

**THE WORKING WARDROBE:
PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S CLOTHING
AT WORK**

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ABSTRACT

Choice of clothing for work has received little research attention from organisational psychologists. Few clothing studies have investigated subjects' own categorisation of clothing, as opposed to categories supplied by a researcher. This study uses a free response technique, card sorts, to investigate spontaneous categorisation of women in terms of the clothing they wear to work. Ten male and ten female office workers repeatedly sorted cards showing photographs of models taken from current clothing catalogues. Subjects sorted photographs into categories according to criteria which they generated, using one criterion at a time. Males showed less variation in their construing than females, and were found to use both dichotomous categorisation, and categorisation related to sexuality, significantly more than females. Female subjects were then asked to select the outfits which they would consider wearing to work. There were marked differences in salience of perception of these outfits between males and females. Interest in clothing and enjoyment of the task were both found to be positively correlated with complexity of construing. Suggestions for further research are made.

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INTRODUCTION

General introduction

Research on clothing worn at work is significant by its absence in the organizational psychology literature (Rafaelli and Pratt, 1993). However, everyone wears clothes to work and most organisations have some kind of dress code (Easterling, Leslie and Jones, 1992). The apparent lack of interest by organisational psychologists may be because work clothing is viewed as theoretically trivial, which this study shows is not the case, or it may be an important means of control in organisations, which is left off the agenda by those with power (Lukes, 1974).

Women's clothing for work was put very much onto the public agenda in 1977, when John Molloy published his bestselling "The Women's Dress for Success Book". Molloy's thesis was that if women wanted to get on in the business world, they would have to dress in a way acceptable to those with power, namely men. He suggested that the ideal business uniform for women was the skirted suit, and found that women reported being treated as if they had more authority when so attired. 'Power dressing' became a by-word for women in business in the 1980s. But the evidence suggests that women have not adopted the skirted suit wholesale (Saunders & Stead, 1986), suggesting that other values may be salient to women in business.

In the following section the theoretical framework used by clothing researchers is outlined, and the relevant research reviewed. The present study is then described.

Review of the clothing research literature

Theoretical basis of the clothing research field

Theory development

In the clothing research literature, two areas of concern have been raised repeatedly. The first is that no coherent theoretical framework has been developed with which to direct future study. Nagasawa, Kaiser & Hutton (1989) complain that most studies have been carried out using a bottom-up, deductive approach, and stress the need for top-down inductive work to test theories before real progress can be made. The lack of coherence in a theoretical framework has led to a piecemeal and unsystematic approach to what is an extremely complex topic (Damhorst 1990).

Three approaches

A second major area of concern is that researchers have approached the study of dress from theoretical perspectives originating in different disciplines and findings thus tend not to be complementary. Susan Kaiser (1983-4) outlines three principal approaches; symbolic interactionist, cognitive and cultural.

Symbolic interaction is a concept developed from the work of social psychologist George Herbert Mead (Mead, 1934) by his

student Herbert Blumer (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interaction views the perception of clothing as involving both wearer and perceiver bringing to an encounter their own social constructs; clothing may symbolise something different to both, and as a result of the dynamic interaction between the two participants, the symbolic value of the clothing may have changed for both. Researchers using this approach have tended to use qualitative methods to evaluate the perceptions of both wearer and perceiver, and there has been a tendency to assume that social constructs are not quantifiable (Kaiser, 1990).

A cognitive approach works on the assumption that in order to simplify the vast amount of stimulus input they have to deal with, people have to organise the information they receive. In person perception, 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 externally 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 (Kelley, 1950). So if a perceiver has encountered an efficient woman wearing a suit, he may assume that all women wearing suits are efficient. Researchers working from a cognitive perspective tend to use quantitative methods to evaluate the perceptions of perceivers only, implicitly

assuming that the symbolic, or associative nature of the clothing is static (Kaiser, 1990).

A cultural perspective assumes that collective beliefs and values are perpetuated and changed through cultural forms such as clothing. Methodologies employed include content analysis of cultural forms, and ethnography, where a researcher becomes immersed in the culture in order to describe it. Kaiser (1983-4) suggests that the three approaches are not mutually exclusive, but rather nested, a cognitive approach being possible within a symbolic interactionist framework, which in turn operates in a cultural context. She advocates a synthesis of all three approaches which she calls a contextual perspective.

An encounter between clothed human beings involves a number of components; the wearer, the perceiver, the context and the clothing. These are now examined in detail.

Wearers

The presentation of the self

Two symbolic interactionists have developed theories dealing with the concept of the self and its presentation to others. Stone (1965) investigated appearance and its role in the way individuals are socialised, clothing being an important factor. One of Blumer's students, Erving Goffman, in his seminal work "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" (1959) used the analogy of the stage as a model for his dramaturgical view of self-presentation. In selecting

the clothes they wear for work, people can manipulate the way they present themselves to their audience, which Schlenker, (1980) has termed 'impression management'.

Identities

The image of his or her identity which an individual discloses to the world via clothing is a composite of many factors. Values, attitudes, mood and social norms will play a part, as does social feedback, with individuals constantly comparing themselves to others (Kaiser, 1990). Several studies have shown, for example, that subjects' use of clothing is linked to self-esteem, (Elliott, 1986; Dickey, 1967; Rowold, 1984).

The identity projected may not always be one which the wearer has chosen, but may well be ascribed (Kaiser, 1990) by, for example, employers. Dress appears to have an influence on wearer behaviour. Tharin (1981) found that on evenings when a strict dress code was observed at a skating rink, there were fewer accidents and less noise. Rafaelli & Pratt (op cit) suggest that employees adopting behaviour which is in conflict with the organisational norms associated with their clothing will experience cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), and they will modify their behaviour accordingly. So clothing rules may be a means of making ascribed identities effective.

Groups

Another important factor in identity presentation is the group with which an individual identifies. People show strong attachments to groups, as has been shown by research based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). The theory postulates that "people classify themselves and others into various social categories" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p.20) such as gender, age group or organisation membership and that they have prototypes of typical category characteristics (Rosch, op cit; Turner, 1985). This classification serves to organise information about the social environment and to locate the individual within that environment. Identification per se with the category or group has various consequences for those who perceive themselves as members, which are not dependent on the member behaving in a certain way, nor agreeing with group norms, nor taking on group values or beliefs. Identification also persists through group successes and failures. Symbols of the group, such as clothing, can be manipulated to enhance group identity (Ashforth & Mael, op cit).

Perceivers

Perceiver variables

A number of factors may influence the way perceivers interpret the messages which a target person transmits by their dress. The perceiver's experience of social interactions will determine their interpretation of the cues picked up from the stimulus person

(Damhorst, 1984-5). Perceiver perceptions have been shown to vary with gender; Dillon (1980) and DeLong, Salusso-Deonier and Larntz (1983), looking at perceptions of female business dress, found differences between males' and females' perceptions, and less variation amongst males than females. Perceptions also vary with social class, (Rosencranz, 1962) and race, although findings for the latter are ambiguous (Kaiser, 1990). Values and attitudes are also salient (Allport, Vernon and Lindzey, 1960) and interest in clothing has been shown to be an important factor (Creekmore, 1963; Sharma, 1980).

Interactions between wearer and perceiver

Wearers may be sending a message deliberately in the way they dress. If this is picked up correctly by the perceiver, intentional communication has taken place. However, messages may be sent unwittingly, and these may or may not be understood by perceivers Enninger (1985). A study by Tseëlon (1989) found maximum agreement between wearers and perceivers was only 56%. Enninger suggests that the constant messages put out by clothing moderate whatever verbal signal the target person is transmitting, and Mehrabian (1981) and Giles and Chavasse (1975) agree that non-verbal signals like clothing tend to dominate when there is a conflict with verbal messages.

Context

Messages can be moderated by the context, whether social or physical, in which they are transmitted or received. Saral (1969) found that context-free facial expressions provided relatively little information to subjects. Students not wearing ties on their way to interviews were thought less intelligent by other students, but less intelligent if they did wear ties on their way to class (Rees, Williams and Giles, 1974).

Many clothing studies have deliberately omitted contextual information, to increase the salience of the variables being examined. For example, Forsythe, Drake & Cox (1985) deleted the audio component of videotaped interviews with target persons to remove verbal cues; Temple & Loewen (1993) used black-and-white drawings of faceless figures against blank backgrounds as stimuli. Damhorst (1984-5) argues that this approach may reduce interference from unwanted variables, but because clothing is normally perceived in context, subjects' responses may differ from those which would occur in 'real life'.

Clothing

Gestalt

The evidence suggests that clothing is perceived synergistically, as a Gestalt (Asch, 1946); that the impression given by the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (Gibbins and Schneider, 1980). The perception of dress is modified by such things as hair colour

(Mahannah, 1968), and colour, texture, pattern and silhouette of clothing (Damhorst, 1990). But sometimes single items give a great deal of information (Kummen & Brown, 1985); Roach-Higgins & Eicher (1992) cite the businessman's tie.

Clothing symbolism

Most 'messages' from clothing are not clear or static, and are described by Davis (1985) as being 'undercoded', that is that their meanings are vague and abstract rather than being clear symbols with a recognised meaning. In semiotics, which originated as a way of studying language (Eco, 1979), cultural forms such as dress are referred to as *signs*, which relate to other objects or experiences. A culture usually provides a pattern for the way its participants should dress (Kaiser, 1990), referred to as a *code*. But individuals make modifications to the code which are referred to as *messages*. Dress signs are made up of *signifiers*, such as the garments or accessories, which carry the message, and the *signified*, or content of the message, for example, a doctor's white coat may be a signifier which signifies cleanliness.

Having looked at clothing perception, we now examine the part these perceptions have to play in organisational life.

Clothing in work organisations

Brief encounters

In the working environment, important decisions often have to be made on the basis of very brief encounters with strangers, as in a selection interview or sales meeting, so first impressions of others are critical (Temple and Loewen, *op cit*; Heitmeyer and Goldsmith, 1990). First impressions have been shown to influence subsequent interactions with the stimulus person (Davis, 1984), and to affect assessment of task performance (Lapitsky & Smith, 1981), and to be lasting and resistant to change (Kleinke, 1975).

Dress codes

Work organisations place restrictions on their members' dress in the form either of uniforms, or dress codes (Kaiser, 1990). Joseph (1986) points out that the type of dress code depends on factors such as the amount of contact employees have had with the public and organisational and professional culture. Written dress codes pose particular problems because of changing fashions, but unwritten codes can exercise powerful control (Kaiser, *ibid*).

Rafaelli & Pratt (*op cit*) offer a model for analysing dress in organisations, using the variables of conspicuousness and homogeneity. They suggest the symbolism of dress may be used by organisations to convey organizational cultural identity, values and image, and to encourage employees' compliance. It can also

be used to legitimise employee behaviour (Bickman, 1974), and to make distinctions between status of employees and between members and non-members of the organisation. One of the most visible differences in dress in organisations is that related to gender.

Gender differences

The origins of the Western male business 'uniform' consisting of shirt, suit and tie appear to lie in the rise of the bourgeoisie in the late eighteenth century, and to be based on utilitarian, egalitarian principles, in stark contrast to the flamboyant dress of the aristocracy (Brooke, 1937; Kaiser, 1990). The uniform has remained relatively stable ever since. In contrast, women's dress has been generally much more decorative, and women's work wear has changed a great deal over the same period. Dramatic changes in dress patterns have been associated with major social change (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

Many cultures assign an active (or agonic) role to men, and an appearance-centred (or hedonic) role to women (Rosaldo, 1974). This could be the reason for the wide range of clothing available to women, whilst men's actions are considered more important than their dress.

Women's business uniform

Molloy (1980) conducted an investigation using several different groups of subjects, into evaluations of various styles of female business attire. Male executives differed significantly from other groups when rating the outfits for efficiency, and Molloy concluded that if women wanted to be successful in the male-dominated business environment, they had to dress in ways which would give the right messages to the men with power. From the results of extensive comparisons between subject groups, he ranked outfits in descending order of appropriateness as follows;

- 1 skirted suit
- 2 dress or skirt with blazer
- 3 dress with matching jacket
- 4 tailored trouser suit
- 5 simple dress
- 6 skirt and blouse
- 7 slacks and blouse
- 8 skirt and sweater
- 9 slacks and sweater

(Molloy, 1980, p.43)

Molloy's work appears to have had a significant impact. Saunders & Stead (op cit), found that the number of portrayals in advertisements of women wearing a skirted suit in a business environment had increased significantly between 1973 and 1983. The jacket appears to have a critical role in perceptions of Molloy's top 'efficiency' outfits, and making a significant difference to

perceptions of expert and legitimate power in Temple and Loewen's (op cit) study using French and Raven's (1959) typology.

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, op cit). McCracken (1985) suggests that by doing so, women are reinforcing all that the masculine stereotype symbolises, including their subordinate status. This suggestion is consistent with Forsythe et al's (op cit) finding that a very masculine skirt suit was less preferred by hirers than a moderately masculine one, although both were preferred over a very feminine dress. Women may mimic men, but not too closely.

The present study

Research questions

The clothing research literature has produced contradictory findings regarding males' and females' perception of women's work clothing (Dillon, op cit; DeLong et al, op cit; Damhorst, 1984-5), probably because the studies have been concentrating on different specific areas of perception (physical features of business dress, business and social dress, and social interaction respectively). Molloy (1980), and Saunders & Stead (op cit), suggest that there is consensus amongst males and females regarding appropriateness of and personal qualities associated with women's business dress. This conflicts with the research on gender differences, which suggests that there will be differences between males and females

in the categorisation used to construe female work clothing, and that there will be more commonality (agreement) in construing amongst male subjects than amongst females. The following hypotheses can therefore be generated; that there will be a significant difference between males and females in their perceptions of women's work clothing; and that there will be more agreement amongst male subjects than females in perceptions of women's work clothing.

Design of the present study

Methodology in clothing research has encompassed a number of techniques including questionnaires, using, for example, semantic differential scales (Kaiser, 1990), written evaluations by subjects, or in-depth interviews. Damhorst (1990), in her review of 869 clothing studies carried out since 1943, found that constructs for target person evaluation were generally supplied to subjects, citing only 75 studies where subjects were asked to freely generate their own associations with the clothing (p.5). Damhorst (ibid) also found that 78% of studies reviewed investigated target persons' personality traits, most of these concentrating on traits which comprise what she classifies as 'potency' - power, competence and intelligence.

Using forced choice methods where constructs are supplied by researchers can lead to results which give little information about subjects' spontaneous perceptions (Damhorst, 1984-5; Burns & Lennon, 1993). Free response techniques generally consist of verbal

or written comments by subjects which are then content analysed, using categorisations of comments supplied by independent judges (Damhorst, *ibid*) or using previously devised typologies (Burns & Lennon, *op cit*). Categorisation by perceivers has received little attention (Lennon & Davis, 1989). The present study uses a free response technique, card sorts, to investigate subjects' spontaneous categorization of person perceptions associated with clothing women might wear to work, and to compare the perceptions of males and females of clothing which the female subjects would choose to wear to work. Items to be sorted were photographs of models taken from mail-order clothing catalogues.

The technique of card sorts used in this study is derived from George Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct Theory (PCT) (Fransella & Bannister, 1980). Kelly postulated that in order to make sense of their world and predict events, individuals organise information in similar, but unique ways. He recognised that people attempt to construe the construing processes of others and that constructs are often 'constellatory' or grouped together, as in stereotypes. One of the advantages of PCT is that it lends itself to measurement of the relationship between constructs. A widely used instrument based on PCT is the repertory grid, but this has limitations regarding nominal categories. Other techniques may be used to complement repertory grids, such as laddering and card sorts (Fransella & Bannister, *op cit*).

Card sorts

Card sorts (or object sorts - cards with pictures or words tend to be more convenient) provide a means of investigating the way subjects categorise the information they have about a particular domain. They have been used in the knowledge acquisition field to analyse the way experts categorise their knowledge (McGeorge & Rugg, 1992; Routh, 1994). The card sort involves subjects generating a criterion by which they evaluate each stimulus item, each item being categorised using that criterion. For example, for the *criterion* 'age', *categories* used may be 'young', 'middle-aged' and 'old'. Subjects then generate another criterion and so on, until they can think of no more ways of construing the items.

Sorts have two main advantages over other techniques (McGeorge & Rugg, *op cit*). Firstly, the constructs used to categorise the stimuli are elicited from subjects rather than supplied by the researcher. The constructs found to be most salient to subjects in the card sort can then be used in questionnaires, for example. Secondly, since all the items are categorised in relation to each construct generated, the resulting data are complete in themselves, and are ready for quantitative analysis without further coding. At the same time they provide the richness of insight into subjects' construing usually available only from in-depth interviews, which then require content analysis. Also, a large number of data points are generated by a small number of subjects.

The technique does have some limitations, however. Firstly, it is time consuming, which tends to limit sample size. Given the wide range of idiosyncratic criteria generated by subjects, the number of subjects generating criteria in common in this study was very small, and thus open to Type II error. A larger sample may enhance differences, so that they become statistically significant, or it may simply increase the diversity of idiosyncratic criteria. As with repertory grids, it is most useful when used in conjunction with other techniques, for example laddering (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988), which would allow depth of construing to be examined.

Feedback

Since dress codes at work would place constraints on subjects' choice of outfits, subjects were asked to give details of any dress code operating in their office. Also, since card sorts are a new technique to clothing research, feedback from subjects regarding accuracy, completeness and enjoyment of the task, and also interest in clothing was elicited. Since the target items were selected by the researcher, subjects were also asked to comment on the representativeness of the items in relation to women's clothing at their own place of work.

Research hypotheses

The hypotheses stated above can now be restated more specifically in relation to the possible outcomes of the card sorts:

- Hypothesis 1: there will be a significant difference between males and females in the *criteria* they use to construe women's work clothing
- Hypothesis 2: there will be more agreement amongst male subjects than females in the *criteria* they use to construe women's work clothing
- Hypothesis 3: there will be a significant difference between males and females in the *categories* they use to construe the outfits female subjects select as the ones they would wear to work
- Hypothesis 4: there will be more agreement amongst male subjects than females in the *categories* they use to construe the outfits female subjects select as the ones they would wear to work

METHOD

Subjects were asked to sort photographs of female models wearing clothing which women were likely to wear to work, using their own categorisation, rather than one supplied by the researcher. The sort involved generating one criterion at a time by which to sort the cards, and sorting the cards into categories according to the chosen criterion. Female subjects were also asked to select the outfits which they would consider wearing to work. All subjects were asked to describe any dress codes in operation in their place of work, and to complete forms giving demographic information and feedback about the experimental technique. The researcher wore casual clothing not represented on the cards.

Subjects

Subjects were ten males aged between 25 and 70, and ten females aged between 25 and 60, who normally worked in an office environment. Subjects' income ranged from £10k pa to over £30k pa. Occupations of subjects were; law, architecture, surveying, finance, secretarial, computing, training, civil service, academic research and telecommunications. All subjects were white.

Materials

Studies involving perception of clothing have varied considerably in the amount of complexity of stimuli presented to subjects, ranging from context-free black and white drawings of outfits on

figures with no facial features, as used by Temple and Loewen (1993), to videos of models being interviewed, used by Forsythe, Drake and Cox (1985). The advantages and disadvantages of using either simple or complex stimuli (Damhorst, 1990) have already been discussed.

For this study, photographs from mail order catalogues (with heads of models and backgrounds removed) were chosen for three reasons:

- 1) they come somewhere around the middle of the range of complexity
- 2) they are from a readily accessible medium
- 3) they are a form frequently used by women to select clothing

Stimulus materials were 22 photographs of women's outfits taken from current (summer) editions of two mail order catalogues. The photographs were selected according to the following criteria; first, one item most closely responding to the ideal type in each of Molloy's (1980) top eight categories of women's workwear was chosen then one item very different from the ideal in each category, then one other item for each category. One shorts outfit (semi-formal) and one waistcoat outfit (casual) were also included, to see subjects' responses, as shorts are now accepted wear in some offices, and as Molloy specifically excludes waistcoats from his list because he claims they increase sexual attractiveness. Due to the limitations of source materials discussed below, some categories had less than three items in them.

Stimulus figures were between 9cm and 13cm in height, and background, head and feet of the models were cut away to increase salience of the garments. Models were all standing, facing the camera, in postures which conveyed no obvious message (Argyle, 1972); i.e. hands by sides or in front of the body. Extrinsic accessories (hats, bags etc.) were excluded if possible, although jewellery, scarves, and so on remained. All models were white. Photographs were mounted centrally on plain white 15cm x 10cm cards, which were then laminated. The cards were numbered on the back for recording purposes.

Procedure

Subjects were asked evaluate the photographs in terms of what they would think about the woman wearing each outfit in a work context. They were asked to sort the cards into groups, or categories, using one criterion at a time, and to then tell the researcher what criterion they were using and what categories were subsumed under it. Subjects were given a verbal example of a card sort in another domain and told that they could use 'don't know', 'not sure', and 'not applicable' as categories if they wished. Subjects were asked if they understood the task. They were encouraged to ask questions about the procedure and to verbalise while they were sorting if they wished. After each sort, the subject read out the numbers of the cards in each category and the researcher recorded them. The number of items recorded was

counted after each sort to ensure that all cards had been categorised and recorded.

Several subjects verbally generated a number of categories or criteria during the first sort, and these were noted by the researcher and fed back to the subject if he or she got stuck. If subjects announced that they had run out of ways to sort the cards, the researcher first prompted them by reminding them to think of what the clothing told them about the person wearing it, then by suggesting they think about the stimulus person's personality or lifestyle. The points at which the prompts were given were noted by the researcher, as were any salient comments subjects made. Subjects frequently generated category names before naming the criterion; if so, they were asked to supply the criterion name after they had decided on the category titles. The session ended either when the subject ran out of criteria or after 50 minutes, whichever was sooner.

Female subjects were then asked to select the outfits, if any, which they would consider wearing to work. This task was not counted as a sort, although some subjects used it spontaneously as a criterion. All subjects were asked if their office had a dress code and if so what it was. All subjects then completed a feedback form comprising responses on Likert scales about their responses to the session, and a form requesting demographic data. Salient comments which subjects made after the session were also recorded.

RESULTS

Differences in construing between males and females

Hypothesis 1: there will be a difference between males and females in the criteria they use to construe women's work clothing

Numbers of criteria and categories used

There was a difference in the number of criteria generated by female and male subjects (females 63, males 82), but this was found not to be significant, using the Mann-Whitney U test. The range was wider in males (3-14) compared to females (2-9), six of the female subjects using six criteria. The mean for criteria for all subjects was 7.25, which may be worth further investigation regarding the cognitive processes involved in the light of Miller's (1956) claims for the number seven.

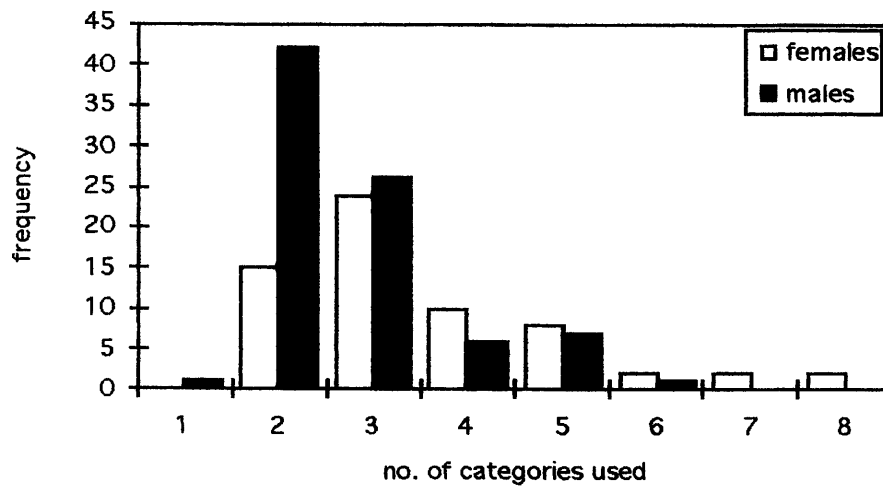
The total number of categories used by the two groups was almost identical (females 224, males 226), making a slight difference in the category/criterion ratio (females 3.56, males 2.75).

However, the range of categories per criterion was wider in women (females 2-8; males 1-6), and males used a dichotomous sort (two categories only) 42 times, compared to females using such a sort only 14 times (fig1). This difference was found to be significant at the 0.01 level, using the Chi-squared test. Dichotomous sorts were distributed fairly evenly over the male subjects. This suggests that although males may use more

criteria for construing women in work wear, females use more complex categorisation within the criteria they use.

Figure 1

Frequency of categories used for each criterion



Identity of criteria used

Subjects generated a total of 45 different criteria, as defined by the independent judges (Tables 1 and 2a and 2b). Level of agreement between judges was 72%. No significant difference was found between males' and females' use of any of the criteria, using the Fisher Exact Probability Test for small samples, probably because the quite wide range of criteria used meant that the numbers of subjects choosing to use any one would tend to be small. Some criteria were utilised by one group only, with men only generating a wider range than women only (Tables 2a and 2b). Therefore, the null hypothesis, that there is no difference between the criteria men and women use to construe women's work clothing, cannot be rejected.

Table 1
Criteria generated by both females and males
(as defined by the independent judges)

criterion	numbers of subjects generating		
	females	males	total
age	9	6	15
hierarchy	4	5	9
appropriateness	6	2	8
style	4	2	6
self-assurance	2	4	6
professionalism	3	2	5
image	2	3	5
occupation	3	2	5
income	2	3	5
ambition	3	1	4
*personality	1	3	4
power	2	2	4
marital status	1	3	4
relaxedness	2	2	4
children	1	2	3
occasion	1	2	3
fun	1	2	3
social background	1	2	3
wealth	1	2	3
success	1	1	2
total number of criteria			20

*Note: the criterion 'personality' included the following categories (square brackets denote categories generated by individual subjects);
[aggressive, motherly, stern, jolly, frothy]
[lower class & fun, mothers, serious/boring, bossy, fun, don't care what other people think about them, image conscious, upper class/posh]
[aggressive, assertive, passive]
[management type, feminine and frivolous]

Table 2a
Criteria generated by
females only

criterion	no of subjects
expense	3
spare time activities	2
what I'd wear	1
feminine	1
fashionable	1
good judgement	1
driving force	1
politics	1
sense of humour	1
total number of criteria	9

Table 2b
Criteria generated by
males only

criterion	no. of subjects
sexual attitude	3
presentation	2
formality	2
outgoingness	2
contentment	2
attractiveness/ sexiness	2
comfortable to be with	2
conventionality	1
trustworthiness	1
education	1
creativity	1
what I like	1
trying to please	1
do they impress?	1
efficiency	1
loyalty	1
total number of criteria	16

The cost of the outfit was quite salient to females, whereas males did not mention it. Males on the other hand were interested in the sexual attitude (and attractiveness/sexiness) of the woman whereas females were not.

Hypothesis 2: there will be more agreement amongst male subjects than females in the criteria they use to construe women's work clothing

Degree of commonality and disparity in use of criteria

Figure 2a

Degree of commonality/disparity of criteria amongst females

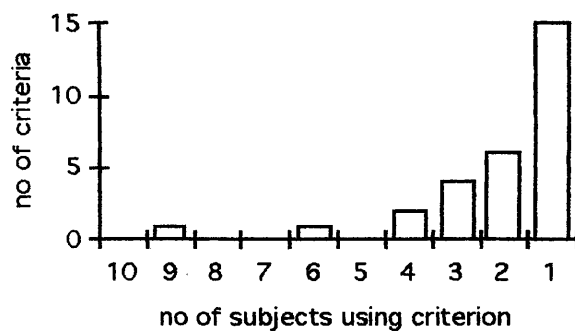


Figure 2b

Degree of commonality/disparity of criteria amongst males

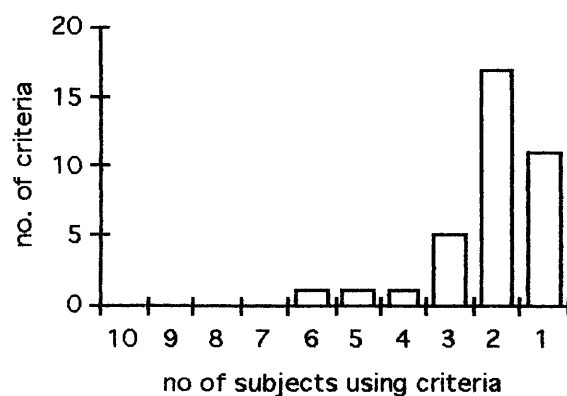
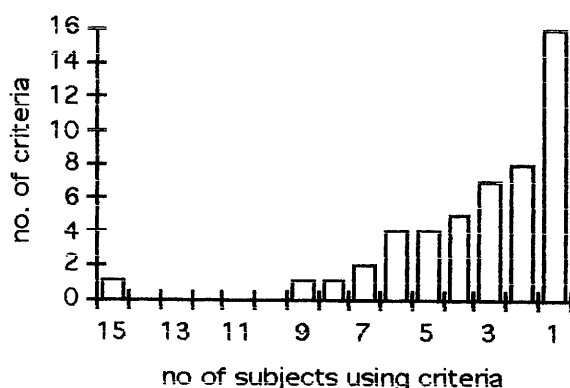


Figure 2c

Degree of commonality/disparity of criteria amongst all subjects



There was a fairly low degree of commonality overall, with only one criterion, 'age', generated by more than 50% of subjects. The degree of commonality is higher amongst males than females, with 51% of the criteria used by females generated by single subjects only (in other words, in 49% of the criteria, any one criterion would have been generated by two or more subjects) but only 30% of the criteria used by males generated by single subjects (or, in 70% of the criteria, any one criterion would have been generated by two or more subjects). This difference was found to be significant at the 0.005 level for a one tailed test using the Chi-squared test. Therefore, the null hypothesis, that there was no difference in agreement between males and females in the criteria they use, can be rejected.

Superordinate constructs

Some individual subjects used closely related criteria, which were grouped into superordinate constructs supplied by one of the judges.

Table 3
Criteria grouped into superordinate constructs

superordinate construct	criteria included	superordinate construct	criteria included
style	style	work	hierarchy
	image		professional
	presentation		occupation
	formality	*	efficiency
	fashion		
	do they impress?	self-assurance	self-assurance
			relaxedness
personality			contentment
	*personality		
	fun	appropriateness	appropriateness
	conventionality		occasion
	outgoingness		
	comfortable to be with	money	
	trustworthiness		income
	femininity		expense
	judgement		wealth
	drive		
	humour	power	power
	creativity		ambition
	comfortable to be with		
	trying to please		success
	loyalty		
		sex	
			sexual attitude
			attractiveness/sexiness

*Note: see note for table 1

Table 4
Numbers of subjects using criteria as grouped into superordinate constructs

superordinate construct	no. of subjects		
	F	M	T
style	8	13	21
personality	6	15	21
work	10	10	20
self-assurance	4	10	14
appropriateness	7	4	11
money	6	5	11
power	6	4	10
sex	0	6	6

This grouping showed larger differences between the gender groups. A significant difference at the 0.05 level, using the Chi-squared test, was found for use of only one of the constructs, sex, which was used more by males than females.

The working wardrobe

Females were asked to select the outfits they would consider wearing to work. Most of the outfits were selected by at least one subject. The outfits were ranked by the number of subjects who chose them (table 5).

Table 5
Outfits selected by female subjects

Outfit no.	Outfit description	No. of times chosen
16	navy shirt dress	7
2	navy/green plaid skirt suit	5
17	red double-breasted shirt dress	5
8	navy skirt; navy/white striped jacket	4
1	navy/white spotted skirt and jacket	3
6	beige trousers; white blouse	3
9	white/navy spotted dress; navy jacket	3
13	blue-green trouser suit	3
15	beige trouser suit	3
19	beige skirt; navy blouse	3
20	pink/beige/blue skirt; dusky pink jacket	3
7	light grey double-breasted skirt suit	2
10	navy skirt; yellow/navy spotted top; yellow jacket	2
14	navy trouser suit	2
18	blue/white floral dress	2
5	beige trousers; yellow/white/green striped shirt	1
11	pink/white spotted dress & pink/white striped jacket	1
22	beige shorts suit	1
3	cream trousers; sage green shirt	0
4	beige trousers and matching waistcoat; red/beige floral shirt	0
12	pink bias-cut dress and matching bias cut A-line jacket	0
21	turquoise skirt; matching top	0

Most preferred outfits

Hypothesis 3: there will be a significant difference between males and females in the categories used to construe the outfits female subjects select as the ones they would wear to work

Categorisations in which at least two subjects agreed were then examined across four groups; women who chose the outfits

('females yes'), women who did not choose the outfits ('females no'), all women, and men (table 6).

'Appropriate' and 'professional' were the most salient descriptions applied to all three garments by women, whether or not they selected them. 'Professional' was also salient amongst males, although 'appropriate' was only their fourth commonly used category. A significant difference at the 0.05 level using the Fisher Exact Probability Test for small samples, was found only for 'appropriateness' between males and females, so the null hypothesis, that there will not be a significant difference between males and females in the categories they use, can be rejected.

'Smartness' and 'management' were also fairly important in all groups. Other very salient categories were age, with the wearer of outfit 16 being placed in her 30s by the 'yes' group and the wearer of outfit 2 in her 40s by the 'no' group, which may well be a reason why they did not choose it, since two of them also described her as 'older'. 'Yes' women construed the stimulus women as 'confident', although 'no' women, and men especially, had a conflict of opinion as to whether or not they were confident or not; outfits 16 and 2 both had high male scores for 'not confident'. Males also rated 16 and 17 quite highly on 'not relaxed'. Most salient category applied by men was 'married', which came fourth on the list for 'no' women, and didn't feature at all with 'yes' women.

Table 6
Responses for the three most preferred outfits

females yes	score	females no	score	all females	score	males	score	all subjects	score
appropriate	12	appropriate	7	appropriate	19	married	9	appropriate	24
professional	6	professional	4	professional	10	professional	8	professional	18
smart	5	management	3	smart	8	smart	6	smart	14
30s	4	smart	3	management	6	older	6	management	11
fairly ambitious	4	40+	3	confident	5	formal	6	confident	10
confident	4	older	2	executive	4	management	5	power	8
power	3	not relaxed	2	ambitious	3	confident	5	older	8
management	3	married	2	40+	3	appropriate	5	executive	7
feminine	2	ambitious	1	feminine	2	power	5	not relaxed	7
executive	2	executive	1	PR	2	not confident	5	not confident	6
25-35	2	has money	1	relaxed	2	not relaxed	5	formal	6
high income	1	serious	1	25-35	2	efficient	5	fairly ambitious	5
ambitious	1	secretarial	1	expensive	2	high income	4	high income	5
PR	1	not confident	1	older	2	not attractive	4	has money	5
relaxed	1	arty	1	not relaxed	2	executive	3	efficient	5
		middle income	1	married	2	middle income	3	30s	4
		confident	1	has money	2	middle class	3	feminine	4
		PR	1	serious	2	has money	2	ambitious	4
		relaxed	1	high income	1	feminine	2	25-35	4
		children	1	secretarial	1	secretarial	2	middle income	4
		expensive	1	not confident	1	mature	2	serious	4
		work oriented	1	arty	1	fairly content	2	not attractive	4
		middle class	1	middle income	1	assertive	2	middle class	4
		conservative	1	children	1	comfortable to	2	relaxed	3
						be with			
		no children	1	work-oriented	1	children	2	secretarial	3
						serious	2	children	3
						well-presented	2	40+	3
						25-35	1	PR	2
						fairly ambitious	1	expensive	2
						arty	1	acty	2
						ambitious	1	mature	2
						relaxed	1	fairly content	2
						no children	1	assertive	2
						work-oriented	1	comfortable to	2
								be with	
								well-presented	2
								no children	2
								conservative	2

Degree of commonality and disparity in use of categories

Hypothesis 4: there will be more agreement amongst male subjects than females in the categories they use to construe the outfits female subjects select as the ones they would wear to work

Table 7

Level of commonality amongst males and females for the most preferred outfits

*unshared/shared category ratio			
	outfit 16	outfit 17	outfit 2
females	6:41	4:41	6:34
males	15:48	12:55	15:45

Note:* 'shared' categories were those were used by two or more subjects;
'unshared' categories were those used by only one subject

The higher numbers of categories generated by males, shown in Table 7, is to be expected since males generated more criteria than females. No significant difference in level of agreement was found between males and females using the Chi-squared test, so the null hypothesis, that there will be no difference in level of agreement between males and females in the categories they use cannot be rejected.

Least preferred outfits

Four outfits were not chosen by any subjects, nos. 3, 4, 12 and 21. Outfit 12 was a pale pink evening dress and jacket. Most subjects identified it as an evening outfit, and therefore very inappropriate for work. It is therefore not included in the

following analysis. Again, categorisation is recorded only where two or more subjects used any one category.

Table 8

Responses for the three least preferred outfits

females	scores	males	scores	all subjects	scores
clerical/support	10	clerical/support	9	clerical/support	19
inappropriate	10	confident	7	young	15
young	9	young	6	inappropriate	13
casual	7	older	6	older	13
older	7	casual	5	casual	12
appropriate	6	ordinary	5	appropriate	10
arty/creative	4	relaxed	5	confident	9
not relaxed	4	fun	4	ordinary	8
fairly smart	4	not office	4	some authority	7
ordinary	3	content	4	admin	7
no power	3	appropriate	4	no power	6
some authority	3	admin	4	relaxed	6
admin	3	outgoing	4	smart	6
cheap	2	inappropriate	3	not relaxed	5
30s	2	no power	3	arty/creative	5
not confident	2	some authority	3	fun	5
under 30	1	married	3	fairly smart	4
confident	1	children	2	not confident	4
relaxed	1	assertive	2	not office	4
fun	1	not attractive	2	content	4
married	1	not ambitious	2	not attractive	4
children	1	30-40	2	outgoing	4
low income	1	formal	2	married	4
working class	1	smart	2	children	3
decorative	1	arty/creative	1	low income	3
		under 30	1	under 30	2
		not relaxed	1	cheap	2
		decorative	1	not expensive	2
		some authority	1	average income	2
		working class	1	30-40	2
		smart	2	not ambitious	2
		arty/creative	1	working class	2
		under 30	1	decorative	2
		not relaxed	1	formal	2
		decorative	1	low income	3
		some authority	1	under 30	2
		working class	1	cheap	2
		middle class	1	not expensive	2
		executive	1	average income	2
		has money	1	30-40	2
				not ambitious	2
				working class	2
				decorative	2
				formal	2

Note: The categories 'clerical' and 'support' were combined for this table. The least popular garments also elicited a number of middle range categories such as 'fairly smart' and 'a little authority'. These were combined with the appropriate positives, such as 'smart' and 'some authority', since the distinctions were so fine.

Dress codes

All subjects were asked if their office had a dress code, and if so, to describe it. One subject, who worked for a large employee-owned transport company, had a written code at work. This had been agreed by the employees themselves. All other subjects said they had a code of some sort, but it was not formal - employees just recognised what was acceptable for their office.

Table 9a
Constraints on dress in subjects' place of work

constraint	gender to which applicable	no. of times mentioned
no trousers	f	5
no shorts	m/f	4
tailored trousers only	f	2
not scruffy	m/f	2
tie compulsory	m	2
no leggings	m/f	1
no short skirts	f	1
no jeans	m/f	1

Table 9b
Comments on dress codes in subjects' place of work

comment	no. of subjects
meeting public	3
assumptions about what is professional dress	2
code relaxed if very hot or cold	2
representative of company	1
have money but poor taste	1
convention/tradition	1
will be more formal when office goes open-plan	1
we have to fit in with the boss	1
older people set the tone	1
not comfortable in trousers	1
jeans are OK for the laboratory	1
suits [for women] are a recent innovation	1
you try not to offend anyone	1
admin are smarter than social workers	1
we [social workers] deliberately dress down for the clients	1

Females generated twice as many comments (25) as males (12) regarding dress codes (Table 9b). Seven constraints on female dress were mentioned, and four on males' dress. Women were not allowed to wear trousers in five of the subjects' workplaces, and only tailored trousers in two. Sources of clothing norms mentioned were; the public, the boss, older people, clients, convention, tradition and assumptions about what constituted 'professional' dress.

Feedback

Interest in clothing

All except three subjects (all male) rated their interest in clothing as average or above. Females were more interested than males (means were 6.3 and 4.3 respectively on a 7 point scale).

Responses to experimental design

Since card sorts are a technique new to clothing research, subjects were asked to show on Likert scales how accurately and completely the card sort had allowed them to express their thoughts about the wearers of the outfits, how enjoyable they had found the experiment, how closely they thought the outfits represented the clothing worn by women in their own office, and if they did not consider their office 'normal', how closely they thought the outfits were to those worn in a 'normal' office.

office. They were also asked to indicate, on a seven-point scale, how interested they were in clothing.

Table 12

Feedback ratings for subjects' responses to experimental design

accuracy rating (%)				
	mean	min	max	range
females	67.5	35.5	86.5	51.0
males	77.5	54.0	91.7	47.7
all subjects	72.5	35.5	91.7	56.2
completeness rating (%)				
	mean	min	max	range
females	71.3	13.5	90.8	77.3
males	84.9	49.5	100	50.5
all subjects	78.1	13.5	100	86.5
enjoyableness rating(%)				
	mean	min	max	range
females	76.3	36.0	98.5	62.5
males	80.9	48.2	100	51.8
all subjects	78.6	36	100	64.0
representative of subject's office rating (%)				
	mean	min	max	range
females	54.8	0	96.0	96.0
males	50.3	10.5	92.0	81.5
all subjects	52.5	0	96.0	96.0
representative of 'normal' office rating (%)				
	mean	min	max	range
females	69.4	43.0	98.0	55.0
males	78.8	47.5	73.8	26.3
all subjects	57.6	43	98.0	55.0

Most subjects felt the sort had fairly accurately represented what they wanted to say about the wearers of the clothing, (a mean rating of 73% for all subjects), men slightly more than women. Subjects were a little more satisfied that they had completed all they had to say about the cards (mean rating 78%), with three men rating completeness at 100%. There was a large difference of opinions amongst females, however, with one woman rating completeness at 14% and another at 91%.

Most subjects found the task enjoyable (mean rating 79%), although three (different) men went so far as to rate it at 100%!

Regarding the representativeness of the outfits, the ratings were lower (mean rating 53%), although one woman (a social worker) gave a 0% rating, and another (a trainer) 96%. Nine subjects (five women and four men) considered their own office not 'normal'. Subjects still felt the selection to be fairly representative of a 'normal' office, however (mean rating 74%).

Table 11

Correlations between feedback variables using Spearman's rho

	crit	cats	acc	com	enj	off	nor	int
crit	-	.86***	.14	-.08	.59**	.20	.10	.40
cats		-	.13	-.22	.58**	.23	.22	.59**
acc			-	.24	.36	-.07	.38	.23
com				-	-.07	.09	-.42	-.30
enj					-	.16	.08	.29
off						-	.32	.16
nor							-	.33
int								-

Notes: ***significant at the 0.001 level
 ** significant at the 0.01 level

Enjoyment of the task is quite strongly related to the amount of construing done by subjects, with number of both criteria and categories showing quite high correlations with level of enjoyment. Interest in clothing was highly correlated with number of categories, but not with number of criteria, suggesting that it is related to complexity of construing (in simple construing, a subject could generate a large number of dichotomous criteria, and therefore a relatively small number

of categories). The high degree of correlation between number of criteria and number of categories is to be expected, since an increase in the former necessarily implies an increase in the latter.

DISCUSSION

Experimental design

Presentation medium

The card sort is a relatively new technique for exploring categorisation, and the perception of clothing is a complex phenomenon. Not surprisingly, therefore, some problems were encountered with the experimental design.

First, models were not adopting exactly the same stance. Second, selecting the models for similar 'neutral' poses, meant that some types of outfit had to be excluded altogether, such as jeans or designerwear, where models were posed more dramatically. A better design would have been to take photographs of the same model wearing different outfits. More control could also then have been exercised over the outfits featured, to test Molloy's (1980) findings more stringently.

Card sorts

The card sort had a number of advantages. Firstly, commonly used quantitative techniques suffer the major drawback of supplying constructs to subjects, a criticism made by Damhorst (1990) in her review. This study shows that subjects generate a very wide range of criteria, so it is possible that even a questionnaire developed from preliminary qualitative

investigation of commonly used constructs may not result in an accurate picture of subjects' organisation of information.

Secondly, since each card has to be accounted for in each sort, a subject's construing can be investigated in relation to all outfits, since there are no omissions in the information generated. If subjects were asked to comment on the outfits using narrative or interview techniques, they may well omit salient information on some items. For example, a subject construing the wearer of outfit 16 as 'married', has to then categorise all other outfits for their association with marriage, whereas the subject may not have generated this criterion spontaneously in relation to say, outfit 17 alone. This allows comparison of outfits categorised in the same way.

Thirdly, the technique has the advantages of both qualitative techniques, in that it generates very rich information using a small number of subjects, and quantitative techniques, in that the number of data points generated is very large, in this case 22 items being sorted by 145 criteria, giving 3190 data points altogether. Also, it produces data in a form suitable for statistical analysis without intermediate coding.

However, it should be stressed that card sorts are best not used alone as an investigative technique. They are time consuming, which limits the number of subjects used. They can show only breadth of construing, not depth. Subjects may not generate all the criteria they utilise in construing the domain in question,

either because some criteria are taken for granted, or because subjects cannot make other criteria explicit. Card sorts are therefore recommended to be used in conjunction with other techniques, such as questionnaires, to focus responses, and laddering, to explore the depth of construing.

Difficulties with the task

Subjects found their task difficult, particularly at first. Although all subjects claimed to understand the task after instructions were given, they found it difficult to carry out in practice. The task was quite a complex one in cognitive terms. First the subjects had to analyse information from the stimulus items. Then they had to evaluate the wearer using associations with the outfits; then choose one criterion on which to compare the wearers, then decide how to categorise the items.

Subjects tended to examine all the items very carefully, then to attempt a sort based on features of the outfits e.g. 'smart' or 'trousers', rather than attributes of the wearer. When corrected, most subjects verbally generated a number of criteria immediately. After the first sort, most subjects had no difficulty in carrying out several more. This suggests that once a pattern of cognitive operations had been set up, subjects used it until they ran out of available categories. Damhorst (1984-5) also notes the difficulty subjects have in construing traits, and cites work by Fiske & Cox (1979) showing that subjects are more willing to embark on a task like this with friends, rather than strangers, presumably because

there is more certainty about traits of people they know. One female subject commented: "I'm trying to outwit my own stereotypes. Sometimes I was aware that I was saying contradictory things - perhaps I could have gone into that more."

The feedback scales (see below) show that in spite of subjects' initial difficulties with the task, they felt it represented their construing accurately and completely.

Categorisation processes

Gender differences

There was more variation amongst males than females in the number of criteria used for construing target persons, although this difference was not statistically significant.

Identity of criteria

No significant difference in the criteria used was found between males and females, but a significant difference was found (in use of the criterion 'sex') when the criteria were grouped into superordinate constructs. This suggests that the groupings of responses, such as personality traits, used (Park, op cit; Damhorst, 1990) may affect comparisons between results of different studies. A standardised typology such as that proposed by Damhorst (ibid) would make meaningful comparison possible.

Commonality

The finding that there was a significantly higher degree of agreement in use of criteria amongst males than amongst females is indirectly supported by Dillon (op cit) and DeLong et al. (op cit); who found less variation in men's than women's perceptions of female business dress. Damhorst (1984-5), however, found less variation in women's than men's perceptions of *male* dress. Same sex perceivers appear to have more complex construing than opposite sex perceivers.

The degree of commonality was low, most criteria being generated by three or less subjects (figs. 2a, 2b, and 2c). This has important implications for questionnaire design. Initially, it was anticipated that this study would provide information which could be used to design a questionnaire investigating perceptions of dress in organisations. However, if the five most commonly generated criteria found in this study were used to compile a questionnaire, all except one (age) would be salient to less than 50% of the respondents, and the majority of subjects may not utilise the questionnaire constructs at all, unless instructed to do so.

However, the low degree of commonality also means that researchers looking for subjects' construing within a specified area would need to use a more directed approach as well. For example, 'intelligence' appears in at least two typologies of constructs used in clothing and person perception studies (Peak, 1986; Damhorst, 1990). Damhorst found 37 studies using it, but it does not appear

at all in the constructs generated by subjects in this study (apart from indirectly as 'education'). A questionnaire featuring 'intelligence' would allow comparison of subjects' *relative* ratings using this criterion, although responses would be of questionable validity.

Dichotomous categorisation

There was a statistically significant difference in the use of dichotomous criteria, males using them much more than females (fig 1), and this difference was distributed evenly over all male subjects. Most of the criteria categorised dichotomously by males were also categorised dichotomously in females, although the latter did not generate such categories so frequently. Dichotomous categorisation has been noted by other researchers, although not in terms of a gender difference, and its cause is under debate (Fransella & Bannister, *op cit*). If this finding is generalizable to other domains, it could have significant implications for decision-making involving person perception in organizational settings. If males are tending to make more either/or judgements than women, they may appear to be more decisive than women but may be missing significant factors.

The working wardrobe

Most preferred outfits

The three most preferred outfits chosen by female subjects to wear to work, were two shirtdresses (one navy, one red) and the navy/green plaid pleated skirt suit, followed by a navy skirt with navy/white striped jacket. Smartness appeared to be a critical factor, as distinct from the least preferred outfits which were generally the most casual. Short skirts and pink outfits received a number of unfavourable comments, being associated with lack of seriousness, a finding consistent with Molloy (1980).

Jackets and trousers

Interestingly, no preference was shown for or against jackets. This finding is inconsistent with the results of studies by Molloy (1980), Dillon (op cit) and Temple & Loewen (op cit), who found the jacket to be strongly preferred in women's business dress. One female subject made some striking comments about jackets:

"Women's jackets aren't the same as men's jackets - sometimes they have no lapels and no useful pockets, and aren't warm and they're pale, light fabrics and you don't wear anything underneath - they're like castrated jackets - they're not real jackets at all."

There was also a lack of preference for or against trousers, consistent with Dillon (op cit), but conflicting with Molloy (1980). Several subjects in the study, both males and females, found it

difficult to categorise the trouser outfits, and most said they were not used to women wearing trousers at work. Seven of the subjects said their workplace dress codes had rules about women's trousers - five not allowing them at all and two allowing tailored trousers only. The association of trousers with males appears to begin very early, in spite of the prevalence of trousers in female attire generally (Kaiser & Phinney, 1983).

How women construe the clothes they choose for work

The choices made suggest that the women in this study have not been heavily influenced by Molloy's (1980) findings. This may be because, as Kaiser (1990) suggests, women have now become more secure in their careers and feel freer to decide for themselves what they wear to work. Alternatively, the constructs viewed by Molloy (ibid) and Harragan (op cit) as prerequisites for women's progress, such as power, ambition and efficiency, are not salient to women. This is supported by the data in Table 6, where these constructs are all relatively low in the response ranking. Choosing the clothing which is not salient to significant males in organisations may indeed be responsible for the 'glass ceiling' experienced by women in their careers. Certainly only one of the female subjects in this study could be described as a senior manager, and she chose only outfit 2, supporting Molloy's thesis.

The most commonly used categories by all women for the most preferred outfits, whether or not they chose them, were 'appropriateness' and 'professional'. This suggests that there is

some standard of acceptability by which women are judging their clothing. Interestingly, this supports the findings of some early clothing researchers. Barr (1934), found that conformity was an important criterion in choice of clothing. Creekmore (op cit) found that women used clothing to increase their sense of belonging and self-esteem.

Age was very salient for both males and females for two of the outfits. The women who chose outfit 16 thought the wearer was in her thirties, which they probably identified with, and the women who *did not* choose outfit 2 thought the wearer was in her forties, from which, given the average age of the subjects (35-40) they probably wished to disassociate themselves.

The working wardrobe as seen by men

The responses of males to the same outfits were rather different. The outfits are construed as being professional and smart, but females used 'appropriateness' significantly more than males, suggesting that males are not so concerned about women adhering to a social norm for dress. The women therefore appear to be trying to conform to a norm of their own construction, rather than one set by men as Molloy (1977) suggests. The men were, however, concerned about formality, which was also found by Dillon (op cit).

Attractiveness

DeLong et al (op cit) found that men were less attracted to formally dressed women than casually dressed women; certainly only one man in this study rated the women in the three most popular outfits as positively attractive/sexy, and four of the men construed them as positively unattractive/unsexy.

One surprising finding was that the most commonly used category by men for the most preferred outfits was 'married', although no wedding ring is visible in the photographs on the cards. Given the formality/attractiveness association described above, men could use 'married' as an indirect way of saying that they do not find the target woman attractive, or that she is not sexually available. The unattractiveness rating may be higher than Table 6 suggests, since it does not include categories used by only one subject. Twelve single subject responses were extracted from the data, five suggesting a negative sexual rating, four neutral, and three positive.

Formality

Formality may be so salient for men because it is the primary source of variation in male dress (e.g. shirt, tie, and suit vs. jeans, t-shirt, denim jacket). It is a strong indicator of status (Damhorst, 1984-5). One of the male subjects in this study commented: " If you go into a room full of men wearing suits, you can tell who is on the board [of directors] by the quality of the suit, *but you can't*

tell anything else about them. " (Original emphasis). Given the narrow range of male business attire, it may be that formality of style, denoting status, is occupying the only dimension of variation available. Women have a much wider choice, and degree of formality can be conveyed by varying either the choice of garment, for example skirt suit and blouse vs. dress, or its style. Formality is important in guiding social interactions. Giles and Farrar (1979) found that formality of dress affected writing style, and Damhorst (ibid) that it guided subjects' construing the type of interaction taking place in an otherwise identical set of drawings.

The image which the women who chose these garments are trying to present is a very positive one of a fairly ambitious, confident, professional manager, who dresses smartly and in accordance with social norms. The outfits were viewed similarly by the women who did not choose them (apart from outfit 2, which was probably rejected because of its serious, older image). The men in the study, although they read some of the messages correctly, were not so concerned with how acceptable the outfits were, but did appear to be thinking of the target women in terms of their sexual availability. There was no significant difference in the categories used by males and females, which was not predicted. This could be due to the fact that categories were analysed as generated by the subjects, giving a large number of idiosyncratic items, and were not grouped as they were in other studies. The implications of this have already been discussed.

Least preferred outfits

There were four outfits which were not chosen as work wear by any of the women. They were two casual trousers outfits (one with a waistcoat), an informal skirt with t-shirt style top, and a pink evening suit.

There was even less commonality in the categories used in construing these outfits than with the most popular ones. The most salient categories were also different, the most commonly generated for both sexes being that the outfits denoted low status in the office hierarchy. This is in contrast to Damhorst's (1984-5) finding that casual outfits had no effect on status evaluations. Again, appropriateness, or rather lack of it, was very salient for women, although some women thought the outfits were appropriate. Opinion was also divided amongst men, but the issue was again much less salient for them. Both groups thought the women were either 'younger' - or 'older', presumably compared to themselves. Compared to the most preferred outfits, 'married' was a much less salient category for men, possibly because the clothes were much more casual, and the women's sexual availability therefore construed as higher, although the males did not find these target women more or less attractive than the most popular ones.

In summary, it appears that women subjects were largely in agreement over the way they construe clothing which they deem most appropriate for work, although quite a wide variety of outfits

was considered suitable. This suggests that for the female subjects in this study there does not appear to be a clearly defined 'business uniform'. Men read fairly well the signals which women are sending by wearing these clothes, but appear to construe the wearers primarily in terms of sexual availability.

Dress codes

All subjects were asked if their office had a dress code, and if so, to describe it. All subjects reported a code of some sort, but only one, who worked for a large employee-owned transport company, had a written code. This had been agreed amongst the employees themselves.

Females made twice as many comments about dress codes as males, and more constraints on female dress than on male dress were reported. This may simply be a result of females having a wider range of work clothing available to them. 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). The wide range of clothing chosen by women in this study and in the working environment in general may reflect a struggle to fulfil both roles, or may indicate that women are not prepared to give up their freedom of expression and adopt the uniformity which many employees are expected to adopt, and which some men complain about.

One subject in this study, a partner in a law firm, bemoaned the lack of variety in clothing of males and females in his office, and located its cause in the degree of control exercised by the partners. When applying for his partnership, two of the other partners had suggested that he shave off his beard before he was accepted. He did not do so.

Three subjects related their dress codes to meeting the public, implying that they dressed more smartly, whereas the social worker's colleagues dressed 'down' to identify with their clients. She commented at some length on the dress code in her office:

" Admin staff wear 'officey' clothes. Social workers used to look dreadful - no make up. This has changed recently because of the business culture. Presentation is more important now. We've got more black staff and they dress up more, so they've raised the level a bit. People are more co-ordinated, they dress as if they've thought about it. Some are a bit eccentric. The clothes are transferable to out-of-work.

Men can't wear shorts. They're stuck in a 70s look - casual to scruffy. They dress down - a sort of false levelling to clients. No suits, and they only wear a tie to court - there used to be the office tie hanging up for anyone to wear to court. They wear sludgy colours - there's no grooming. Some wear pony tails, but they're nasty pony tails, not like in advertising.

I think people consider it a bit thoughtless to wear lipstick when you're dealing with life issues. If I dressed in an officey, businessy way, it would be seen as odd - I think it's inverted snobbery - not the same signals as in offices where people make money - social work is about values."

Dress was more casual in the public sector, which is consistent with the findings of Kaiser (1990), who found that ostentation was avoided to prevent accusations of misuse of public funds.

Dress codes serve a number of functions. Sommer, Kaiser & Sommer (1987) found that practical considerations were often overlooked by companies with dress codes, suggesting that impression management was the primary reason for the code. Easterling et al. (op cit), found that dress codes are significantly more common in service industries than in manufacturing. They point out that when services, as distinct from goods, are being offered, prospective purchasers cannot sample the product in advance, so have to rely on a surrogate indicator of quality, such as the presentation of the vendor.

Interest in clothing

Thirteen subjects (eight females, five males) indicated an above average interest in clothing. Interest in clothing is related to complexity of construing (a correlation of .59 with number of categories generated - Table 11) although the direction of causality is open to further investigation. Subjects with complex construing processes, and with knowledge about clothing, may be more interested in it as a consequence, or heightened interest may result in more complex construing. Interest in clothes did not appear to have an affect on the outfits chosen by women to wear to work.

Interest in clothing has been found to have effects on evaluations of target persons. Rowold (op cit), found that subjects with little interest in clothing were more likely to project their own levels of self-esteem onto target persons. Lapitsky & Smith (1981), found that females who were interested in clothing gave higher ratings to tasks performed by attractively dressed women, but did not necessarily give lower ratings to women dressed unattractively. A measure of interest in clothing was developed by Creekmore (op cit). Accurate evaluation of others in a work environment is often critical. Given the important role interest in clothing appears to play in reducing projection onto target persons, further research in this area could be very fruitful, especially since women appear to have a greater interest in clothing than men.

Feedback

Experimental design

Since card sorts are a technique new to clothing research, the opportunity for feedback was given to see how subjects felt about the session and also how representative the stimulus photographs were of the type of outfits which the subjects encountered in their normal working life. Subjects were also asked to rate their degree of interest in clothing.

The ratings for accuracy and completeness of construing were quite high (means of 73% and 78% respectively) and most subjects enjoyed the task (mean rating 79%). Both number of both criteria

and categories showed quite high correlations with level of enjoyment.

The 'normal' office

The outfits presented were not felt by subjects to be very representative of those worn by women in their own offices (mean rating 53%). Several subjects said this was because the outfits were 'too posh' and one, a solicitor, had a very strict dress code at work. Nine subjects (five women and four men) considered their own office not 'normal'. Of these, four (two women and two men) gave very similar ratings to representativeness in their own office and in a 'normal' office, which could be an artefact of the juxtaposition of the two scales with similar questions attached. However, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, op cit) suggests that people do view the groups to which they belong as unique, even if they have no evidence for that uniqueness (Ashforth & Mael, op cit).

Implications for organisational psychology

Clothing at work has been largely overlooked by organisational psychologists. (Rafaelli & Pratt, op cit). This study has raised a number of interesting issues which could provide useful starting points for further investigation.

There appear to be differences in complexity of categorisation between men and women in construing female work clothing, notably in the higher degree of commonality and use of dichotomous categorisation amongst males. Given previous findings of differences between same sex and different sex construing of clothing, it is likely that studies of *male* work clothing would show higher commonality amongst women than men (Damhorst, 1984-5), and possibly more dichotomous categorisation in females. If dichotomous categorisation is predominant in males evaluating male clothing, then this suggests that it is a fundamental factor in male person perception and has far-reaching implications for organisations, for example in decision-making.

The difference in the salience of variables for men and women could have important repercussions for selection and assessment, as males and females may be using different criteria to assess target persons. The low degree of commonality between individuals in construing clothing may apply to domains other than clothing, such as training or selection - the card sort technique used in this study could be useful in obtaining profiles of trainees or job applicants, for example.

Women's and men's work clothing

The differences in the way women's clothing is construed by males and females needs to be explored in terms of its implications for women's career development. The consequences of women's either mimicking male attire more closely, or developing their own 'business uniform', or not having a uniform at all, could have dramatic effects on the contribution made by women in the workplace.

Little research has been undertaken on men's workwear (Damhorst, 1990). Aspects worth investigating are: degree of formality as an indicator of status; the messages conveyed by variations in the business suit, and its effect on self-perception and behaviour; the symbolic nature of socks and ties (which are frequently very eye-catching); and the use of conspicuous consumption.

More research on the jacket would be appropriate. Jackets are important business garments for both men and women, although there are significant variations between the male and female versions, as one of the subjects in this study pointed out. The nature of the 'enclosure' afforded by the jacket (Dillon, op cit; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992) and jacket-wearing protocol, would also be interesting areas to explore.

Controls in the organisation

The controls which organisations exercise over employees' dress in the form of dress codes could also be a fruitful theme. The origins of the codes, the reasons given for their existence, the sanctions against employees breaking a code, and the expense incurred by employees in complying it, would be possible avenues to follow. Rafaelli & Pratt (op cit) propose a model for classification of organisational dress, with homogeneity and conspicuousness as variables. The literature (Dillon, op cit; DeLong et al, op cit; Easterling et al, op cit) suggests that such a model should also include the dimensions explicit - implicit and formal - informal.

The symbolic associations of organisational dress could be investigated, possibly using an approach such as semiotics (Eco, op cit). Impression management is commonplace in organisations (Rafaelli & Pratt, op cit), in attempts to convey organisational image or values, but since dress is 'undercoded' symbolically, (Davis, 1985), this could be a challenging task.

In summary, it is clear that clothing at work is an important, but overlooked, aspect of organisational theory and there many aspects of this field which offer fruitful areas of enquiry to organisational psychologists.

CONCLUSION

This study produced interesting insights into subjects' categorisation of women's work clothing. Males showed less variation in their construing than females, and were found to use both dichotomous categorisation and categorisation related to sexuality, significantly more than females. In their categorisations of the outfits which the female subjects said they would consider wearing to work, there were marked differences between males and females. For females categorising the three most preferred outfits, 'appropriateness' and 'professional' were most salient categories, whereas for males the most salient category was 'married'. For the least preferred outfits, 'low status' was the most salient category for both gender groups. Subjects felt the card sort technique reflected their construing accurately and fairly completely, which suggests that it has high validity. They also enjoyed the task. This study has clearly shown that clothing plays a significant role in person perception in the workplace, and has highlighted a number of areas which could usefully be explored in future research.

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Appendix: Illustrations of stimulus items

Black and white illustrations of coloured photographs of outfits used as stimulus items, in order of preference by subjects. Colour descriptions may be found in Table 5.

16



17



2



8



1



6



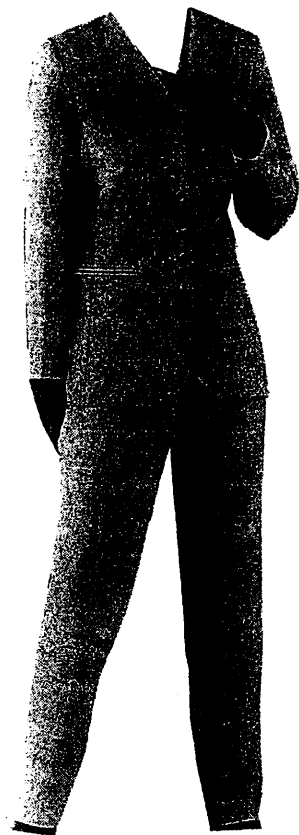
9



13



15



19



20



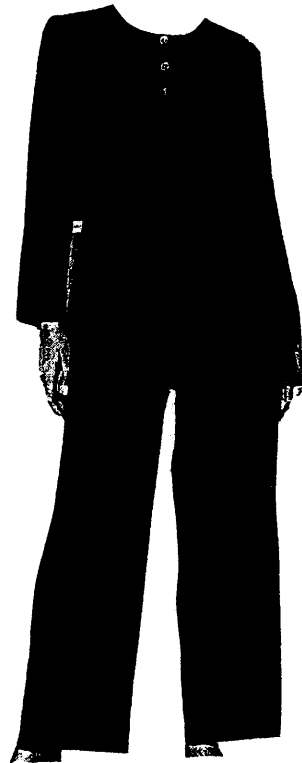
7



10



14



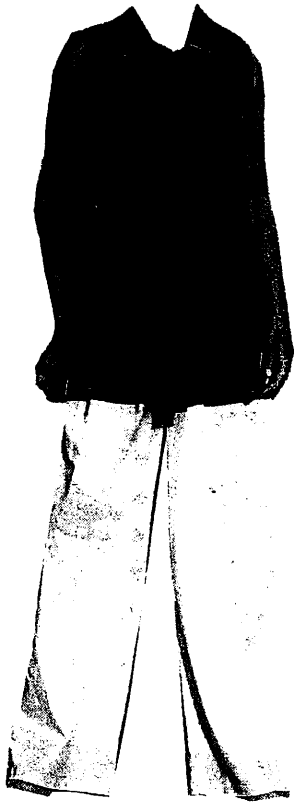
18



22



3



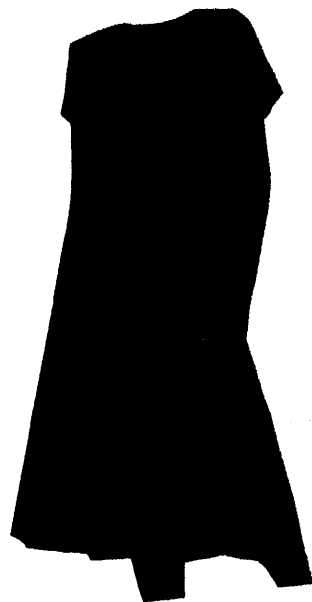
4



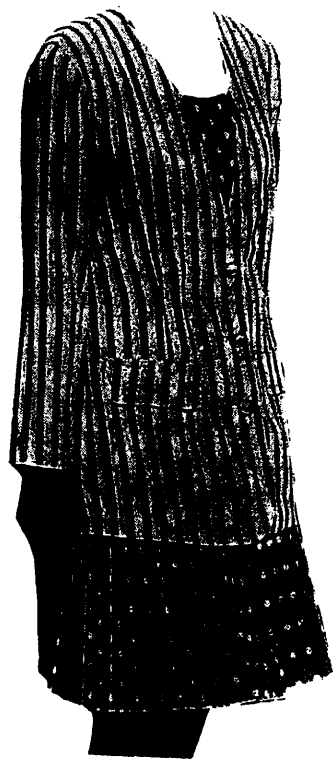
12



21



11



5

