

Dress code in the Mauritian Working Environment: Defeminising Executive Women

Aansa D. Bedacee*

Today's emancipated women are educated and are occupying senior positions in the professional world. However, it does not necessarily mean that there is gender equality at the work place. The meaning of gender equality does not stop at providing equal rights legislation, but it goes further. A deeper look provides us with a more accurate status of the executive women.

Even though, women in the 21st century have proved their capacity as executives in the working environment, we think of an "executive" as a man because in the collective mind, feminine characteristics are still perceived as inferior for the workplace. "Female is by virtue a certain lack of quality" (Beauvoir, 1949) linked with weakness, passivity, fragility, emotion and beauty. This has resulted into an implicit defeminisation of the executive women.

The purpose of this paper is to sensitise people on implicit gender inequalities prevailing in today's working environment and to change sexist perceptions. This paper probes into the realities of the corporate world to understand the process of perpetuating the masculinisation of the executive image through the defeminisation of women.

INTRODUCTION

Thousands of years ago, when people started covering their body to protect themselves, they demarcated themselves from animals. Human beings are the only living creatures to use clothes and today, clothing has become so indispensable that the contemporary society cannot function without clothes. At present, clothing is not merely worn for protection, but it has many other meanings attached to it. Apart from differentiating males from females, clothing reveals the status of the wearer and its association with a particular culture/society or group.

With time, as people evolved, the function and interpretation of clothing became more and more complex. A survey was conducted among 85 participants and the subjects were asked to determine the importance of clothing. It was found that for 47% of the subjects, clothing represented a way to express their inner self, compared to 32% who associated clothing to comfort. The remaining

21% of participants said that clothing is linked to their looks or the way they want to be perceived. Therefore, it can be said that clothing has a far deeper meaning than simply covering and protecting the body.

The subject of women's clothing can be considered as unimportant, but it is an undeniable fact that women's clothing has always reflected their role and status in society. For example, in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the life of women was mainly restricted to the household and their participation in the corporate world was almost inexistent, their dress style was more complex than functional. They were wearing several layers of clothing. The opening of the drapery-parted skirt which they wore revealed an underskirt or a petticoat. Their dressing style laid emphasis on dilated hips and the corseted waist. Such clothing inevitably brought along an extreme restriction of mobility. However, with the advent of feminist movements and with the emancipation of women, fashion designs evolved and allowed more freedom of actions for women.

When women were fighting for their rights in the 1960's, a symbolic 'bra-burning' incident was reported by the 'New York Times' on 8 September 1968. It was a way for women to say that they do not accept oppression and that they are equal to men. As such, clothing was once again associated to the emancipation of women.

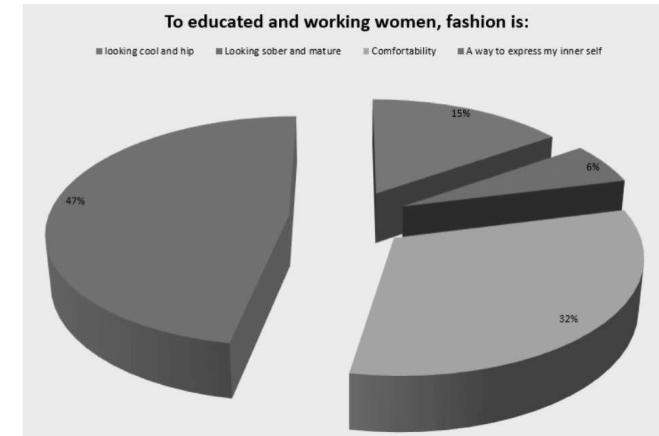


Figure 1: The importance of clothing

Eventually, the 'garçonne' look was created for women with the intention to give authority and power to women. As a result, contrary to past centuries, nowadays, nobody is shocked to see women wearing pants and suits, carrying a suit case and going to the office. Yet, in her research entitled "The working wardrobe: Perceptions of Women's clothing at work", Sue Gerrard (2005) wrote: "Research on clothing at work is significant by its absence in the organizational psychology literature (Rafaelli & Pratt, 1993). However, everyone wears clothes to work and most organizations have some kind of dress code (Easterling, Leslie and Jones, 1992)". The website theagtrader.com conducted a study among 3,000 workers and found out that for a majority of women, the way they dress affects their day of work and their performance. The way women feel and look do affect their career path and the study further reveals that two-thirds of the participants agree that dressing smartly is correlated to the respect gained at the workplace.

With regard to the above, we have decided to concentrate our research on the hidden implications directly linked to the executive dress code of women professionals and gender discrimination. When our work on women's clothing began, many people felt that it was insignificant. But, in fact, women's executive wear seems to be a black spot in women's emancipation. Women have surely come a long way and they are proud of their achievement. But professional achievement never meant the denial of one's identity. To be more precise, women

executives voluntarily or reluctantly reject their feminine characteristics and adopt a masculine image to better fit the male-dominated professional world. In 1980, the author of "Women: Dress for Success", Molloy concluded that if women wanted to be successful in the business environment, they had to dress in ways which would give the tight messages to men with power. It appears that women who wish to be taken seriously at work need to mimic the male business uniform (Harragan, 1977; Douglas, 1983; Saunders & Stead, 1986). Mc Craken (1985) suggests that by doing so, women are reinforcing all the masculine stereotype symbolizes, including their subordinate status. There is actually no law or practice in Mauritius compelling women to choose masculine garments and to minimize their femininity. But sometimes, unwritten codes can exercise powerful control (Kaiser, 1983-4).

Background and statement of the problem

The net gives the following comprehensive background on Mauritius: Mauritian society is a multicultural society and its population has its origin from three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. Three or four decades ago, the mentally vis-à-vis women in Mauritius was very traditional. Very few women enjoyed freedom to seek education or any kind of training. A majority of them were viewed as second-class citizens and this was justified as being the natural result of the biological differences between the two sexes. As men were the sole breadwinners, the role of women was relegated. All decision taking was in the hands of

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the husband. Moreover, the freedom of women was restricted as most families were extended.

After independence, much emphasis was laid on industrialization. Industrial zones were being set up and incentives were given for foreign investment. As a result of the extensive use of machines particularly in the field of textile and clothing, manpower was greatly needed to work in factories. Thus, female labour was absorbed by this industry. In the early seventies, many women began to leave their homes and start working, thus adding to the monthly income of the family. Today more than 75% of women work in textile factories. As a result women began to enjoy economic independence, their status in society rose and they enjoyed more dignity. The whole approach towards women changed. Women today are no longer regarded as the inferior sex and enjoy more equality.

As a result of economic independence, there was a change in the structure of the family unit. We began to have more nuclear families. In such a step, the traditional role of women began to lose importance. Both husband and wife have a role to play and start living on equal terms. At the same time trade unions began to fight for equal wages and such demands were backed up by feminist movements fighting for equal rights. Those organizations consisted mainly of intellectuals, both men and women. As there were mainly sexist laws that are to the detriment of emancipation of women, the authorities concerned were pressurized to change those obsolete laws and replace them with more equal ones.

Another factor, which has played a major role in boosting up the status of the Mauritian women, is education. Free education was granted in 1976. Since then, many more women and girls began to have access to education. Today, many boys and girls reach tertiary education. Moreover, legislation has been passed to make education compulsory till the age of sixteen. Girls completing tertiary education are thus able to occupy posts of responsibility. In almost all sectors, women are present, performing jobs once considered as male-oriented like, police force, driving vehicles and management posts."

In 2015, the population comprised 637,836 women compared to 624,769 men. Women outnumbered men by 13,067. The data for the year 2015 of the

Mauritian Government reveals that:

- Unemployed women were generally more qualified than their male counterparts;
- The average income tends to be lower for women than for men across all occupations;
- Women are largely under-represented in decision making at higher sphere of society;
- In the public sector, only around 40% of senior staff positions are held by women;
- The number of female parliamentarians is 8 out of a total of 70; and
- Women represented only 7% of the boards of directors of the Top 50 Companies in 2015 (ranked by profits).

In an attempt to find out more about the Mauritian society and the emancipation of women, a survey was conducted. Twenty-five participants of both sexes were asked to give the name of a powerful executive person. 92% of the subjects gave the name of a male person. This result indirectly indicates that in the collective mind, Mauritians still think of an executive person as man because feminine characteristics are still perceived as inferior for the workplace. "Female is by virtue a certain lack of quality" (Beauvoir, 1949) linked with weakness, passivity, fragility, emotion and beauty. This has resulted into an implicit desexualisation of the female executive. The desexualisation process of executive women include the masculinization of the clothing style and the masculinization of behavior and attitude.

Such forces prevent the corporate women from having their full potential in comparison to their male colleagues. Regrettably, very little research has been carried out to understand the process of the masculinisation of the clothing style of executive women and its impact on them.

The purpose

Therefore the purpose of this research is as follows:

- To understand the concept of gender in the Mauritian working environment and the prevailing perceptions regarding dress code
- The expectations/unwritten laws or subtle requirements pressurizing women to undergo an implicit process of defeminisation either voluntarily or against their will;
- To better understand the executive women's

personality trait in comparison to the executive image and the consequences of the desexualisation process.

Method

Two different surveys were conducted. Subjects were asked to fill a survey form about the executive women's dress style. The first survey was conducted among educated (higher education level) executive women to determine the following:

Is dress style important to them?

Is their clothing style linked to their self-esteem?

The significance of fashion to them

Their personal style

Their personality trait

Their 'wish' image

Their reaction to a change in their dressing style

Their level of comfort in wearing masculine clothing style at work everyday

The second survey targeted male employers and they were requested to answer the following questions:

The importance of applying dress code in an organisation

What type of dress code should be set by the employer?

What type of dress should women wear to best project the image of the organization?

What clothing style would be promoted at work?

Is dress style connected to the wearer's self-concept?

Which clothing style can lead to a promotion at work?

Does the application of dress code at work have an impact on the female employee's self-concept and self-esteem?

What kind of impact would it be?

It is worth mentioning that this research focuses on the Mauritian society and all participants are Mauritians.

For all the questions, participants were provided multiple answers to choose, but they were also given the opportunity to give their own answers so questionnaire designed was both open ended and closed ended. The questionnaires were distributed in both public and private organizations. Out of 110

survey forms distributed to women, 85 answered, whilst only 11 men filled in the form out of 25.

Subjects

For the first survey, subjects consisted of 85 educated (tertiary education level) and professional women aged between 30 to 50 years, occupying executive positions in either the government or private sector. Occupations of the participants were as follows: Chief Executive Officers, lawyers, second line officers, Assistant secretary in Ministries, Officer-in-Charge, academics, etc.

There were 11 male employers who participated the second survey. They were mostly from the education, ICT, banking and manufacturing, plus services sectors.

Findings

For centuries, the place and role of women were limited as mothers, wives and daughters in the household. But the fight of feminists over decades has changed the fate of oppressed women in many parts of the world and numerous countries have taken initiatives to guarantee equal rights, equal opportunities and equal treatments for men and women. Along the same line, relevant laws and policies were enacted in Mauritius to ensure that women are treated fairly, with dignity and respect. The constitution of Mauritius guarantees the equality of all citizens and the respect of fundamental rights and freedom. In 1995, the constitution was amended to make sex discrimination illegal and in 2011, the government adopted the Equal Opportunities Act (2011) which emphasizes equality of opportunities. Moreover, in order to provide support to working women, the following laws were also enacted as per the "Sex Discrimination Act":

- Eliminate, discrimination against persons on the ground of sex, marital status, pregnancy;
- Eliminate discrimination involving dismissal of employees on the ground of family responsibilities;
- Eliminate discrimination involving sexual harassment in the workplace, in education institutions and in other areas of public activity; and
- Promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle of the equality of men and women.

There is also the “Labour & Industrial Relations Act” which guarantees the equality of men and women with respect to the individual’s constitutional right to work and protection from unlawful dismissal. However, the wide-ranging initiatives taken to eliminate gender inequality in Mauritius have not been completely successful. In an interview to Business Magazine, Catherine McIlraith (March 2016) stated that “the glass ceiling does exist in Mauritius. Mauritius earned a ranking of 120 out of 142 places [...] due to a poor performance with regards to the economic participation, opportunity and political empowerment.” Although the Mauritian law guarantees gender equality, in reality, the deep rooted social construction of gender roles is a major barrier for women to get equal treatment at the workplace. Through the process of correspondent inference (Jones, 1976), the division of labour led to gender roles. Boymel Kampen (1996) defines gender as “the social and cultural construction of femininity, masculinity, and anything in between as opposed to the biological sex”. People are generally socialized to be ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ based on cultural norms and assumptions of gender difference are often so embedded into our cultural systems, beliefs, and behaviours that they appear ‘natural’, and thus we tend to take them for granted” (Morris, 2000).

Gender roles are collections of factors like appearance, sexual orientation, social conduct, the

type of jobs, economic roles, chores, hobbies, etc. In brief, gender roles determine the specific positions and actions of a given gender as defined by a culture. Eventually, gender roles have created a gender stereotype. This stereotype has resulted into specific ways of living in society, whereby both men and women need to stick to their respective attributed positions and responsibilities in order to be socially accepted. Ultimately, in the collective mind, the image of “perfect woman” and “perfect man” took shape according to the assigned gender roles and gender stereotypes. The characteristics for the “perfect woman” include femininity, beauty, fragility, physical weakness, peacefulness, respectfulness, passivity, compassion, caring and loving nature, sensitivity, dependency and generosity. For men to match the “perfect masculine image”, they need to be powerful, well-built and muscular, a provider, authoritative, strong-minded and independent. For those who have decided to maintain their individuality or who are far from the prescribed image of the ‘perfect’ man or woman, very often they have a low self-esteem and feel socially rejected. Therefore, in an attempt to fit the image of the ‘perfect’ female, the majority of women in the patriarchal Mauritian society ‘naturally’ adopt feminine characteristics. This statement is proved by our survey which was conducted among 85 executive women. 33% of executive women chose to have a feminine dress style, compared to 27% who prefer a creative/artistic clothing style, and 23% who opt for a classic/elegant style.

The response of female participants to this survey is

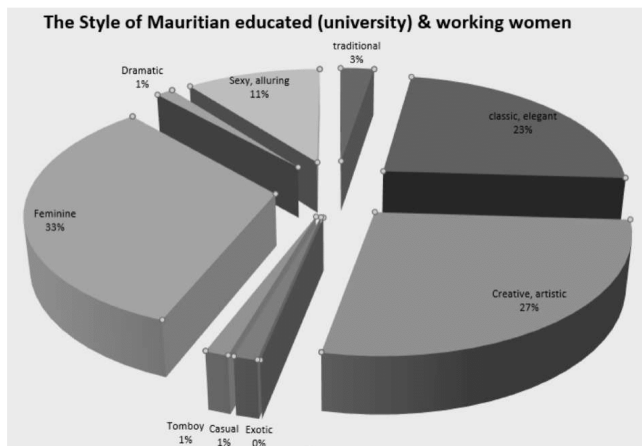


Figure 2: The dress style chosen Mauritian executive women

not at all surprising. From the time of the birth of a baby girl to the age of adulthood, feminine characteristics are inculcated in women. Maltz and Broker's (1982) research showed that the games children play contribute to socializing children into masculine and feminine cultures. Besides, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) rightly said that “One is not born, but rather, becomes a woman”. Throughout their childhood, little girls are told fairy tales like “Cinderella”, “Snow White”, “The Sleeping Beauty” and so on. These children stories reinforce the gender stereotypes whereby the female protagonists of these stories are all very beautiful, loving, compassionate, defenseless, submissive and dependent. In short, they represent the ‘ideal woman’ of the patriarchal society who need a man (the prince charming) to save them, to marry them, to give them children and to provide for them. The upbringing of little girls in male dominated societies is undeniably based on gender stereotypes. By the time little girls reach adulthood, they take on distinctive attitudes about their role and position in society. The psychologist, Dr. Sandra Lipsitz (1981) developed the gender schema theory whereby throughout their life people act and react based on the combination of aspects of the social learning theory and the cognitive development theory of sex role acquisition. The theories about social learning and cognitive development help us to understand why 53% of Mauritian women are engaged in “traditional female occupations”. Based on specific gender assignment, people expect men to occupy authoritative and powerful positions and women to hold subordinate positions. This partly explains

why, in Mauritius, the majority of the female working population holds traditional female or elementary jobs. The female jobs include the following: Air hostess, esthetician, typist, secretary, nurse, nanny, maid servant, receptionist, personal assistant, model, nail artist, teacher, and so forth. It does not take long to notice that such employments not only give a subordinate status to women, but they are all requiring the female employee to enhance their feminine traits. To be feminine means having qualities and or appearances traditionally associated with women. The male dominated corporate world even applies specific dressing style for women occupying subordinate positions in the corporate world. These female employees need to look attractive, nice and welcoming. These women usually wear makeup and feminine clothing or uniforms such as skirts, blouses and dresses. “Culturally, women learn that they should care about how they look more than men do.” It therefore appears natural that in order to fulfill their gender role and to be socially accepted, women chose to be feminine and to occupy gender-linked jobs. Thus, even though women in Mauritius are doing well in terms of educational attainment, this is not translated into equality in terms of the position they occupy in the corporate world. Only a small percentage occupies high positions. The reason being that “the elements of convention or tradition seem to play a dominant role in deciding which occupations fit in with which gender roles. The majority of patriarchal societies is not often tolerant of one gender fulfilling another role. The traditions of such societies often direct that certain career

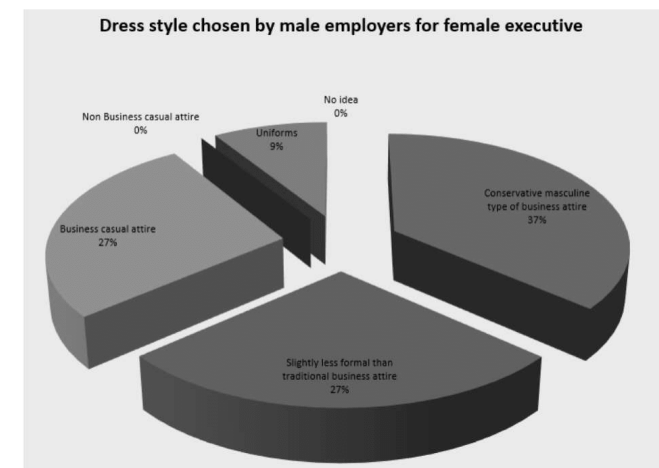


Figure 3: Dress style chosen by male employers for female executive

choices and lifestyles are appropriate to men, and other career choices and lifestyles are appropriate to women.”

Moreover, gender stereotypes are culturally dependent and are reinforced from birth (Ozkan & Lajunen, 2005; Williams & Best, 1990). As such, gender stereotypes still influence the perceptions of Mauritians. As a consequence, Mauritian women are not able to benefit from the same privileges as men in the professional arena. When women get out of their traditional feminine roles and take an executive position which is normally occupied by men, they inevitably have to face an internal conflict. They have to balance their femininity with their executive image, which is a masculine one. Sue Gerrard (2005) wrote that “women at work appear to be faced with a choice of image – either decorative or businesslike. Both are acceptable, but are mutually incompatible with each other (Kaiser, 1990).” But, the male dominated professional arena has difficulty in accepting the feminine side of women occupying executive positions.

We should not forget that the socially constructed gender roles are considered to be hierarchical and characterized as a male-advantaged gender hierarchy (Wood & Eagly, 2002). In the collective mind, characteristics like strength, dominance, confidence, competition, rationality and authority are seen as masculine (Martin B, 1984). In contrast, “female is by virtue a certain lack of quality” (Beauvoir, 1997) linked with weakness, passivity, fragility, emotion and beauty. As such, feminine characteristics are perceived as inferior for senior positions. This resulted into a rejection of feminine traits at the workplace and our survey among male employers reveal that a greater percentage of man prefer executive women to wear a masculine clothing style at work.

As already mentioned, the executive position in the corporate world usually requires what are considered typically “male characteristics” (Knight & Guiliano, 2003). In the Mauritian culture, the masculine values are the ones valued most highly for positions of power. An active role is assigned to men, whereas an appearance-centered role is assigned to women (Rosaldo, 1974). Therefore, in order to attain and maintain a senior position, executive women end up adopting a masculine dress style and renouncing their feminine image. “The identity projected may not always be one which the executive woman has chosen, but may well be ascribed (Kaiser, 1990) by the employer. According to Fairchild County Business Journal

(2005), executive women dress to promote respect, enhance their authority, and assist in gaining advancement opportunities” (Sue Gerrard, 2005). Thus, in order to have a successful career, educated and competent Mauritian women are implicitly compelled to discard their feminine traits and adopt masculine characteristics. This situation is well expressed by the Pink Magazine. It published an interview of Michelle King, the Vice President of a realty company on the internet where the interviewee was quoted: “I will not promote anyone (referring to a woman in this case) who doesn't dress appropriately. I consider it a factor in her decision-making skills.” In such cases, appropriate dress usually refers to the executive dress style approved by male dominated corporate world. In a second internet article, Judith Rasband (2010) wrote that at the workplace “the more skin you show, the less authoritative you become”. The perception of Women executive wear is directly associated with cultural beliefs, systems and traditional gender attributions. The concepts of Social psychologist Geroge Herbert Mead (Mead, 1943) and Herbert Blumer (Blumer, 1969) clearly explains that the “perception of clothing involves both the wearer and perceiver bringing to an encounter their own social constructs”. The gender discrimination faced by Mauritian women originates partly from **Christian Culture:**

religious beliefs and traditional values. The following quotations from the three main religions of Mauritius clearly explain why women with power need to hide their femininity.

Hindu Culture:

“There is no creature more sinful than women [...] They are never satisfied with one person of the opposite sex [...] Verily, women are the root of all faluts” (Vyasa, 1997)

Muslim Culture:

Qur'anic Text

From Yusuf Ali or Muhammad Asad translations:

“And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their zeenah (charms, or beauty and ornaments)... Tell your wives and daughters and the believing women that they should draw over themselves their jilbab (outer garments) (when in public); this will be more conducive to their being recognized (as decent women) and not harassed. But God is indeed off-forgiving, most merciful.” (33:59)

Timothy 2:9-10

“Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness – with good works.”

Such religious beliefs have given way to a collective perception that sexy or attractive feminine women are low-grade. Peter Glick, a psychology Professor at Lawrence University conducted a survey and published in the “Psychology of women Quarterly” that sexy attire put women into the 'less competent' category, no matter how smart they actually were. Moreover, Susan Fiske (2008) reported that “the changes in brain activity suggest sexy images can shift the way men perceive women, turning them from people to interact with, to objects to act upon” and it has been reported that “women have more obstacles to overcome with business dress than men and, in particular, that they face double standard.” In her research Sue Gerrard (2005) wrote: “It should be noted that individuals develop implicit – that is, not articulated – personality theories about others (Arnold, Robertson & Cooper, 1991). Information may typically be organised as prototypes – a cluster of characteristics which typify a personality type (Rosch, 1977) or stereotypes- “The perceived characteristics of an extremely defined group” (Arnold et al. op cit). If one of the characteristics of a prototype or stereotype is perceived, the rest tend to be elicited, often erroneously, which is why stereotypes have such pejorative associations (Kelly, 1950).” So, if the male employer perceives a

'masculinised' woman wearing a suit as competent, he may assume that all desexualized women wearing suits are efficient. Along the same lime, if sexy and attractive women have been stereotyped as unfit for high positions, the majority of men in the patriarchal society therefore has a problem in accepting professional women who project a highly feminine image.

“In their study, DeLong & al (1980) found that men were less attracted to formally dressed women. This fact also explains why the male employers prefer female executives to adopt a more masculine dressing style. Barr (1934) found that conformity was an important criterion in choice of clothing may indeed be responsible for glass ceiling experienced by women in their careers” (Sue Gerrard, 2005). For this reason, executive women voluntarily or reluctantly accept to defeminize themselves in order to lay emphasis on their professional competence instead of distracting male colleagues by their feminine features. The impact of this deliberate or involuntary defeminisation may eventually lessen the self-esteem of women. Our survey revealed that for a majority of people dress style is linked to the self-esteem. The fact that most of the time women have heightened concern with their appearance than men, the self-esteem is more closely linked to their dress style. As a consequence, women are more affected psychologically by dress codes than men. The table below shows that for a total of 92% of women affirm that they would be affected completely or partly if they are compelled to change their clothing style.

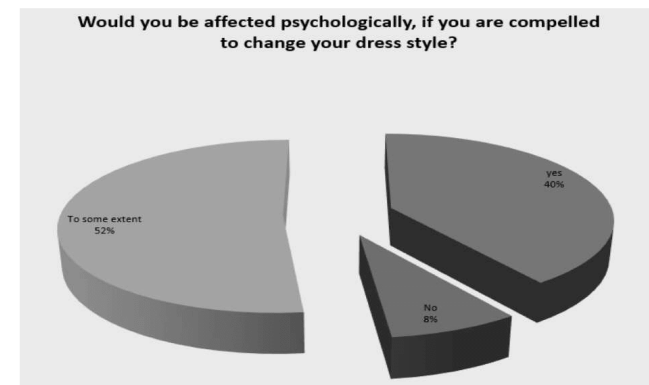


Figure 4: Impact of clothing style on women

Our survey among executive women further reveals that a total of 81% of women would not feel comfortable in wearing men clothing style every day.

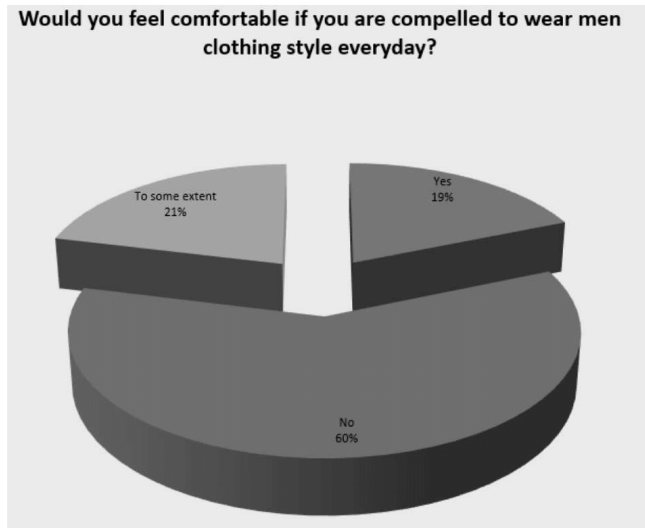


Figure 5: Women executive and men clothing

However, Figure 6 shows that the response of male employers regarding masculine dressing style for women executives is rather different. Male participants of the second survey were asked to choose the executive female image which they will promote from photographs of female models wearing different types of clothing, namely: masculine type, usual wear, sexy wear and feminine dress.

Survey result : 81.8% of male employers would promote a masculinised woman at the work place rather than a sexy or feminine one



Figure 6: Male employers' choice for executive women's clothing

81.8% of men opted for the masculine type, where as nobody selected the sexy wear or the feminine dress. Furthermore, 54% of the male employers believe that women are not affected by a change in the clothing style. The symbolic interactionist approach developed by George Herbert (Mead, 1934) explains

that the perception of clothing involves both the wearer and the perceiver and brings to an encounter their own social constructs. Our two surveys reveal a significant difference between males' and females' perceptions and choices. Men perceive the feminine clothing style attractive but inappropriate for an

executive position, whilst women perceive the feminine clothing style as comfortable and a way of expressing themselves.

The consequences of women's mimicking male attire could have dramatic effects on the contribution made by women in the work place. Social perceptions and gender stereotypes regarding dress code help in sustaining the male power over women in the business world. But unfortunately, no in-depth research has been done whereby the executive wear was linked to gender discrimination. The psychology of masculinized domination is maintained by making women feel uncomfortable in the working environment through the following:

- Perpetuation of sex discrimination through defeminization of executive women;
- Affecting the self-esteem, self-confidence and comfort level of women through implicitly imposed masculine dress style; and
- Decreasing feminine women's chance to climb the career ladder & impedes achievement of equality at the workplace.

It is appropriate to quote Mc Craken (1985) again who said "that by mimicking the male business attire, women are reinforcing all that the masculine stereotype symbolizes, including their subordinate status".

CONCLUSION

Audrey Nelson (2010) wrote: "fifty years of research tells us that you can change perceptions of a person by changing their clothes. There is no getting around it. Dress has persuasive value that influences the behavior of others. Clothing may influence the extent to which another person may consider us credible. It is often read as a sign of character" and I order to send the right signal at the work place, women have to sacrifice their femininity.

Unfortunately for women, they are still manipulated by the patriarchal society. On one hand, they are brought up to be feminine, and on the other hand they are asked to reject the acquired femininity and adopt masculine clothing at work. The reason lies in the fact that their values differ from that of men and regrettably for them, "it is the masculine values that prevail" (Virginia wolf, 1929). We have seen that although the Mauritian society has allowed the emancipation of women, its

perception about the role and image of women has not yet evolved. This has implications for both the well-being of executive women and the performance of women at the work place.

It seems that legislations have not been able to eradicate deep rooted social perceptions on gender stereotypes. This situation is playing a major role in the perpetuation of gender discrimination and resulting into the following:

- Influencing the training & Occupational Choices of women;
- Affecting women's chance to participate in the professional job market;
- Indirectly maintaining both work and family responsibilities on women; and
- Impeding the achievement of gender equality in the working environment.

The data obtained from our two surveys make us aware of unnoticed issues and opens the way to address overlooked problems that prevents women from delivering their full potential in the working environment. This paper has highlighted multiple areas for further research which can help in the eradication of sexist perceptions, namely: a psychological analysis of the impact of the desexualisation process on executive women, an insight into the fashion world and the designing of women's corporate wear, and a research on the influence of religious beliefs on women's position in the professional world.

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