete the same tasks. Researchers predicted that wearing the “doctor’s” coat would increase performance on attention-related tasks. Through a total of three different experiments, and by manipulating the lab coat and representing it as either a “painter’s” coat or a “doctor’s” coat, the evidence clearly showed that the influence of clothing depended on both whether the clothes were physically worn *and* their symbolic meaning. Results indicated that only when the coat was physically worn *and* associated with a “doctors” coat did participants experience sustained attention on multiple tasks. The study is based on the theory that cognition can be influenced by outside factors, such as physical experiences, and results of this study support this. The “Encloded Cognition” study is comprehensive and thorough, and the researchers conducted three separate experiments to account for possible confounding variables. It could be argued, however, that a lab coat is a very symbolic article of clothing. Would the effect have been the same if more traditional clothing had been used? Is this study applicable to our day-to-day lives?

The answer to the above questions appears to be “yes.” Research conducted by Michael Slepian, Simon Ferber, Joshua Gold and Abraham Rutchick, entitled “The Cognitive Consequences of Formal Clothing,” explores the relationship between wearing formal clothing and

different mental capabilities, and specifically, abstract cognitive processing. Not only does clothing influence impressions formed by others about oneself, but it is also responsible for influencing cognition on a broad scale, “impacting the processing style that changes how objects, people, and events are construed” (Slepian et al. 661). The researchers conducted a total of five experiments, manipulating the sample, the clothing worn, and the tests given to participants. Their third study, which manipulated clothing formality by having participants change into either formal or casual clothing, demonstrated that wearing formal clothing increased the extent to which participants exhibited abstract processing, which is regarded as a higher form of cognitive processing. Essentially, the researchers showed a *causal link* between wearing formal clothing and the ability to achieve abstract processing capabilities. In addition, and of great significance, wearing formal clothing lead to more “felt power” for participants. It is important, of course, to acknowledge the definition of “formal clothing” and what that entailed for the researchers. The researchers asked participants to bring two outfits with them, the formal one being explained as “something you would wear to a job interview,” versus casual “clothing you might wear to class” (663). Needless to say, this is a fairly broad categorization, however it is safe to assume that “something you would wear to a job interview” might include some type of suit for men, and either pants or skirt for women, a blouse, and perhaps some form of jacket. In this sense, and if this is the case, the clothing worn by participants reflects nicely the clothing often worn in corporate workplace settings. Of course, this is a generalization, and all workplaces differ, but this could be considered a variation on the “corporate uniform.” This study has real-world implications directly applicable to women in corporate settings. Not only does it imply a significant link between wearing formal clothing and the

ability to perform well (or better, or smarter) at the job in question, but it might serve to positively impact the way women deal with potential negative discrimination and harassment at work. Essentially, wearing formal clothing could potentially help equip a female with cognitive tools to better mentally cope with this kind of gendered discrimination, and lead her to being able to respond to this type of discrimination in more effective ways.

Another study conducted by Harris et al. in 1983 further shows the striking effects of formal clothing as it relates to female wearers. The study itself was conducted in a mall and involved analyzing participants' reactions to being approached by graduate students who asked them to fill out a questionnaire (which consisted of photographs of women in these various outfits) wearing either a formal skirt outfit, a formal pants outfit, a casual skirt outfit, a casual pants outfit, or jeans and a T-shirt. Overall results of this study were significant: a picture of a woman shown to participants was perceived as most happy, successful, feminine, interesting, attractive, intelligent and desirable as a friend when she was wearing the formal skirt suit, and least so in the jeans and T-shirt. The authors state that clothing does communicate something about the wearer, but may only influence behavior toward her (this study deals with only females) in the absence of other information about her status or role (Harris et al. 88). This statement alone has significant implications for scenarios such as job interviews, where very little is known about the interviewee. Analyzing the results of this study shows that, everything else being constant, different dress styles communicate different things about their wearer, such as status (Harris et al. 96). The authors even go so far as to say that: "...women who wish to be viewed as successful might be well advised to wear the dress styles suggested for women executives" (Harris et al. 95). These "suggested" styles that the

authors speak of are those put forth by John T. Malloy (discussed previously), and include primarily the skirt suit. This is an interesting concept that should be unpacked further. It is suggested that the most powerful “look” for a woman in the corporate world is a skirt suit, which undoubtedly incorporates a very gendered article of clothing, the skirt. Women have been wearing pants regularly for about a century, and the practice was a marker for women’s liberation, especially on the fashion front. It is understood that times have changed, and women can now wear what they want. This poses the question then, of why it is a *skirt*, and not pants, that is suggested to women in the corporate world. As will be discussed in the following section, in a study conducted by Mary Forsythe (1990), more masculine clothing was favored for a female wearer during a job interview. There is therefore contradictory evidence being put forth. There are a few ways of looking at this: firstly, it could be indicative of a preference for women to adopt both feminine and masculine modes of attire in the office: masculine to connote male stereotypes such as strong and ambitious and feminine to connote positive female stereotypes such as niceness and warmth. Secondly, it is possible that the encouragement of the skirt (as opposed to more masculine clothing which has been shown to be more favorable in certain situations) is in fact an attempt to create a symbolic reminder of women’s “different” gender, which would encourage and lead to discrimination within the workplace. For instance, the modern-day pencil skirt is often very slim and constricting at the knees, and bears some resemblance to the hobble skirt by Poiret. Is this a way to slow women down, literally and metaphorically, in the office?

Another example of the connection between our cognition and clothing is a study conducted by Leonard Bickman entitled “The Social Power of the Uniform,” in which strangers on the street were approached by someone dressed as either a civilian, a milkman, or a security

guard, and asked to complete a task such as picking up a paper bag, giving a dime to a stranger or moving away from a bus stop. The researchers found much greater compliance from strangers when requests were made by individuals dressed in a high-authority uniform (the security guard uniform) over requests by individuals in a low-authority uniform, or civilian clothing. This may seem evident, however security guards do not typically ask strangers to give a dime to other strangers, or to move away from a bus stop. These were *out-of-role* requests being made, and the implications of this are striking: "It is likely that the degree to which a person will comply with orders is partially determined by the characteristics of the person who gives the orders. One way to identify those individuals who possess authority is by their attire" (Bickman 47). Results of this study suggest that we respond differently to people based on what they are wearing. This phenomenon surely translates into a corporate setting, suggesting that one could take charge, to some extent, of how others respond to them simply based on what they are wearing.

In a study somewhat more closely tied to a corporate atmosphere, authors Tracy Morris et al. examined three dress conditions (formal professional, casual professional and casual) and their effects of students' perceptions of college teachers. The study took place in an introductory psychology course at West Virginia University, where four graduate students (two male and two female, of similar build, attractiveness and age) were trained as associates in the study. Results of this study were clear: more formal dress (such as business suits and dress shoes) was associated with increased ratings of instructor competence, especially with regards to ratings made by female students about female instructors. In fact, perceptions of competence *decreased* as attire became more casual. Perceptions of competence, when someone is in a position of authority, holds extreme value. In fact, Leathers (1992) explains that

communicators who dress in such a way as to meet the expectations of the people with whom they may be interacting with will be seen as more competent, as well as better liked. It is clear that the articles of clothing - aspects of nonverbal communication - that one decides to wear greatly impacts how one is perceived, and context is a big part of that perception (Thourlby 34).

There is no doubt about the power of non-verbal communication; one need only look at the power of first impressions and appearance to see these effects. Dr. Dana Carney, Amy Cuddy and Andy Yap, from Harvard University, wanted take things further, and see if, similar to the effects of wearing formal clothing on cognition, the *body* could affect cognition. The researchers predicted that posing in high-power nonverbal displays (as opposed to low-power nonverbal displays) would cause neuroendocrine and behavioural changes for both male and female participants. One of the two high-power poses used in the study involved someone sitting in a chair, with their legs crossed and outstretched up on the desk in front of them, and hands back behind their head, almost in a relaxed, but authoritative, position. The second high-power pose involved the person standing up in front of a desk, with one leg in front of the other, and both hands placed firmly on the desk. One of the two low-power poses involved the person sitting in a chair, with their head tilted downward and hands placed in their lap, with one hand covering the other in a fist position. The second low-power pose involved the person standing upright, legs crossed tightly and with their arms giving themselves a hug. The authors measured fundamental features of having power: namely, feelings of power, elevation of the dominance hormone testosterone, lowering of the stress hormone cortisol, and an increased tolerance for risk. Participants who posed in high power poses experienced a decrease in cortisol, and an increase in testosterone. The reverse was also true; those who posed

in low-power poses showed a decrease in testosterone and an increase in cortisol. The impact of feeling powerful should not go unnoticed: “Power determines greater access to resources, higher levels of agency and control over a person’s own body, mind and positive feelings, and enhanced cognitive function” (Carney, Cuddy and Yap 1365). It is worth noting briefly that some aspect of high power posing (for example, adopting a wide-legged stance or even either of the power-poses adopted here) are dependent on the individual’s physicality, which includes clothing worn. It is arguable that if a woman is wearing a slim fitting pencil skirt, which is typically what is suggested of her to wear (recall Malloy), that might make these poses more difficult, if not impossible. There are surely ways to get around this, as a woman could adopt a different type of power-pose, however it still points to potential issues with regards to what women are expected to wear and the consequences and constraints of wearing that specific clothing.

Although this research looks at the body itself, it can be related back to the work conducted by Slepian et al. (2015) with regards to notions of felt power. In addition, another similarity between the two studies is illustrated by the following quote: “By changing physical posture, an individual prepared his or her mental and physiological systems to endure difficult and stressful situations, and perhaps to actually improve confidence and performance in situations such as interviewing for jobs, speaking in public, disagreeing with a boss, or taking potentially profitable risks” (Carney, Cuddy and Yap 1367). It is safe to say that feelings of power may also equip a person to deal with negative social interactions at work, namely gender discrimination and stereotyping. Despite this study having no tangible link to clothing and appearance, it speaks to the effectiveness and implications of outside stimuli affecting one’s cognitive abilities, the sheer power of *feeling powerful*, as well as possible positive impacts of

possessing executive presence. Taken together (power posing and formal clothing), these two aspects of non-verbal communication can effectively work together to foster confidence, decisiveness and feelings of power and authority.

6. The Importance of First Impressions and Professional Dress

The effects of clothing and appearance in corporate settings can be seen in the very early stages of the first interview. A leading researcher and writer in the field, Sandra Forsythe, has conducted a number of studies which look at the effects of appearance, clothing, and attractiveness on the outcome of job interviews. In her 1990 study entitled “Effect of Applicant’s Clothing on Interviewer’s Decision to Hire,” Forsythe examines the extent to which an applicant’s clothing influenced interviewer’s perceptions of management characteristics and decisions to hire women for management positions. Forsythe, unlike many other scholars, focuses solely on female applicants, giving us a better idea of how they are directly affected as a cohort. Forsythe found that the more masculine an applicant’s dress was, the more they received favorable hiring recommendations. This can be related back to Warkander (2014) and his notion that feminine apparel connotes social mobility instead of stability (like a man’s suit might). In addition, clothing masculinity was found to be a significant predictor in the perception of all the management characteristics examined. This is a great example of how appearance can lead to others making judgments about a person’s abilities or personality traits which have nothing to do with their appearance, such as their ability to manage adequately. In a similar study conducted by Sandra Forsythe, Mary Drake and Charles Fox, researchers looked at the effect of female applicants’ dress on interviewers’ decisions to hire, specifically

for management positions. The authors state: "...during an employment interview, appearance is an important source of information because information about an applicant is limited" (Forsythe, Drake and Fox 374). What the author is suggesting is that appearance and clothing are forms of nonverbal communication, and influential ones at that.

Kim Johnson and Mary Roach-Higgins conducted similar research in 1987. Their research, entitled "Dress and Physical Attractiveness of Women in Job Interviews," also looked at the combined influence of physical attractiveness and dress on impressions made by both male and female hiring agents about the personality characteristics of females applying for either male- or female-dominated jobs. Again, the researchers were examining the role that clothing and appearance played on notions of personality characteristics, and personal abilities (such as being an effective leader). The results of this study indicate that the dress of the applicant exerted a consistent influence on the subjects' ratings of the participants. The most significant result of this study is that *dress*, as opposed to *physical attractiveness* or the sex-typing of the job position, had the most influence on hiring agents' impressions of the personality of the job applicant (6). This suggests that a female can use clothing to her advantage, and counteract negative impressions of her ability simply by *wearing the right clothing*.

Other scholars (Riggio and Throckmorton 2006; Shannon and Stark 2003) have more recently replicated these trends in the research. These studies continue to show that appearance – clothing worn and grooming capabilities – has significant effects on the perception of both an applicant's capabilities to successfully work in the position in question (often in these studies, this *is not* specified, which in a way is slightly problematic), as well as the applicant's personality characteristics. What these studies do not show, however, is whether or not these

“judges” (those that determine the participants’ personality characteristics based on their appearance) are right. It would be interesting, and useful, to compare and contrast what others believe to be participants’ personality characteristics, and their actual personality characteristics.

The significance of first impressions as they relate to clothing does not stop in an interview setting. Research by Chris Shao, Julie Baker and Judy Wagner shows the significance of the appropriateness of employee uniforms on customers’ expectations of a company, as well as their purchasing intention. The authors of this study found that not only are “customers likely to judge service employees themselves by their dress, but customers are also likely to use contact employee dress as cues to the quality of the service firm itself” (1172). Findings also indicate that “the effect of appropriateness of dress on expectations of service quality and purchase intent was stronger for females than for males” (1172), echoing other scholars who have indicated that appearance and clothing affect females differently than males (Davis 1992; Entwistle 1997; Sapir 1949; Roach and Eicher 1979; Wolf 1991). Needless to say, this research focused on uniforms in relation to appearance and impression formation, and the results of this study are therefore not generally applicable to the majority of corporate settings (at least in terms of the corporate world this paper is investigating). However, what is noteworthy is the effect that appearance and clothing can have on potential customers and clients. The importance of dressing professionally and in line with the brand of the company in question not only has direct implications for the status of the employee, but will also affect how business is conducted with outsiders.

How do first impressions fit in to these findings, apart from the obvious? According to Lennon and Miller (1984), “...typically, in real life encounters, first impressions are often

formed on the basis of physical appearance” (1). The authors examine how diverse pieces of information are integrated in person perception, or impression formation. It has been argued (Riggio and Throckmorton 2006; Shannon and Stark 2003; Johnson and Roach-Higgins 1987; Forsythe 1990; Forsythe, Drake and Fox 1985; Stephens, Hill and Hanson 1994) that physical appearance affects trait judgments and it is also known that the traits attributed to a person, such as in a mock interview setting, affect first impressions of that person. Thus, according to Sharron Lennon and Franklin Miller: “...physical appearance may affect first impressions by virtue of the fact people assign traits on the basis of physical appearance cues” (2). Overall, the researcher’s hypothesis was correct, and results show that under certain circumstances, the influence of any one physical appearance cue on first impressions will be altered by the presence or absence of other such cues. Implications of the study suggest the importance of *cohesion* in a person’s total “look;” given the presence of conflicting cues, negative first impressions are likely to form. For instance, it would be detrimental for a female to be dressed in a professional business outfit at work, and then to wear an over-the-top, goofy hairband.

But what exactly is a first impression? It is imperative to define what it is and how it works in order to put these results into context. A first impression involves the lightning-quick formation of thoughts and feelings of someone else based on nothing more than visual cues of that person. For example, it is said that people not only form global impressions but specific trait impressions simply based on the structure of the face (Willis and Todorov 592). Specifically, one trait that is highly influenced by this phenomenon is that of *competence*. In a very informative study conducted by Janine Willis and Alexander Todorov entitled “First Impressions: Making Up Your Mind After a 100-Ms Exposure to a Face,” the researchers con-

ducted five experiments, each focusing on a different judgment from facial appearance: attractiveness, likeability, competence, trustworthiness and aggressiveness (attractiveness being the only one that is related to facial appearance). Pictures of unfamiliar faces were presented for 100-milliseconds, 500-milliseconds or 1000-milliseconds. Next, participants were asked to make a trait judgment and subsequently express their confidence in that judgment. The results of the study clearly indicate that even after a mere 100-millisecond exposure to a face, trait judgments were highly correlated with judgments made in the absence of time constraints (596). Notably, the correlation for judgments of trustworthiness was the highest. This has direct implications with regards to first impression formation in a workplace setting, especially in a hiring setting. An interviewer will be more inclined to hire someone they believe they can trust. Granted, this study was based on notions of facial features, however it is arguable that the same theory could be applied to notions of first impressions formed on the basis of clothing, grooming, and general appearance.

By reviewing existing research on the history of women in the corporate workplace, first impressions, clothing and its effects on the mind and body, and stereotyping and discrimination in the workplace, it is clear that there are many factors that interact to create either favorable or unfavorable experiences for females in the workplace. Women are held to impossibly high standards of appearance and are meant to walk a fine line between notions of feminine yet appropriate, powerful yet non-threatening dress. Not only do they have to navigate this problematic fashion system, but generally, they are required to do so alone – very rarely will women receive feedback (either from women or men) on their appearance as it might be seen as inappropriate or rude. Many women are therefore forced to seek out some type of “image consulting” service to help them “construct” an appropriate business wardrobe

(Entwistle 322). Successfully managing one's appearance, or brand, in the workplace can mean the difference between success and failure, promotion or no promotion. As Thourlby suggests, you will only be promoted to a job you look like you belong in (53). Appearance, in this sense, isn't limited to the clothing one wears - it encapsulates grooming, attitude, and presence. Clearly, the task of managing one's appearance is not an easy one, and requires much hard work, dedication, and, most importantly, a thorough understanding of the importance of first impressions, appearance, and executive presence in the workplace. In the closing section, the notion of executive presence will be analyzed more thoroughly and applied to the concepts of first impressions, women in the workplace and appearance.

7. Executive Presence and its Impact on Women in Business

Within the last twenty to thirty years, corporations and high-level executives have known about executive presence and have been using the term since, however no one truly knew what it meant or encompassed. It was used as a type of umbrella term to describe someone with not only the technical skills to succeed, but the interpersonal skills as well. It was recorded in academic literature as early as 1983 (Kaufman and Fetter), although even then it was not clearly defined (205). In 2012, Sylvia Ann Hewlett, an economist from the United States and founder of the Center for Talent Innovation, sought to figure out exactly what executive presence meant to corporations and executives alike. It had become increasingly clear that leadership ability alone was not enough to effect promotions to the executive suite. This is where executive presence comes in.

In order to measure executive presence, Hewlett and her team at the Center for Talent Innovation surveyed close to 4,000 college-graduate professionals in large corporations to

find out what executive presence meant to them. According to results of the study, executive presence accounted for 26 percent of “what it takes to get the next promotion” (Hewlett et al. 1). But what exactly does it consist of? Hewlett and her team recognized that there are in fact three distinct pillars of executive presence: appearance, communication and gravitas. Additional findings from the study revealed how these elements all work together to create the aura of authority that sets leaders apart. According to Hewlett: “Presence alone won’t get you promoted [...] but its absence will impede your progress, especially if you’re female or a person of colour” (1). This statement alone indicates the sheer importance of executive presence when it comes to women in business. In addition, it has been shown that women are at a disadvantage (in the accounting business, at least) within the male-managerial model, also synonymous with notions of executive presence (Kaufman and Fetter 205).

7.1 Pillars of Executive Presence

Each pillar of executive presence will be dissected more thoroughly here and applied to notions covered previously with regards to the difficulties women face in business settings, such as stereotypes, discrimination, and creating favorable first impressions. Hewlett’s examination of executive presence will be the focus of this analysis, as it is the most comprehensive study conducted on the matter to date. In addition, scholars have begun to use her findings as a trusted analysis of executive presence (Shirey 2013; Service and Reburn 2014; Beeson and Valerio 2012). In addition, much of the research conducted by Hewlett and her team focusses on minorities and marginalized individuals in the workplace, such as women, LGBT communities and veterans. For instance, sixteen of just over 50 publications listed on the Center for

Talent Innovation address accelerating women in the corporate workplace, some of which have been published in scientific journals, such as the Harvard Law Review. Also, in the 1983 study conducted by Debra Kaufman and Michael Fetter, many of the “components” of executive presence that they named have been replicated in Hewlett’s research. It is clear that Hewlett, despite her work not being considered formally academic, should be considered a trusted source on notions of executive presence and how it affects women in the corporate workplace.

i. Gravitas

Gravitas was found to be the core characteristic of executive presence, according to 67 percent of executives surveyed. Gravitas involves six specific behaviours. Firstly, and most importantly, exuding grace under fire is a true testament that an individual possesses gravitas. Acting decisively and showing integrity fall closely behind (also discussed as a large component of executive presence in the Kaufman and Fetter (1983) study). Next, demonstrating emotional intelligence is seen as a contributor to executive presence. Finally, burnishing reputation and projecting vision (mentioned in the Kaufman and Fetter (1983) study as ambition/dedication) come in last, with approximately 50 percent of executives saying it contributes to both men and women’s executive presence. Gravitas, based merely on its breakdown here, can be thought of as a core characteristic of leadership potential, which has been looked at by other scholars as a notion of executive presence (Shirey 2013; Service and Reburn 2014; Beeson and Valerio 2012; Kaufman and Fetter 1983). The most significant part of gravitas, exuding confidence and grace under fire, can be directly applied to results previously discussed

involving the effects of clothing cognitively and behaviourally. As has been discussed (Slepian et al. 2015), for example, clothing can have a direct influence on levels of confidence and felt power. Therefore, if clothing is used properly, it can effectively serve to enhance one's confidence, and thus one's executive presence. In terms of how this may affect women, there is an inherent assumption that women are less capable of coping with crises than men (Kaufman and Fetter 204), indicating a potential lack of gravitas found amongst women.

ii. Communication

Communication was acknowledged by 28 percent of senior executives as indicative of leadership material. Part of this pillar of communication involves nonverbal communication. Hewlett and her associates found that great speaking skills, the ability to command a room and the ability to read an audience were all important aspects of communication. One element that creates a great public speaker is confidence, a core executive presence trait that was acknowledged in the Kaufman and Fetter (1983) study. As discussed, appearance is another non-verbal aspect of communication and thus by nature belongs in this pillar as well. Kaufman and Fetter also found that "the maintenance of a cool, competent image" is linked to possessing executive presence (206). The first two aspects of communication, strong speaking skills and the ability to command a room, can both be influenced by how we choose to present ourselves, even down to our posture (Carney, Cuddy and Yap 2010). As discussed in the previous section, wearing formal clothing can enhance abstract processing (Slepian et al. 2015), potentially allowing someone to work a room with more confidence and poise. In addition, we

have seen that the clothing one wears can lead a person to feel more powerful, and hence more confident, allowing them to perform better when speaking in public.

iii. Appearance

While appearance is the least important pillar, with only 5 percent of executives stating it was an important aspect of executive presence, it counts, as Hewlett points out, as a filter “through which your communication skills and gravitas become more apparent” (2). This can also be linked back to the Kaufman and Fetter study (1983) which found that the projection of a competent image was essential to executive presence (206).

The breakdown of appearance is as follows in order of pertinence: good grooming and physical attractiveness, respectively. It is worth noting that physical attractiveness was found to be 2 percent more important for females than males, highlighting a significant, albeit small, difference in the importance of appearance with regards to men and women, and further highlighting women’s special relationship with appearance. Despite the fact that it is the least important pillar, leaders recognize its potential for hindering progress up the corporate ladder. Some appearance blunders include unkempt attire (specifically, and of significance, 83 percent say it detracts from a woman’s executive presence, and only 76 percent say it detracts from a man’s), and for women specifically, too-tight provocative clothing.

According to both Hewlett and other scholars (Kaufman and Fetter 1983), women have difficulty possessing and projecting executive presence, at least more difficulty than men. For

instance, 43 percent of respondents in the Kaufman and Fetter (1983) study perceived differences between men and women with regards to executive presence, and a staggering 85 percent thought that women lacked executive presence (206). According to findings of the Hewlett study, there is an inherent tension between conforming to corporate culture, and being true to oneself. As mentioned previously, women are held to stricter standards of appearance, yet are denied feedback on their appearance. This factor alone inevitably leads to feedback on executive presence that is contradictory, if existent at all. This may play into why a staggering 81 percent of women and people of colour say they are unclear how to act on it (Hewlett 2). It is clear that there is a need, then, for women to increase and enhance their executive presence.

8. Conclusion

While significant progress has been made with regards to gender diversity within corporate settings, the evidence suggests that there is still a long way to go before gender equity within this environment is achieved. North American society is once again in the midst of experiencing a shifting gender atmosphere: women's issues are being discussed in the media, more women are filling CEO positions, and certain branches of feminism are becoming more and more accepted and embraced by both sexes. Yet, despite this progress, there are still a number of unanswered questions, including why women are continually discriminated against in workplace settings, and why there is still a significant lack of females present within upper management levels. In order to better understand women's complicated relationship with appearance and subsequently address these questions, more research needs to be done

that focuses specifically on women and discrimination as it relates to appearance. In addition, the bulk of the research that currently exists on these topics has been conducted from an American perspective. Despite the similarities between American and Canadian culture, including corporate culture, they are two distinct countries with distinct morals and values, and hence research conducted in Canada would be extremely beneficial in terms of providing a state of the field within Canadian corporations. Lastly, based on the fact that executive presence seems to be of increasing importance within the corporate world, more academic research on its implications is necessary, and would help to measure its effect even further.

There are a few clear takeaways, however, which should not be ignored. Firstly, as the evidence suggests, appearance and clothing can impact how a person behaves, and also how others respond to them. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge the importance of appearance, especially within a workplace setting, and especially with regards to women who face a number of gendered issues within this environment. Secondly, it is clear that there are *significant* double-standards that women face daily, such as the suggestion by professionals like John T. Malloy that women wear a skirt suit at work as it connotes respectability and authority while studies indicate the opposite, that women who wear more “masculine” clothing are viewed as more competent and able to hold a certain position more successfully. Another double-standard that women face is the importance placed on appearance, and expectations that women present themselves in a certain way, however women more often than not lack constructive and appropriate feedback on their appearance. A third duality that exists is the often-favorable treatment that attractive women receive (such as in hiring situations as well as income earned), but also the potential for a higher rate of stereotyping that is sometimes directed towards more attractive women (Browne 100). The relationship between appearance

and stereotyping is clearly not a simplistic one. For instance, the evidence suggests that among different environments within the same occupational role, a woman could be both favored for her “successful” image, and punished for it. These dualities and double-standards alone present significant roadblocks for women within corporate settings. The evidence suggests that one way to overcome, or deal with, these double-standards is an increase in the possession of executive presence, which women are perceived as possessing less than their male counterparts. An increase in executive presence for women might mean a better understanding of appearance and how it affects them, which in turn could lead to an increase in confidence, decision-making skills and communication skills, which in turn would denote a higher level executive presence, creating, for the first time, a *positive* feedback loop. It is clear then that aspects of executive presence and how it can affect success in the workplace, should not go unnoticed, and is certainly deserving of more thorough investigations.

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