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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN
FACULTY OF DESIGN
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**'WORKING DRESS:
DID IRISH WOMEN POWER DRESS
IN THE 1980S?'**

by

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Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and
Complementary Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of Fashion

1996

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	
List of Illustrations	
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	Women's changing status in 20th Century Ireland; 3
	Changes in Government Legislation; 4
	Education and Women; 7
	Striving for Equality. 9
Chapter 2	"Dressing for the positions"; 13
	Women using clothing as a means of indicating their professional status;
	Working dress pre 1980: Setting the Context; 14
	Working dress in the 1980s. 25
Chapter 3	An investigation of Irish working women's dress in the 1980s; 54
	Working positions; 56
	Working Clothes; 56
	The Language of Clothes; 58
	Dressing for their particular roles; 60
	Working dress post 1980. 62
Conclusion	71
Appendices	75
Bibliography	87

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In presenting this project, I wish to thank all who contributed to it. I would like to acknowledge in particular the following people:

- Hilary O' Kelly, my tutor.
- Frances Mc Donagh, Head of Fashion, N.C.A.D.
- All the women who graciously responded to my questionnaire.
- The Department of Equality and Law Reform, Dublin.
- Evelyn and Don for proof reading and critical analysis.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration Number 1

Mrs E. Glasgow, Assistant Librarian, Tyrone County Library
1928

Illustration Number 2

Wife greeting her husband as he comes home from work.
Men and women dressing the part, Kidwell & Steel, 1989

Illustration Number 3

Female banker presenting a sponsorship cheque
Tyrone Constitution, 20th March 1974

Illustration Number 4

Fashionable image of 1974

Illustration Number 5

A delegation from Limerick City on their way to meet the Fianna Fail
leader in Dublin, *Irish Times*, 10th November 1978

Illustration Number 6

Molloy's recommended uniform for success,
The Women's Dress for Success Book, Molloy 1980, p37

Illustration Number 7

The Minister for Education, 1981

Illustration Number 8

Dublin Councillor attending a official ceremony,
Irish Times ,13th March 1985

Illustration Number 9

Molloy's Imitation Man Look, *The Women's Dress for success Book*,
Molloy 1980

Illustration Number 10

The Gentleman Look, *The Book of Looks*, Johnson,1984

Illustration Number 11

Men's Fashions interpreted, *Elle Magazine*, February 1985

Illustration Number 12

Clothes for men...coveted by women,
Irish Independent, 12th September 1985

Illustration Number 13a

Ms Sally O'Neill, Head of Projects with Trocaire,
Irish Independent, 12th January 1986

Illustration Number 13b

Ms Noreen Slattery, Administrative Manager,
Irish Times, 7th March 1986

Illustration Number 13c

Ms Anne Clarke, Branch Manager,
Irish Times Business & Finance, 29th March 1986

Illustration Number 13d

Office secretary, 1985

Illustration Number 14

Women in Senior positions within the workforce, March 1986

Illustration Number 15

Punch on Powershoulders of the 1980s, *Fashion modernity & ID*, p48

Illustration Number 16

American Soap Opera stars sporting the shoulder padded look

Illustration Number 17

Ms Kaye Mulronney, Director on the C.I.E. Board,
Irish Times, 23rd Nov 1995

Illustration Number 18

Boys Own, *Image Magazine*, September 1995

Illustration Number 19

Pat Mc Carthy's Winter 1995 collection

INTRODUCTION

This study sets out to examine the concept of power dressing by Irish women in employment in the 1980s. For the purposes of this study the term 'power dressing' will be taken to refer to fashion amongst ambitious, 1980s professionals of both sexes, although it most often related to women. Power dressing was associated with young, upwardly mobile, professional people in employment, (in media terms known as 'Yuppies'), who expressed assertiveness through their choice of clothing styles and accessories.

Molloy, 1980, who coined the term 'power dressing', described it as a mode which,

"called for feminising an otherwise cloned masculine image - signalled by suit, jacket and matching, well-below-the-knee skirt through wearing such apparel as silk fronted blouses"

(Molloy, 1980,p.10)

There has been no published study on the topic of Irish women's working dress in the 1980s. There is, however, much literature on the subject of power dressing. Cross referencing this information with pictorial evidence from the 1980s, it should be possible to establish whether or not Irish women power-dressed.

I aim to study the backdrop of political and social change as it affected the lives of women in 20th Century Ireland. I plan to examine the concept of "dressing for the position" with reference to working and middle class women in employment by analysis of press photographs.

I hope to determine whether or not current fashion influenced workwear, whether Irish women attempted to indicate professional power through clothing and what, if any, message the female business apparel was communicating. It may be possible to establish whether or not Irish women's working dress evolved in parallel with her role and what the consequences of this were for women in the workplace.

My investigation centres on the 1980s, however, it will be important to look at dress before and after this date to determine whether there was any change in women's attitude to clothes and in their modes of dress in the 1980s.

CHAPTER 1

WOMEN'S CHANGING STATUS IN 20th CENTURY IRELAND

To place this study in context, I feel it is necessary to look at the development of the emancipation of women, the improved educational opportunities for women and their entry into and progression within the workforce. I intend to examine the changing role of women in society against the social and political background of 20th Century Ireland and the concurrent change in women's working position from the 1970s to the present day.

There was a 19th Century belief that the production of wealth outside the home was the role of the male and that caring for the children was the role of the women. It could be argued that these activities, which are essential to the welfare of society as a whole, should be the responsibility of men and women equally.

This premise seems to have been supported by Coulter (1985) writing in *Women and Work, Personally Speaking*.

Productive work in society, contributing to the total wealth of the society, is fundamental to a person's full development as an adult. To maintain the species people must do two things - produce the means of life and reproduce themselves. The biological burden of the latter is laid, by nature, on the shoulders of women. But it is only in very recent history and only at certain times and within certain classes, among a small minority, that this has been counterpoised to their role as producers of wealth.

(Coulter, 1985, p 95)

CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION

I have found no support in history for the belief that women have no major aspiration other than to marry and have children, or that if indeed they do marry and have children that it is natural for them to stay at home to look after the children and husband.

Since the foundation of the Irish State in 1922, both men and women have had the right to vote and the equality in law of all citizens was set out in Article 40.1 of the 1937 Constitution of Ireland. Despite this, the National Report of Ireland, 1994, claimed that Irish Society held a very narrow focused and limiting view of women during the first fifty years of the country's independence. Enormous improvements regarding equality of women with men in Irish society seem to have taken place over the last twenty years. It could be argued that this is due largely to three factors:

- the growth of world-wide consciousness of the rights of women;
- a better educated population, ready and willing to announce its rights;
- obligations deriving from the membership of the European Union.

Women today are better informed of their rights as citizens and according to the 1994 National Report some highly significant changes to Irish law were initiated by constitutional test cases taken by individual women rather than by Government or legislature. Josey Airey, was one such woman who took a test case against the constitution, to enable her and others like her to obtain free legal aid.

It is evident from such an example, that Irish women are striving to achieve true equality in society. One could suppose that Ms Airey, saw her abilities and skills and that by making a personal effort to try and change the law, she would be helping others in a similar position.

One could conclude that Ms Airey is reflecting true equality described by Beale,

True equality is reflected both internally in the individual and externally in society. Internally, it means a woman having a positive image of herself as a female person, and seeing her abilities and skills clearly. It means feeling that she is of equal worth to other human beings and that she is in charge of her own life. Externally, equality requires a society in which women are taught and encouraged to see themselves as valuable and worthwhile people, and where the social and political structures reflect a recognition of and constructive use of, women's talent and potential.

(Beale, 1986, p187)

It is evident from the changes being made by the Irish Government to help and encourage women in society, that they too are trying to achieve true equality for all citizens.

In November 1990, the Government established the second (National) Commission on the Status of Women. The Commission's remit was to examine the recommendations of the First (National) Commission on the Status of Women set out in 1972. They were to consider and advise on the means, administrative and legislative, by which women would be able to participate on equal terms and conditions with men in economic, social, political and cultural life. They were to pay attention to the needs of women in the home and to establish the estimated costs of all recommendations made.

The establishment of the Employment Equality Agency (EEA) in October 1977 promoted the advancement of women in Ireland. The EEA works toward the elimination of discrimination in employment and the promotion of equality of opportunity between men and women. They keep under review the Anti-discrimination (Pay) Act 1974, along with their own Act and if necessary make proposals for amending either or both of these Acts. This agency was most important for Irish women who wished to advance positions within the workplace or enter professions previously not available to them. Such new laws helped women enormously and promoted their status as equal citizens in Irish society.

EDUCATION AND WOMEN

Information published by the Department of Educational Statistics Reports, 1979/80, 1984/85 and 1992/3, displays the number of persons receiving full-time education by age and gender, see table number 1 in appendices. The figures show that the number of persons in education in 1980, compared with 1993, has increased in every age group from 3 - 24 age cohort of the de facto population. The department also published tables on the number of persons receiving full-time education by gender and type of school/college for 1979/80, 1984/85 and 1992/3. What is notable is that the number of women attending university exceeded that of men in 1992/93, in contrast to the previous years for which data are given, see table number 2a, 2b, 2c in appendices. Table number 3 in appendices, published by the Higher Education Authority, show the numbers of third level students by sex and field of study. A salient feature is that women students outnumbered men in economic and social studies in 1991, compared with having accounted for 29% of the students in this study in 1980. Dramatic increases in the percentage of women students was also evident in education, art and design, law, science and medicine. It is evident from this table that women were aiming to enter labour markets traditionally closed to them.

For many years the Irish Governments have pursued a policy for equality of educational opportunity for all. Positive action to promote gender equity in education is the policy of the Department of Education. In 1990, the government announced its intentions to introduce a comprehensive Education Act. It was published in 1992 and set out a programme to promote gender equity in education which included, regular reviews of all teaching equipment in schools and states that all second level schools must ensure that their full range of courses are available to both sexes.

This Act encourages co-education as the norm in both primary and second level.

The Department of Education plans to bring about the greater participation of women in management positions within the department, including the inspectorate. All educational institutions, at all levels, are obliged to develop and publish an active policy to promote greater equity. This will be reported in their annual reports. This 1992 Education Act also directed that the boards of management in schools aim to have a gender balance in their membership and staff selection committees.

STRIVING FOR EQUALITY

The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Women's Rights (1983), the National Economic and Social Forum, (1993), and the Council for the Status of Women, are bodies processing women's interests and channelling these through to government. This guaranteed women not only a direct input to government policy making but also a monitoring facility through which progress towards equality can be checked and measured.

In early 1993, the Commission made its final report to the government. The report established that women want to be treated as individuals, not as dependants, and they want choice in pursuing the roles and careers best suited to them. It points out that in order for women to acquire equality, there must be power sharing and partnership at the private household level as well as the macro level. Concurrently, a Minister was appointed for equality and law reform. It is now the Minister's responsibility to see that equality becomes a reality through institutional, administrative and legal reform. They also exercise a monitoring and co-ordinating role on government policies in so far as they affect women. A system is now operating to scrutinise all proposals coming to Government, for their impact on women. The Department is committed to the development of equal status for women. They introduced legislation to ensure equality of employment. This will forbid discrimination on a range of grounds not only in the workplace, but also in education, in the provision of goods, facilities and services and in the disposal of accommodation or other premises.

Despite the new laws and legislation, the overall proportion of women in the labour force only increased from 28% in 1970 to 34.2% in 1992. There was, however a remarkable increase in the number of married women in the workforce. In the early 1970s only 8% of married women were employed outside the home, whilst by 1992, 29.7% of all married women had joined the ranks, (figures from Department of Equality and Law Reform, 1994).

Table number 1 indicates the increase of women in management positions in the Irish workforce in the early 1990s. This trend may have influenced the mode of Irish working women's dress or indeed their mode of dress may have helped to bring about this evolution.

TABLE NUMBER 1

IMBUCON SURVEY

WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT			
FUNCTION	1994%	1993%	1992%
Top Management	3.5	2.6	2.0
Personnel	32.0	27.6	34.9
Sales	8.8	9.9	9.1
Finance	22.6	20.1	16.7
Marketing	21.0	28.8	23.9
Manufacturing	10.4	9.5	12.7
Technical	3.7	7.6	2.6
I.T. & Data Processing	31.0	21.6	21.0
Distribution	8.7	6.1	6.2
Materials	16.3	11.5	13.5

It seems that the Irish Government is firmly committed to eliminating inequality for all groups in society that have suffered from disability, disadvantage or discrimination. They proclaim themselves dedicated to a radical programme of affirmative action in appointing women to the boards of State controlled bodies. Their objective is to draw at least 40% of all the members of such Government boards, from each gender, by March 1997. They have also requested that all public sector agencies introduce equal opportunities policies if they have not already done so. It can be seen that in the relatively short space of time, from 1970 until today, Ireland has shed its identity as a predominantly rural country dominated by traditional values and attitudes. It has begun to adopt a more urban, industrial culture which reflects standards and practices common to much of Western Europe. Throughout this time of development in Irish society, values and ways have been questioned and every aspect of women's lives not least their dress, has been subject to scrutiny and change.

CHAPTER 2

"DRESSING FOR THE POSITION"

**WOMEN USING CLOTHING AS A
MEANS OF INDICATING THEIR
PROFESSIONAL STATUS.**

In this Chapter, I intend to investigate the concept of 'dressing for the position with reference to women in employment. This will determine whether Irish women in the 1980s, dress to suit their occupational role and if so, did women in senior positions indicate professional power through clothing, that is power dress.

To understand what is considered to be appropriate clothing for certain positions, it is necessary to be aware that messages are conveyed to others from items of our personal dress. We create a image of self by clothes, shoes, jewellery, make-up and hairstyles. This image evolves from social contexts as well as conveying messages within society and has been affected by this collective social vision of gender as well as our own ideas of our personal image. One could suppose that clothing is very much a social artefact, a form of communication and therefore it must enable us to carry out daily activities, accommodating our way of life, as well as responding to social contexts.

An individual manipulation of language of clothing is defined as clothing speech, in an non verbal tongue. According to Oscar Wilde,

"it is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances.

The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible".

(Wilde, 1891, p. 57)

By examining working women's dress in the 1980s, it should be possible to understand the messages of the wearer.

WORKING DRESS PRE 1980: SETTING THE CONTEXT

Writing about dress Davis (1992) states that,

The different evolution of male and female dress in the modern era is not, as many think, the result of historical accident with each dress form going its own way, as it were, once its basic pattern is set down.

(Davis, 1992, p47)

It is his opinion that the confined system of post 18th Century men's dress and the elaborated system of women's are of one unit; together they form a coherent sign system, which seeks to ratify and legitimise the culturally endorsed gender division of labour in society. He concludes that in steadfastly narrowing its symbolic allegiance to values of work and career, conventional, middle class, male dress signals its privileged access to the source of economic and political power in industrial and post industrial society, namely occupational success and the income, social status and prestige deriving from it.

Women seemed to be content to enter the workforce, inferior in position to all men, and in the early 20th Century regarded their actual entrance as achieving professional success. Mrs E Glasgow, illustration number 1, was the assistant librarian in Tyrone County library in 1928. Her working dress includes a long, dark, skirt, a stiff white blouse, with no accessories together with a neat hair style. Her dress is discreet and she is neat in appearance.

Illustration Number 1

Mrs E. Glasgow, Assistant Librarian, Tyrone County Library

1928



This type of working outfit is that as described by Wilson and Taylor, (1989) in *Through the looking glass*, when discussing appropriate clothing for the 1920s.

Womens clothes had to be 'dainty' and 'becoming' and women's dress had to be quiet and ladylike - anything sexually suggestive would have seemed terribly vulgar. Working women had to be even more, careful with nothing to call attention to appearance.

(Wilson & Taylor, 1989, p78-79)

As the century progressed it is evident that many demands were made on womens appearance. Head, writing in 1959, prescribed what men wanted from women and their appearance.

Working wives must cultivate two, separate fashion philosophies; no man wants a brisk executive-looking woman at the dinner table and no man wants a too alluring creature gliding around his office.

(Head, 1959, p193.)

Similarly, Fogarty, (1959), held the view that a wife played an important role in the advancement of her husband. Therefore the wife should dress in an appropriate way for the husband's job, always looking attractive even when doing the housework, rather than looking like a mechanic or farm labourer. His belief demonstrates how women were supposed to dress for the position of a wife. One could suppose that society upheld the view that woman should be content to feel inferior to men, even follow their dictation in regards to appearance.

There seemed to be less social restrictions on the dress of men at this time. Even in the late 1950s the businessman faced fewer problems regarding demands on appearance.

During business hours there was a rigid set of rules about what to wear in the office. To be accepted in this world of business all men had to do was to conform to the rules by wearing a suit, shirt and tie. Regrettably no rigid set of rules had been formed for women and their working costume, which would have made it simpler to acquire a suitable business image.

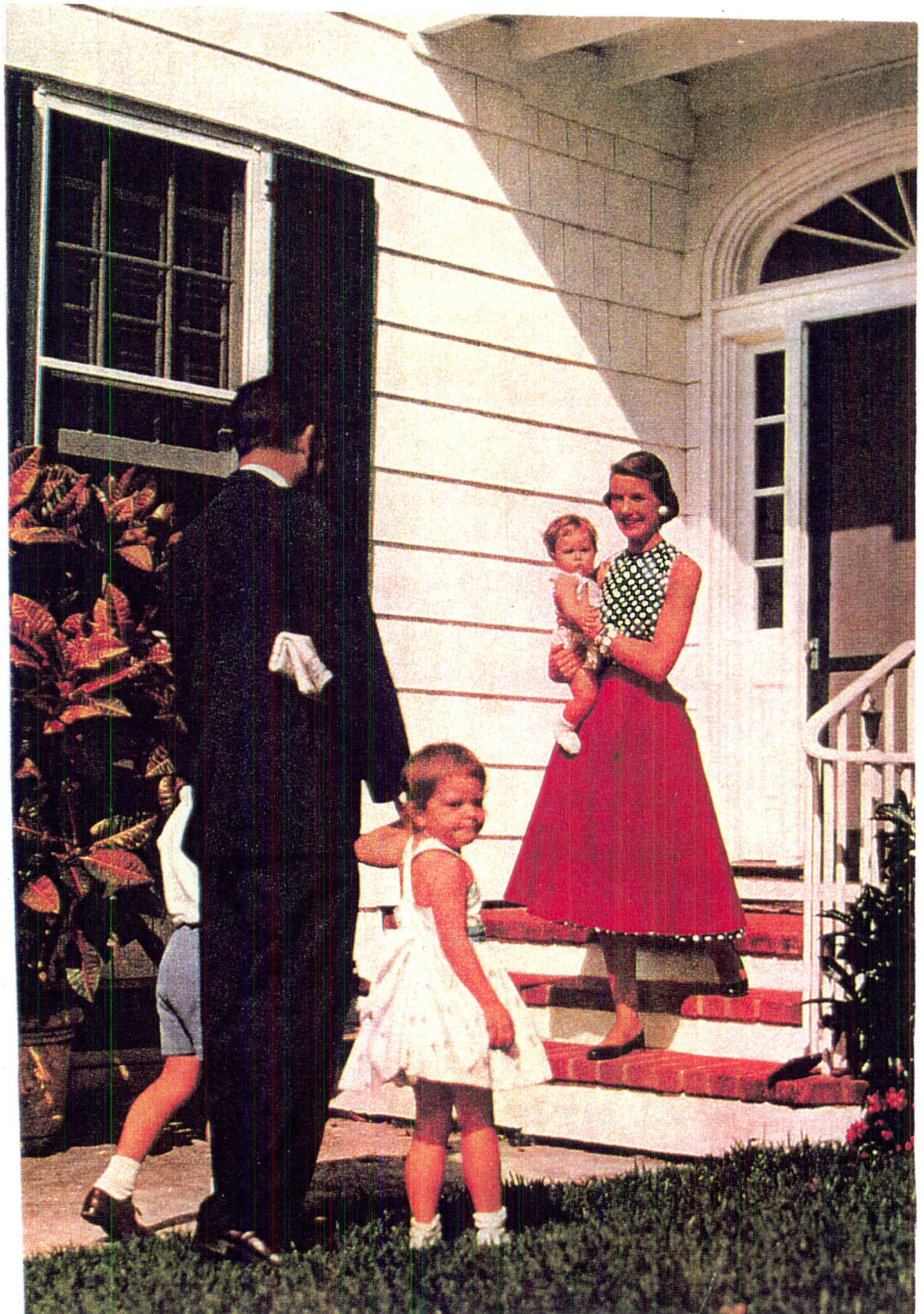
Illustration no. 2 shows a wife greeting her husband as he comes home from work. It illustrates the stereotypical image of the 1950s rounded, "nurturing" woman and rectangular, "bread winning" man, showing a sharp contrast between the males sharp, dark, business suit and the colourful, curvaceous female silhouette.

It could be argued that in this illustration personal visual statements add up to the evaluation of power in a society which is divided by sex, race and economics. The sex-stereotyped attitude, by which men were perceived as the breadwinners, may have prevented women entering the workforce. This diminished during the 1960s and early 1970s. Educational opportunities changed, as a wider subject choice, previously the prerogative of men, became available to women, for example, engineering. Women were now able to enter a career of their own choice.

Illustration Number 2

Wife greeting her husband as he comes home from work.

Men and women dressing the part, Kidwell & Steel, 1989



By this time it was accepted by society that women could work outside the home and continue to work after marriage. The marriage bar, which obliged women to resign from the Civil Service, on marriage, was abolished in 1973 in Ireland. Women still completed the majority of housework but developments of appliances allowed more time and greater freedom to complete other work. Husbands also began to undertake more responsibility within the home and women demanded further measures to facilitate a better combination of work and family responsibilities. The government recognised a need for a legal entitlement to social insurance-funded maternity leave. Larger companies offered child care facilities to employees, which greatly reduced the obstacles for women who wished to work.

Illustration No. 3 shows a female banker presenting a sponsorship cheque to a youth organisation in March of 1974. Her attire is conventional for work, yet conscious of the fashion of that time. She is wearing a short, slightly A-line skirt with a matching waistcoat. The waistcoat has a 'v'-shaped neckline and is close fitting with flattering panel shaping. This does not conceal the contours of the body but yet is still acceptable attire for work and perceived as neat dress. A plain white blouse is worn underneath with an open neckline, displaying a more relaxed attitude to work clothes than was previously held. No jewellery or accessories are worn with the look. The age and the fashions of the bank clerk is emphasised by the attire of the older woman, a youth leader, who is standing next to her. The immediate difference in the two women's clothes is the skirt length and the colour of the garments. The older woman wears a belted tailored dress which comes to below the knee. The garment is dark in colour, has short sleeves and has a v-neck shaping. The outfit again is quite respectable, but it seems to conceal more of her femaleness with its shape and colour.

Illustration Number 3

Female banker presenting a sponsorship cheque

Tyrone Constitution, 20th March 1974





In comparison to a fashionable image of 1974, see illustration number 4, the garments worn by the female banker, namely her skirt length, are dateable to the time yet far from high fashion. One can conclude that the look achieved by the banker is one of anonymous professional dress.

Illustration Number 4

Fashionable image of 1974



Illustration number 5 taken in 1978, shows a delegation from Limerick City on their way to meet the Fianna Fail leader in Dublin. The men pictured are all wearing suits with overcoats which display the formality of the working occasion. There is only one woman pictured amongst ten men. She appears confident and does not seem to be uncomfortable or threatened by the situation. She is wearing a dark coloured blazer and calf length skirt. The skirt is full in shape which seems softer and perhaps feminine in appearance. The jacket is a blazer cut with long sleeves. The look of rounded shoulders is achieved with the help of pads. The cut of the jacket conceals all contours of the body but the full skirt which is gathered at the waist gives definition. The blouse, in a lighter colour with a flowery pattern, has a frilly neckline and ruffles continue down the front. This draws attention to the wearers face and reduces the soberness of the garments. This outfit, compared to the previous work attire in 1974, is more overtly feminine and daringly fashionable. One could conclude that in the 1970s, Irish women at work, especially young women, were comfortable with their working dress as it was an adaptation of their weekend wardrobe.

Illustration Number 5

A delegation from Limerick City on their way to meet the Fianna Fail leader in Dublin, *Irish Times*, 10th November 1978



WORKING DRESS IN THE 1980s

With legislation, governmental guidelines and most especially reverse discrimination in favour of women, it is possible to believe that women could have a decided edge in getting jobs and promotion within jobs, by the early 1980s. However there were still major obstacles for job advancement for women in the early 1980s. *Women's Dress for success book*, author, Molloy (1980), believed that

"a firm and dramatic step towards professional equality with men was for women to adopt a business uniform like their male colleagues."

Chapkis (1986) claimed that clothes made a definite statement

Economic power, or class position, is easily suggested by the man's use of the standard business suit. An expensive tailored three-piece suit says authority and privilege quietly but unmistakably.

(Chapkis, 1986, p79)

It may have been that women believed that not only should they adopt a business uniform, but that the more masculine the suit was the more economic power, and therefore, equality with men they would have. To obtain the attention and status that men received, women may have felt that they must speak up more assertively in terms of their dress. It was at this period during the 1980s, that the language of clothes became somewhat confused. To speak up more assertively, some women thought that wearing a designer outfit with shoulder pads and short skirts or an abundance of accessories was the answer. Others felt adapting the dress of their male colleagues was the best option. Those following the 'dress for success' rules often used designer accessories such as handbags, belts, earrings, shoes and scarves alone or together, believing that they helped

to achieve presence. A woman dressed in such designer labels was also recognised as spending a lot of money on appearance.

Chapkis (1986) supposes that traditionally, a women expensively dressed was assumed to be making a statement not about herself, but about a man. Her expensive clothing was thought to signal that her husband or male provider was so wealthy that he could clearly afford luxury in the form of this female. One could interpret from Chapkis' view, that the woman herself is relegated to the position of a passive object. Women, therefore, in the role of wife establish social position second hand and obtain ascribed power. Chapkis concludes that dressed well from money, a woman despite her sex, is visibly protected by someone with an ability to be employed in the workforce.

However, one is more likely to assume from messages that a woman who is dressed expensively, through a man's finances, does not work, nor financially need to work. Also expensively dressed women, who do not work or earn their own money tend to wear designer casuals and not carry briefcases and expensively dressed women who earn the money themselves wear business suits, at least during working hours.

As women have begun to move up the ladder in the executive world, they have been earning more money and therefore an obvious way to display their personal achievements, is to better their working dress.

It is evident, however that there is still a conflict as to how women should dress to indicate their professional power. Molloy (1980), Chapkis (1986) and Rubinstein (1995), I believe, agree on two fundamental issues pertaining to how women could achieve the professional image. Firstly to have a "successful appearance" is more than half the battle in achieving professional success. Therefore, it is, to an extent, how women

look, not what women do or how they do it, that counts in terms of securing employment and subsequent promotion.

Secondly, they believe that successfully expressing professional power is a set formula not to be adjusted.

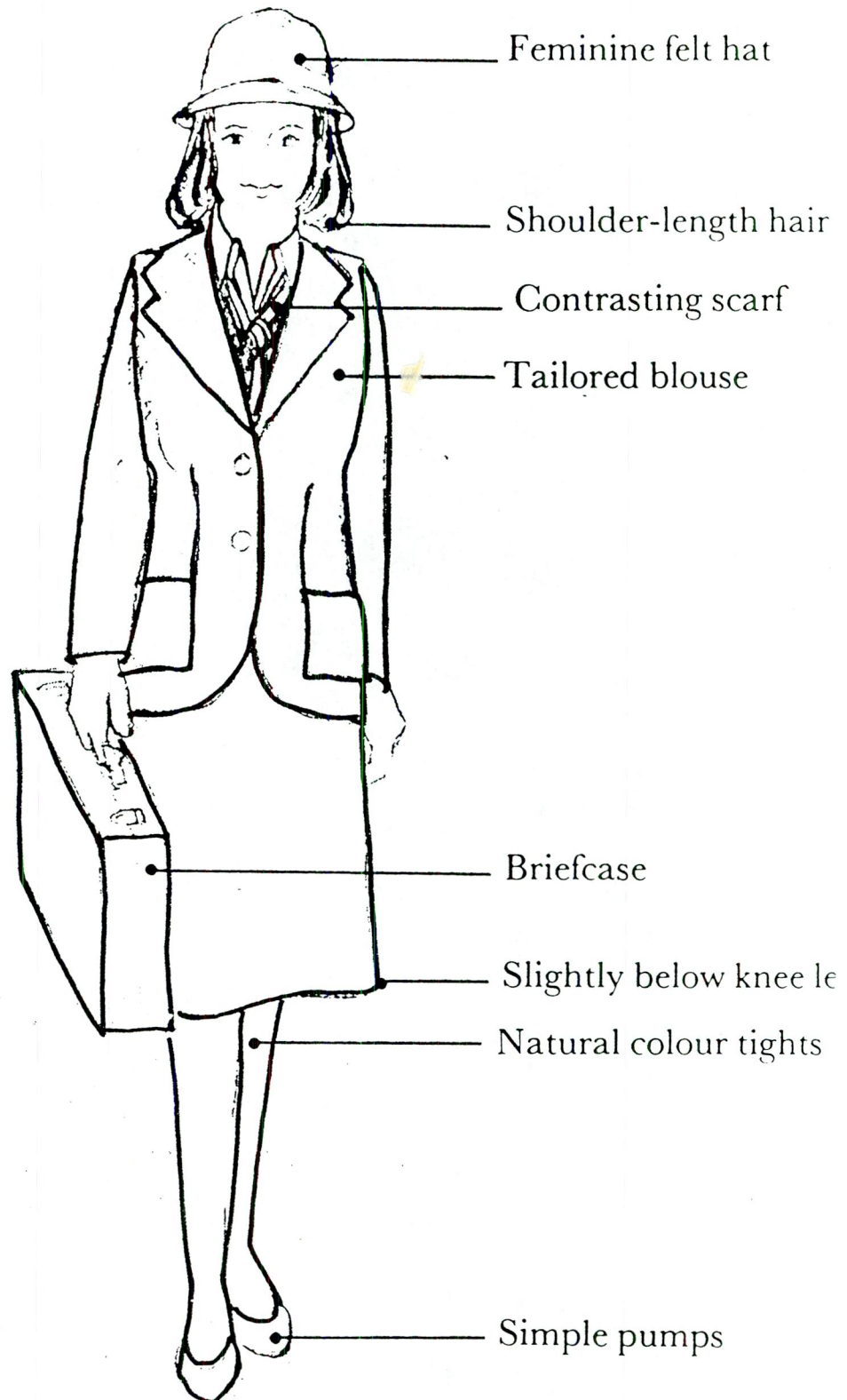
Today however, women can define what exactly success is in individual terms. To follow established guide-lines on what exactly to wear for executive success, however, is for many a useful strategy.

An example of such guides is Molloy's (1980) *Women's Dress for Success Book*. Molloy's suggested uniform consisted of a skirted suit and blouse, in most cases the suit being a darker colour than that of the blouse which is in a contrasting colour. This look he claims would give them authority, which is precisely what Molloy believed women needed, see illustration number 6.

Illustration Number 6

Molloy's recommended uniform for success,
The Women's Dress for Success Book, Molloy 1980, p37

DOING IT RIGHT



Molloy claims that:

If women are to enjoy widespread success in all industries. They must adopt this uniform. It is their best hope. They cannot have equal status and equal pay without a collective image equal to that of men. Without uniform there is no equality of image.

(Molloy, 1980, p36)

However, after making enquiries, it was noted that none of the Irish working women questioned had read Molloy's *Dress for Success Book*. They did, however, follow trends for working dress from their European and American counterparts to try and look professional, yet smart.

Illustration number 7 shows, the, then, Minister for Education, Mrs. Gemma Hussey in 1981, wearing a suit like that dictated by Molloy. It appears sober and a 'safe' outfit to wear to work. She wears a skirted suit in a grey flannel stripe. This fabric could easily be used for men's suiting. The jacket conceals all contours including the breasts, waist and hips. The skirt is a full calf length with a front pleat detail. Although purple was a fashionable colour in the early and mid 1980s, it was a brighter shade and was often worn with a bright marine blue, rather than dark grey. The blouse, worn underneath, is of this dark purple colour. It seems to add to the soberness of the outfit rather than flatter the wearer. Feminine details such as the tara brooch, the only accessory on the lapel of the jacket and the bow of the neck of the blouse, add to the femininity of the wearer. Court shoes are worn with the outfit and the ankles are evident also reducing an otherwise masculine look. The complete outfit, when compared with the more casual jumper and skirt worn by the other woman in the photograph, dictates to the viewer Mrs Hussey's greater importance within the group.

Illustration Number 7

The Minister for Education, 1981



In Molloy's, 1980, research he states that of all female uniforms the tailored blazer suit works best, this entails a blazer cut jacket and matching skirt. The jacket should not be pinched in to exaggerate the waist and should be full enough to cover the contours of the bust, and sleeves should definitely be long. He claimed that a waistcoat should not be worn because it makes women more sexually attractive and therefore less authoritative. The most suitable skirt length falls to below the knee as this will not be made redundant as fashion changes like that of a mini or midi length.

Molloy believed that fabrics such as wool and linen should be used and that solid tweed and plaid patterns achieved the best results. He does not recommend the pinstripe look, which he believes gives the 'imitation man' effect.

Comparing Mrs Hussey's outfit to the type of 'dress for success' according to Molloy, it could be argued, that Mrs. Hussey is wearing the correct attire - a successful business uniform.

Another later example of a strong business outfit was worn by a Dublin councillor in March 1985. Illustration Number 8 shows the councillor doing, or pretending to do a 'mans' labouring job, of digging. She is well dressed and looks important without being overtly male. In comparing her dress to those of the spectators in the background it would seem that the lady councillor takes great care in dressing for her position. She clearly gives the impression of the most important person present. The outfit consists of a matching skirt and jacket with a softly bowed blouse. The jacket is softly shaped to the hips, and conceals any curves of the bust or waist. It is more stylish than a conventional blazer as the neckline is rounded with no collar. The long sleeves are quite narrow with button closed vents for added detail. The shoulders are smooth and rounded with the help of shoulder pads.

Illustration Number 8

Dublin Councillor attending a official ceremony,

Irish Times ,13th March 1985



The skirt, which is of the same colour and fabric as the jacket, is full and ends well below the knee. A pale coloured blouse is worn, which has a shirt collar and decorative buttons. To lift the insipid outfit, the wearer has added a soft bow tie in a complementing colour. This adds focus and uplifts the look by adding a contrasting colour and fabric. It reduces the sterility of the look and softens the profile of the wearer. The look is completed with accessories, including a belt of two materials and colours, sensible 'slip on' court shoes and jewellery. She sports short hair, a tailored blouse, contrasting scarf, below the knee length skirt and simple pumps all of which are recommended in Molloy's 1980 guide-lines. This is an example of an Irish woman in the mid 1980s who may have followed set guidelines of dressing the correct way to achieve

" instant clothing power for the business woman."

(Molloy, 1980,P.47)

In the mid 1980s, there was much conflict about influence from men's suiting for the correct look in women's workwear. Davis talking about this period stated,

Theoretically there is no need for woman in business and the professions to opt for masculine dress insignia. They could conceivably move in unisex direction that is avoidedly neither masculine nor feminine....

(Davis, 1992, p 48)

One could presume that men in the office are likely to agree with Davis, and may be of the opinion that dressing like them, was not the way to reach to top for women. However, the wearing of a tailored suit, which derived its style from menswear, allowed women to establish credibility in the workplace without disturbing the status quo.

Molloy was adamant that women should not try to achieve an "imitation man" look. He gives a fashion warning to all readers in the words "Never Wear" and points to all offending articles, see illustration number 9. In the sketch the man's fedora, shirt, tie and pinstriped or chalk striped suit, are labelled as offending items.

Illustration Number 9

Molloys Imitation Man Look, *The Women's Dress for success Book*,
Molloy 1980

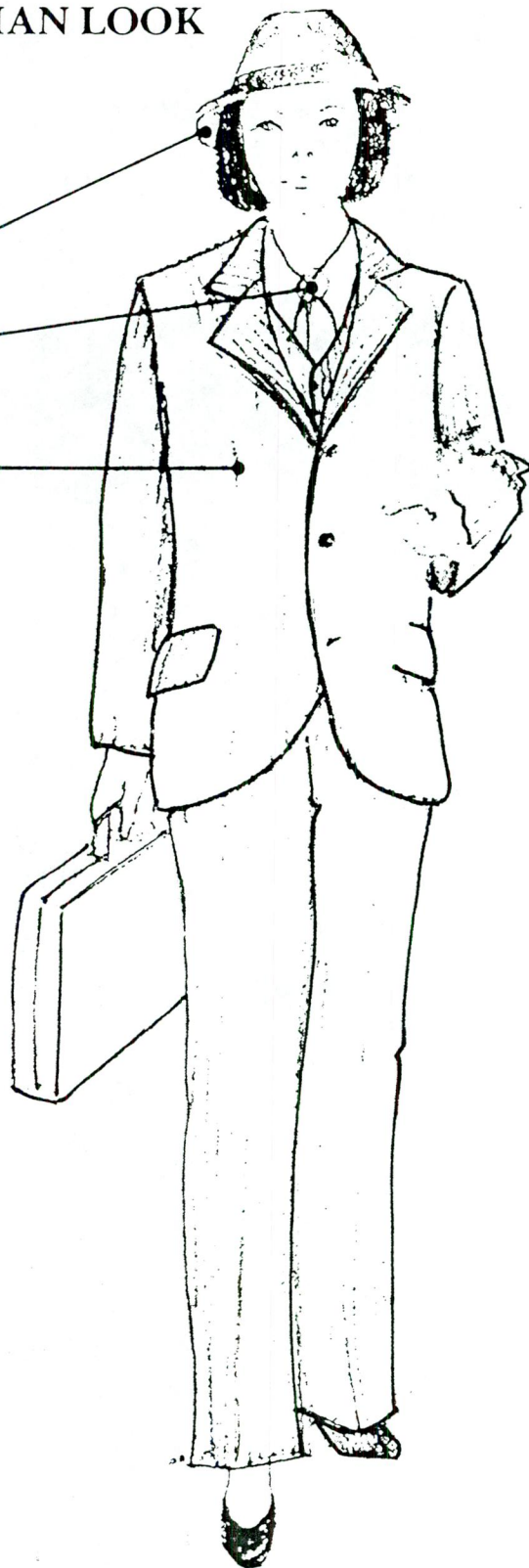
IMITATION MAN LOOK

Never wear—

Man's felt hat

Shirt and tie

Pinstriped or
chalk-striped suit



On the other hand, the *Book of Looks* , by Lorraine Johnson illustrates how this look can be successfully achieved, see illustration number 10.

The gentleman is always perfectly mannered and perfectly dressed - never untidy or foppish this look is still worn daily by executives throughout the world.the basis of the look, the tailored suit, is now sported by men and women alike in virtually every colour and texture.

(Johnson, 1984, p113)

Johnson describes the particular suit that should be worn and advises the female reader to take note of current men's fashions. One can obtain the suit from

" the man in your life (if he's the same size), in a menswear shop, or a second-hand clothing store."

(Johnson 1984 p113.)

To complete the look, a spotted or striped tie is suitable. In a later magazine article, early 1985, this look has been softened by wearing a women's blouse rather than a crisp man's shirt, see Illustration Number 11

Illustration Number 10

The Gentleman Look, *The Book of Looks*, Johnson, 1984





Illustration Number 11

Men's Fashions interpreted, *Elle Magazine*, February 1985



One could suppose that the models sculpted, bob-shaped hair style and subtle make up reduced the maleness of a woman's attire and therefore gives her a more feminine appearance overall.

In September 1985, the Irish Independent printed an article entitled "Clothes for men coveted by women." The article describes the work of current menswear designers and what they were implementing for the forthcoming spring 1986 season. The accompanying photograph, see illustration number 12, shows the female model, dressed in full male clothing. The two piece suit, as Johnson had recommended, was of a plain wool flannel, perfectly tailored by Magee, with notched lapels, back vents, three front buttons, with trousers of current men's fashions. Under the suit, the model wears a classic white cotton shirt with collar and cuffs. A necktie was worn and plain coloured leather loafers. To complete the masculine look the model sports a well fitting fedora hat. One could question, how many, if any, Irish women reading the article had the aspiration to don their husband's or brother's business suit as work wear.

By 1986, working women in Ireland had firmly established a uniform for the office. Women such as those who worked in banks, offices, sales positions, lawyers, doctors and secretaries had gradually adopted a particular uniform for work to achieve the 'correct look' and so to convey authority.

Illustration Number 12

Clothes for men...coveted by women,
Irish Independent 12th September 1985



Illustration number 13 a, b and c display three women working in different areas in senior positions with similar style of working uniform. Ms Sally O'Neill, illustration 13a, was the head of projects with Trocaire. Illustration 13b shows Ms Noreen Slattery, the administrative manager with Irish Management Institute and illustration 13c shows Ms Ann Clarke, a branch manager with the Kelly Girl Company. This uniform consisted of a skirted suit and a light coloured blouse with neck ruffle or floppy bow tie.

It is evident from illustration number 13d of the secretary, that similar clothes were been worn by other women working at lower levels in the office. One could suppose that it was around this time, that the adopted uniform ceased to be effective as a method of achieving authority. It is from this established uniform that women working in senior levels in the executive workforce modified and altered the guidelines to create a new working wardrobe. They aimed to re-establish hierarchy in the workplace through clothing. By 1985 jewellery, colour, shoes, hairstyles and accessories were added in abundance to create this newer, still suited image. The look became more severe than before but continued to be soft hued. The women's straight styled jacket was more boxy and manly, therefore intimated more authority. The skirt was shortened to above the knee and the look was often accompanied by an attaché case.

Illustration Number 13a

Ms Sally O'Neill, Head of Projects with Trocaire,
Irish Independent, 12th January 1986

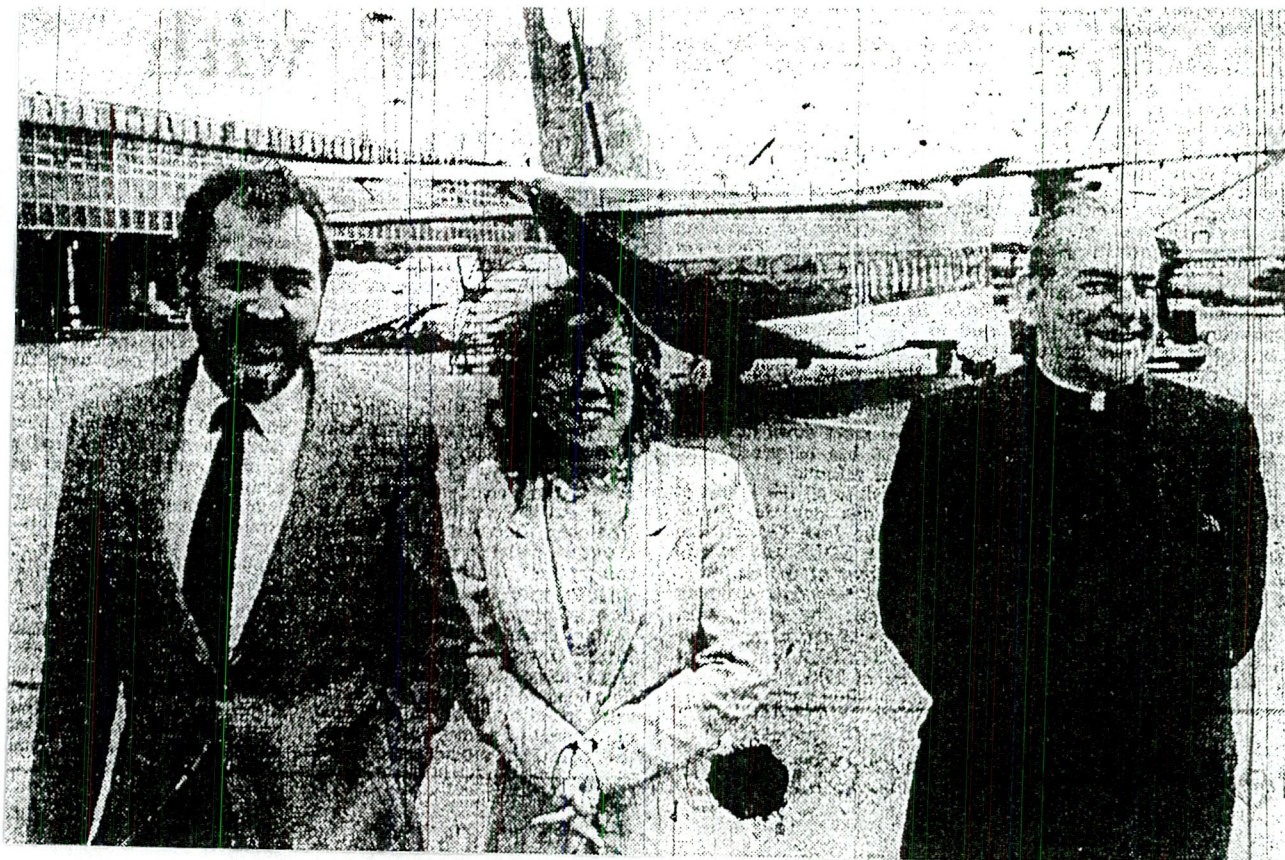


Illustration Number 13b

Ms Noreen Slattery, Administrative Manager,

Irish Times, 7th March 1986





Illustration Number 13c

Ms Anne Clarke, Branch Manager,

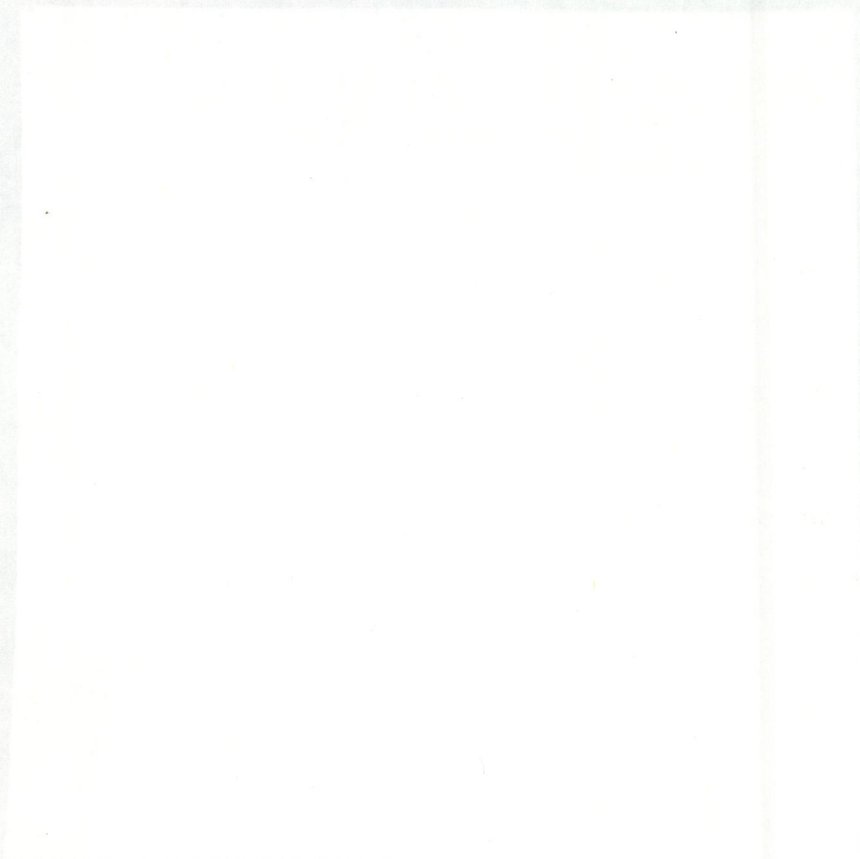
Irish Times Business & Finance, 29th March 1986



Illustration Number 13d

Office secretary, 1985





Feminine details uplifted the look with silk blouses in pale colours, soft bow ties, earrings, clutch handbags, necklaces and belts, see illustration 14. It could be proported that by adding exaggeratedly feminine accessories, frivolous details and shoes with high heels, the wearer pulled back from any austerity or masculinity inherent in the silhouette and so enhanced their femininity, while at the same time allowing them to look authoritative.

Lurie,1992, discussing women of the eighties suggested that they, women, were subjected to antifeminist ridicule and criticism and were threatened with loss of control over their reproductive lives. The propaganda against women's rights became so strong and effective that Lurie believes many young working women began to declare that although they might have careers that they were not feminists. This is why many adopted such a "strange and incongruous costume" .

Illustration Number 14

Women in Senior positions within the workforce, March 1986



An example of such a costume is depicted in illustration number 15. The cartoon suggests how the power dress may have been perceived by onlookers. It seems to indicate that women dressed for the position at work and that this image seemed so out of place when worn in the home.

Illustration number 16 of the American Dynasty soap opera stars emphasises the power dressing image. Irish working women did not tend to adopt this exaggerated mode of power dressing.

Towards the later part of the 1980s, further change in women's working clothes took place. They advanced from the skirted suit, introducing trousers and belted shirts to be worn without a severe 'shoulder padded' jacket.

The Irish Independent newspaper, 9th September 1985, acknowledged this development in women's working clothes. An article written by Katrina Goldstone entitled "Executives' Dress", described this type of executive woman and her new style of clothing.

A new breed is aboard. She is young, she is smart and she is probably upwardly mobile. She is single, on a good salary and very fashion conscious she requires a very stylish and versatile type of wardrobe. She is no longer content with constrictive suits (the executive uniform) and floppy-bow shirts. She wants to look sharp and be sharp. She is part of the new generation of executive women. Being successful need no longer be equated with being unfashionable/boring.

(Goldstone, 1985, p11)

Illustration Number 15

Punch on Powershoulders of the 1980s, Fashion modernity & ID, p48



"You're home now, Adele. Why don't you take off your shoulders?"

Illustration Number 16

American Soap Opera stars sporting the shoulder padded look



Goldstone recommends Nicole Farhis' range, available at Brown Thomas, as fulfilling the criteria. She describes the range "for girls who have 'dress for success' tattooed on their chest!"

This Irish publication acknowledged that women in Ireland dress in a particular fashion for work. Goldstone states, that a more fashionable and image conscious look for work was desired more especially by the younger female executive. The complete range, if one could afford it, according to Goldstone, would cater for almost every occasion that is likely to arise in a busy, working life. Shoulders were normally padded, the hallmark throughout the range and current autumn 1985 fashions.

Trousers were slim fitting at the lower leg but were loosely gathered at the waistband. Oversized white blouses were worn which were gathered at the waist by a large coloured belt. Long slim fitting coats were prominent throughout the range, in 100% wool/camel, in colours such as navy, ecru, or camel. Skirts were longer and more relaxed than the severe short tight ones previously fashionable for the working woman. This further change in fashion, in the mid 1980s, signified the development of women's working clothes, which became more relaxed and comfortable, to suit the new breed of business women.

From this chapter, one could suppose that women of the 1980s who had entered professions previously not available to them, and those who had moved upward to managerial positions, felt more comfortable in their working environment and possibly ceased to feel inferior to men as they were believed to have felt previous to 1950.

Women adapted their weekend wardrobe for work and seemed comfortable with this working dress, illustrations number 1,3 and 5.

To help diminish the obstacles for working women, in the 1980s, many seemed to follow guidelines for instant power and business success, such as those set by Molloy, see illustrations 7, 8, 13a,13b, 13c and 13d. Women in positions of importance dressed with care and attention but did not overtly follow fashion trends. Irish women did not follow extreme fashion trends and very few women adopted the female version of the masculine business suit, see illustrations 9 and 10.

By 1986, it appeared that all working women from the secretary to the senior partner of the firm had adopted this one uniform for work see illustrations 13a -d and 14. One could conclude that at this point, women in more senior positions felt that "the look" needed to be re-established, possibly to redistinguish hierarchy in the work place. Suits became more fashionable, with larger shoulder pads and shorter more fitted skirts. Trousers were also established as suitable attire for work. Overall a more fashion conscious approach was taken in dressing for work.

From this research, one could suppose that women were dressing for their position and they possibly tried to indicate this professional power through clothing. To confirm these conclusions, I felt it was necessary to interview women who held positions of importance in the 1980s.

CHAPTER 3

AN INVESTIGATION OF IRISH WORKING WOMEN'S DRESS IN THE 1980s

Having looked at the changing political and social climate for women in 20th Century Ireland, I discussed the perceived need for a changed image for women in the workforce and the subsequent cross gender influence on clothing design post 1970. I then investigated the concept that women in employment may have been 'dressing for position' and the idea that the language of clothes could have been used to indicate professional power.

In an attempt to verify these concepts, I undertook research to interview women who were working in key positions in the mid 1980s. The women worked in different occupations ranging from a banker, a T.V. show host, a newsreader, to a design consultant. All had achieved senior positions in their field of employment. It is possible that these women were likely to have used dress to indicate their status and professional power.

I began the investigation by preliminary telephone contact to set up the interviews. I had originally planned a personal interview, but the interviewees indicated that they would prefer a questionnaire which they could fill out in their own time. This was due to their tight work schedule and difficulty of arranging a mutually suitable interview time. The same questionnaire was sent out to all interviewees so that the information collected would be easier to collate and analyse.

My initial questionnaire was made up of largely open ended questions. I used a few student colleagues to test my initial questionnaire. Their replies alerted me to the fact that the questions were too open ended. I restructured the questionnaire giving several answer options within most questions, see questionnaire in appendices.

I received a 75% response to all questionnaires sent out. It is necessary to examine responses from Irish women, to each of the questions with reference to the literature relating to those same issues discussed in the USA and Britain.

I sent out four black and white illustrations along with my questionnaire, see questionnaire illustrations a, b, c and d in appendices. I did this to ascertain the type of dress Irish women in positions of importance wore to work in the mid 1980s. In case that they did not wear any of the outfits that I had chosen, I left them the option of stating that none of these illustrations applied to them and the opportunity to explain why, see question 3.

- Illustration a was a trouser suit and matching waistcoat worn with accessories.
- Illustration b was a below the knee length skirt with matching jacket. A soft patterned blouse with a neck bow detail was also worn, the only accessory being a large waist belt.
- Illustration c was a short, straight skirt with matching slim fitting and flattering jacket. It was worn with accessories including scarf, necklace and earrings.
- Illustration d was a below the knee length, patterned dress.

I chose to send black and white illustrations rather than colour because I wished to determine the style and silhouette of the garments rather than colour or pattern. Black and white illustrations eliminated the possibility of a person opting for a particular outfit due to colour preference.

WORKING POSITIONS

Question 1 and 2 were to establish the 1980 and present career positions of the interviewees. All of the women interviewed were in fairly senior positions in the 1980s and had advanced to a higher career position in the mid 1990s. Examples of this include: a continuity announcer to a television show host, a deputy bank manager to a bank manager and a senior partner of one firm to a chairperson and director in a number of public and private companies.

WORKING CLOTHES

I used Question 3 to determine the way in which women dressed for work in the 1980s. I felt that responses to a photograph would remind people of 1980s working dress and be more easily analysed. My belief, that few women would wear outfit a or d to work, was confirmed as 60% of the interviewees opted for outfit b. 15% of women opted for outfit a and c with only 10% opting for outfit d. One can conclude that the majority of the women interviewed wore a suit with a matching, below the knee length, skirt. The look was completed by a blouse with soft bow detail. This confirmed the press photographs that I obtained during my earlier research, see illustrations 7, 8 and 14.

In question 4, I asked if fashions of the time affected the way in which these women dressed for work. Only 20% replied that fashions always dictated what to wear and 20% answered that they never took current fashions into account. The most popular, 60% of responses, indicated that only sometimes, did fashions of the time influence what they wore to work.

I used question 5 to find out where the interviewees purchased their clothes. I felt that this would give me some idea of the approximate price and quality of the clothes as well as indicating the effort taken to find what the interviewee perceived as the right garment for work. 60% of those questioned said they bought their clothes in boutiques, while 30% purchased in chain stores and 10% got their working clothes made to order. Boutiques usually stock only a few garments in each colour and size and often sell designer labels which are more expensive than mass produced garments. Fabrics in such garments are generally of higher quality and the garments, even if not of better construction, are of better design. The latter is achieved by more advanced tailoring techniques such as bias cutting or matching check fabrics.

Garments in chain stores are mass produced therefore, for the wearer, are less exclusive and individual. They are usually less expensive and come in a range of sizes, 8-18, and often a few colours of the one style of garment are available. 10% of interviewees indicated that in the 1980s they often had their working clothes made for them personally. They stated that they were a larger than average size, above size 14, therefore one could presume that they had difficulty in finding the correct working attire to fit their size. When a person is ordering clothes from a dress-maker, on a one-to-one basis, they can be specific in what they require in terms of style, shape, fabric and colour and it also enables their dress to be totally exclusive and personal.

THE LANGUAGE OF CLOTHES

In response to question 6 an overwhelming majority said, "yes" that their dress at work gave them more confidence to complete the job.

In question 7, I asked "Do you think what you wore to work made you seem more authoritative to your colleagues?" Giving the interviewees two possible answers of Yes and No, my responses were Yes 50%, Possibly 25%, No 25%. In hindsight I could have included 'Possibly' as an alternative choice of answer. This may however have altered the percentage of Yes and No answers. 25% of interviewees actually wrote the word 'Possibly'.

"Possibly - I would suggest the reason being that all the other female staff wore a uniform."

BankManager.

"Possibly, for me design authority was the most important issue."

Design consultant.

For 90% of the interviewees to have confidence in their dress and for 50% of that 90% to feel that their dress made them seem more authoritative to their colleagues, it may indicate that they were content with their own image.

Of those questioned, 90% said "Yes a person's appearance in work affects other peoples' perception of how they can or cannot do the job", in question 8.

"Appearance demonstrates, attitude, ability to select, taste, sensitivity, attention to detail and self worth."

Head of Department
Third level college.

"Smart appearance suggests being in control."

Bank Manager.

"If you feel confident, well dressed you look it - and the impression is passed strongly to others."

Broadcaster.

"Because unfortunately, 'we are what we wear'"

Television presenter.

These personal research findings, on the subject of the language of clothes, seem to agree with the literature research which I had previously carried out. An example of such literature is *Men and Women, Dressing the part* by Kidwell and Steel asserting that,

The freedom to choose and create an image of self, whether in tangible forms of appearance or the abstract qualities of self concept, has been a celebrated source of self expression and a chronic source of conflict.

(Kidwell & Steel ,1989, p1)

The literature seemed to argue that the garments worn are a cue to personality in that they give us an impression of what one is, does, and values in life. For thousands of years, people have communicated with one another firstly through the non-verbal language of clothing. When people meet for the first time they form impressions about each others occupation, origin, personality, opinions, tastes, sexual desires and current mood.

(Paraphrased from Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets*, 1986; Davis; *Fashion, Culture and Identity*, 1992; Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 1975)

DRESSING FOR THEIR PARTICULAR ROLES

In response to question 9, 85% of the women interviewed stated that they did dress differently from women in less senior positions. This indicates that in the mid 1980s people seemed to dress in accordance to their position.

"Yes. I was the Minister for Education at the time and therefore I needed to dress seriously."

Minister for Education.

"Yes. This was probably because of working in a 'design' capacity."

Design Consultant.

Some women said they dressed differently than others in less senior positions due to personal styling rather than seniority.

"Yes, I dressed differently due to my individual style-not what I felt my position dictated."

Television presenter.

"Yes, but not because of seniority. Far more to do with evolving and maintaining a personal style."

Head of Department
Third level college.

Literature on this subject indicates that both physical and psychological disadvantages can be concealed or possibly cancelled out by wearing a uniform. A surgical gown or the robes of a judge may successfully boost confidence and give dignity to the wearer by hiding a scrawny physique or fears of incompetence.

The uniform, unlike most civilian clothing, is often consciously and deliberately symbolic. The uniform normally identifies the wearer as a member of some group and often locates him or her within a hierarchy. A good example of hierarchy evident in uniform is that in the nursing profession in St. Vincent's Hospital, Dublin, where student nurses wear a plain white uniform with a coloured stripe on their shoulder. This indicates to the public and each other their year of study. When the student qualifies and graduates to the position of staff nurse they wear a plain uniform with a coloured crest on the breast of the garment which indicates the hospital of their employment. If they are in a more senior position for example sister or matron of the ward, the uniform is navy or deep blue in colour.

All answers for question 10a indicated that a corporate identity for work was a good thing. 20% said that a uniform was always good and 80% said that it was sometimes a good thing. However in 10b 70% felt that uniforms should not be used to distinguish rank. The most interesting comment came from a woman who sometimes wore a uniform at work.

No, it is not important to distinguish rank within the uniform system. I currently wear the uniform from time to time which all the female staff wear. It consists of several different pieces which can be mixed and matched and is very smart.

Bank Manager.

80% of responses to question 11 indicated they feel that the approach to dressing for work is more relaxed today compared to the 1980s.

"Yes, dress for work today has taken a more relaxed approach. This is a good thing because the way a woman dresses is a means of self expression."

Head of Department
Third level college.

WORKING DRESS 1980

A 1995 article in the Sunday Times magazine, reported

In the 1980s, when the corporate world was the fashionable place to be, the executive woman was wooed and won over, to power dressing. But with hindsight, the power suit looked too rigid and the executive woman frequently looked as if she was wearing a bad version of the executive man's suit....Strict, often unwritten, city dress codes (no pants, no long hair, no big earrings) and the equally strict catwalk definition of the executive (footballer shoulder pads, hobble skirts and 6 in. heels) left many women stuck in the middle, in a style limbo that turned them into frumps.

(Doe, 27th August 1995)

From the 1980s illustrations in Chapter 3, it seems to me that Irish Women in positions of importance, did not at that time power dress in either of the modes suggested above. They did however, adopt a clothing image for work in the 1980s. The replies to question 12 regarding what they would wear to an important meeting today suggests that Irish women are more stylish and fashion conscious in their dress for work.

Normally I wear a suit - with either a skirt or trousers -.The style is generally understated with simple lines as I don't like fussy details or too many layers. The jacket is long and the skirt falls to the top of knee and is worn with medium heeled shoes. If I wear trousers, I wear flat shoes. The colour is warm or bright(ish) and fabrics are often lightweight such as linen in summer and pure new wool for winter.

Television presenter.

I always wear trousers to work today, whatever the occasion. Jackets are generally black or grey and usually untailored. Typical trousers would be black wool crepe and cuffed. A shirt in white silk satin with a fringed Black and white printed silk chiffon scarf. The outfit is accessorised with crystal and pearl jewellery.

Head of Department
Third level College.

Many of the women questioned mentioned certain Irish boutiques, such as the Irish Design Centre and Brown Thomas. These outlets stock top clothing designers, such as Nicole Farhi, Paul Costelloe and Louise Kennedy, which would indicate that a lot of money and effort is put into choosing clothes for work.

From illustration number 17, taken in late November 1995 it is evident that Irish executive women are turning away from their 1980s mode of dress to a softer, more feminine image. In a recent interview with the Belfast Telegraph, 17th October 1995, Bonnie Orleans-Vass, fashion editor of Company magazine, discussing the working woman today stated,

This is probably the best time to be a woman at work because the look is so lady-like....the look is sophisticated and feminine - not the flirtatious side of femininity but the essence of a well dressed woman.

Belfast Telegraph, 17th October 1995

Illustration Number 17

Ms Kaye Mulronney, Director on the C.I.E. Board,

Irish Times, 23rd Nov 1995



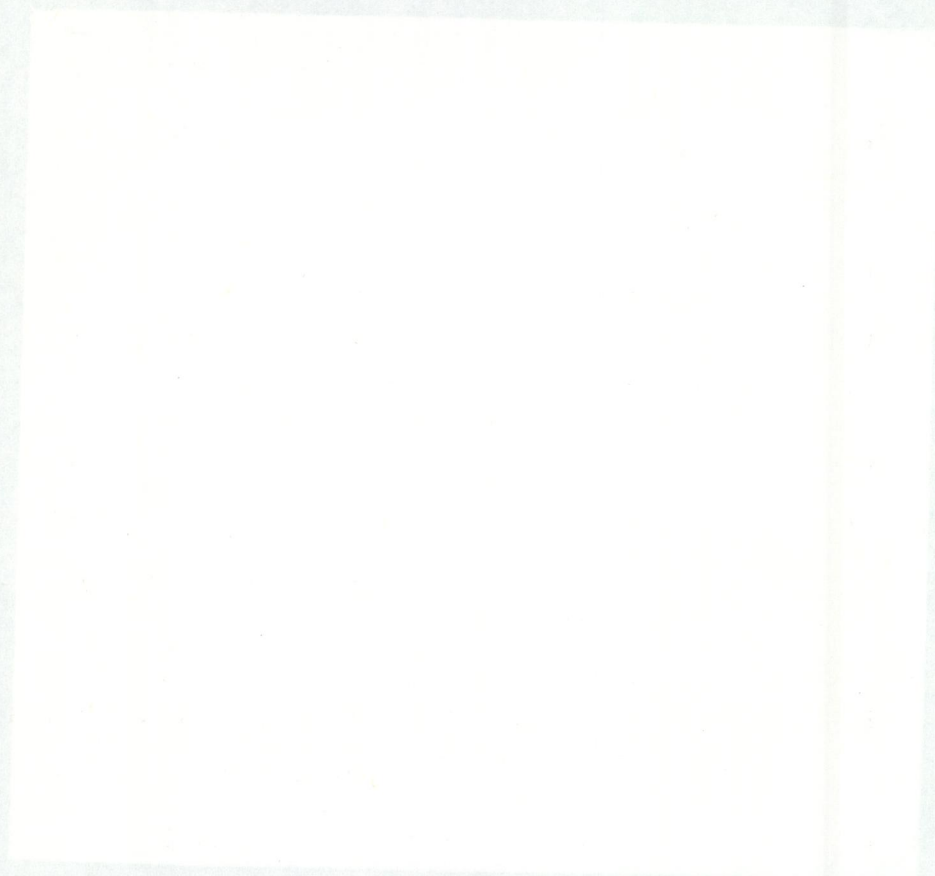


Illustration number 17 shows a male and female director attending an important meeting in November 1995. The woman is very stylish and fashionably dressed in a skirted suit. The jacket is long and slightly fitted. The outfit is accessorised with a neck scarf and earrings. She carries a briefcase and gold belted handled handbag. She is professional and looks confident. Her outfit depicts a 'softer more feminine' suit typical of the mid 1990s. It is evident that this woman has put a lot of thought and effort into deciding what and how to wear it. One could presume that this woman, like those interviewed, thought that clothes help personal confidence and other peoples perception of their ability.

Today it seems that many more women wear trousers for work. However, trousers still remain an issue for some women in certain work places. Traditionally trouser suits were too masculine in cut, colour and fabric for work wear and were used only for casual wear. Even in the 1980s, trousers for work were promoted as unnatural and sexually unattractive. Trousers for women were confined to the private and informal side of life. Today, however, many women wear trouser suits to work. They are popular for women in both pale colours such as blue and pink and in stronger, more traditionally male, colours such as brown, black and navy. Women who dressed in men's clothing in the 1980s were not taken seriously as women. In the photograph, illustration number 12 which appeared in The Irish Independent, in September 1985, it is obvious that the woman is wearing full male attire. Today, however, it appears that clothes for the young and fashionable are becoming more androgynous.

In three fashion articles, from August to November 1995, the titles and the photographs suggest that in male and female fashions, gender roles are becoming blurred. "Say bi to gender" in the Sunday Times, "I'm your Man" in the Clothes Show Magazine and "Boys Own" in Image Magazine all indicate that men and women today can wear the same clothes as each other and get away with it. Talking about fashions for Autumn 1995 Image magazine tells Irish readers,

This seasons style oscillates between the very feminine and the androgyny of the masculine suit. Take your pick from soft A-line shapes on skirts and sleeves, or the solid lines of traditional menswear.

Image Magazine, October 1995

This statement seems to indicate that women can wear either very feminine or androgynous, even masculine clothes equally successfully. Illustration number 18 shows a female model in a male suit. Men's suiting today have relaxed somewhat from the sterile, strictly business suits of the 1980s using a wider range of colours and fabrics. This may be why this male attire for women seems much more acceptable than that of illustration number 12 in 1985. Similarly when press photographers went to shoot, Irish Menswear designer, Pat McCarthy's Winter 1995 collection, they chose to photograph the clothes on a female model rather than a male, illustration number 19. These examples of women wearing male suits successfully, is reminiscent of Marlene Dietrich who succeeded in wearing a man's tuxedo and still looked sophisticated, sexy and totally in control of her femininity and image.

Illustration Number 18

Boys Own, *Image Magazine*, September 1995



The wide variety of answers in question 12, what would one wear to an important meeting today, indicates that a great variety of clothing styles are acceptable today in the workplace.

The main aim of this chapter, involving active research, was to discover what women wore to work and whether they used this dress to indicate their status and professional power.

The women interviewed held and still hold a prominent position within the workforce. Most women declared that they wore a suited skirt, a softly bowed blouse and that 'only sometimes' did they take current fashions into account. They did dress for their position, in the sense that they wore formal, smart dress, and therefore dressed to indicate power. However, the clothes they wore were not extreme in expressing assertiveness as they were in the USA and some parts of Europe. Most women were willing to spend a considerable amount of money on their working clothes.

The majority of women had confidence in their dress. However only half of those interviewed said that their dress made them feel more authoritative over their colleagues. All the women said that a person's appearance at work affects other people's perception of their ability to do the job.

This confirms that the clothes they wore were a form of communication. 85% of the women interviewed stated that they dressed differently from women in a less senior position which shows that there was a relationship between dress and the level of power one had at work.

Illustration Number 19

Pat Mc Carthy's Winter 1995 collection



The women concluded that their working dress today is more relaxed than that of the 1980s. Replies to the question of what Irish women wear to work indicated that they are more stylish and fashion conscious than ever before. This new image is both subtle and confident. They have achieved a more secure position within the executive workforce and therefore do not need clothes with severe shoulder pads or brief skirts to indicate authority in a overpowering way. The 1990s language of clothes would seem to have become more subtle compared to the overt clothing messages of the 1980s.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to examine how dress changed in accordance with the changing position of working women and to determine whether or not Irish women of the 1980s power dressed.

I examined the social and political change pertaining to women in 20th Century Ireland. Against a background of new legislation brought in to ensure equal status for women in areas of life such as education and the procurement of goods and services as well as equality of employment, there was a dramatic increase in the number of women attending university. It was also evident that more women were studying law, science, engineering and medicine. These labour markets had been traditionally closed to them.

The overall proportion of women in the labour force only increased from 28% in 1970 to 34.2% in 1992. However there was a remarkable increase from 8% in 1970 to almost 30% in 1992 of married women employed outside the home. There has also been an increase in the number of women in management positions in the workforce especially in the last decade.

Having examined press photographs of women in employment, I feel that, as women entered the 1920s workforce, mainly in lower positions, they dressed discreetly, almost fearful of drawing attention to their appearance. There was no code of business dress for women, unlike their male counterparts, who wore suits for work.

Tracing women's dress through to the 1970s, their work wear, while being influenced by fashion of the day in terms of skirt length, was quite impersonal and created an anonymous professional look.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s more women were employed in higher positions and began to adopt 'the suited look' to assert themselves. This premise, I feel, is supported in the literature on power dressing as well as in press photographs. Women, having entered the executive world of employment, did not seem to be content to feel inferior to men in the workplace as they appeared to have been in the earlier part of the 20th Century. One could suppose that with a new status in the workplace, such women felt a need to create a new identity that would suggest authority and professional success. Many women adopted the new world-wide professional women's uniform of a skirted suit and blouse. In most cases the suit was a darker colour than that of the blouse.

At this time, there was still a cultural linkage of male equalling work, career, skill mastery, authority and success. It is understandable, therefore, that these women used professional male dress as their role model for achieving an image appropriate for the workplace. It would appear that these women observed that a key to being considered professional was dressing in a manner that minimised the material, nurturing and sexual dimension of their appearance. Worn over a blouse was a form flowing jacket, concealing the contours of the female body. This, like a shield, created distance. Possibly these women assumed that this distance strengthened their ability to give orders and increased the probability that they would be carried out.

When secretaries adopted this now established way of dressing they regarded it as sophisticated. However, at the same time female bosses adopted a more casual look. Garments softened up in terms of silhouette, structure and colour. The feeling was that not only was the gilt buttoned suit too obvious, but the stereotype was too forceful 'The woman doth protest too much'. A perception emerged that really successful women just don't wear the suit and dressing like the boys in pinstripes and gabardines was no longer approved of.

From the questionnaires sent out it seems that the majority of Irish women working in senior positions wore a suit with a matching, below the knee length skirt and a softly bowed blouse. Only sometimes did they take current fashions into account when dressing for work and most seemed willing to spend a considerable sum of money on their working clothes. They seemed confident in their working dress so one could assume that these women were satisfied with their own image. Their responses also indicate that they believe that clothing is a form of communication.

Replies to what women wear to work today indicated that Irish women are more stylish and fashion conscious than ever before. This new image is both subtle and confident. They have achieved a more secure position within the executive workforce and therefore do not need clothing, in the form of shoulder pads or skirts, to indicate authority in an overpowering way.

One could conclude that as Irish women gained confidence in the professional arena, that their dexterity at navigating their way through the nuances of career dressing increased. Irish women are now more firmly established in the workplace and her working dress has evolved in parallel with her role.

From the findings of this study one could conclude that Irish women dressed to indicate their professional power. They did not, however, powerdress in the extreme way in which their European and American counterparts did. An important result of this era was that Irish women came to realise the importance of looking credible for work.

It is evident that high profile career women will still have their clothing scrutinised for some time to come. However, good news is that our perception of women and our perception of career women finally seems to be breaking down. One could suppose as the working women's fashion silhouette softens, her stereotype, hard nosed career woman, is possibly doing the same. The way forward seems to exist in a diversity of styles which aims to present women as a valuable, powerful and feminine presence at work.

APPENDICES

TABLE NUMBER 1

Number of persons receiving full-time education by age and gender

Age on 1 January	1980		Total % Participation	1985		Total % Participation	1993		Total % Participation*
	Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female	
3 and under	214	194	• 0.6	93	89	0.3	366	364	1.4
4 and under	18144	18177	54.1	20098	19752	58.5	15,050	15,496	56.2
5 and under	34741	33172	99.2	36351	34676	99.2	29,182	28,241	99.7
6 and under	35706	34088		35289	34175	99.2	31,232	29,275	100.0
7 and under	36467	34391		35316	33314	99.0	31,061	29,430	100.0
8 and under	36174	34600		35051	33101	99.4	32,129	30,098	100.0
9 and under	35246	33369	99.1	34815	33071		33,227	31,642	100.0
10 and under	34767	33720		35990	34379		34,864	33,416	100.0
11 and under	34127	32074		35834	34389		35,721	34,088	100.0
12 and under	34261	32385		36746	34840		37,054	34,983	100.0
13 and under	34435	32699		36279	34912		36,437	34,766	100.0
14 and under	32974	32171		34569	33227		34,585	33,811	100.0
15 and under	28873	29238	85.2	32025	31664	94.4	33,311	32,249	96.6
16 and under	21237	24989	68.2	26238	27896	80.3	30,280	30,527	92.6
17 and under	13816	18473	49.6	19189	22946	63.3	25,014	27,314	80.8
18 and under	6795	9427	25.9	11197	13946	39.7	17,476	20,008	61.8
19 and under	4657	4420	14.8	7203	7010	23.6	12,031	12,918	40.3
20 and under	12213	7790	+ 7.4	14887	11018	+ 8.9	25,124	23,411	+ 16.8
Total	454847	445377	° 66.7	487170	474405	° 69.4	494,144	482,037	° 74.0

* Percentage participation is defined as the estimated percentage of the population attending education courses on a full-time basis. The data are based on population estimates for 1 January, 1992 which were derived from the Census of Population in 1991 (final results).

+ Taken as a percentage of the 20-24 age cohort of the de factor population.

° Taken as a percentage of the 4-24 age cohort of the de facto population.

Source: Department of Education Statistics Reports, 1979/80, 1984/85 and 1992/93.

TABLE NUMBER 2A

**Number of persons receiving full-time education
by gender and type of school or college attend, 1979/80**

Type of school or college attended	Male	Female	Total
First Level			
Aided by Department of Education			
National Schools	281,734	265,697	547,431
Private non-aided Primary Schools	8,786	9,525	18,311
Total - First Level	290,520	275,222	565,742
Second Level			
Aided by Department of Education			
Junior Cycle	101,205	96,876	198,081
Senior Cycle (General)	37,171	46,161	83,332
Senior Cycle (Vocational)	2,439	7,887	10,326
Other courses	26	134	160
Regional Technical Colleges	101	169	270
Technology Colleges	37	74	111
Aided by other Departments	1,037	352	1,389
Non-aided			
Commercial	167	1,697	1,864
Radio Schools	56	-	56
Religious Institutions	3	-	3
Total - Second Level	142,242	153,350	295,592
Third Level			
Aided by Department of Education			
Higher Education Authority (HEA) Institutions	14,284	11,107	25,391
Universities	12,631	10,306	22,937
Other HEA Institutions	1,653	801	2,454
Teacher Training	660	2,456	3,116
Primary	410	2,176	2,586
Vocational	158	14	172
Domestic Science	-	211	211
Physical Education	92	91	183
Vocational Technological	2,818	1,119	3,937
Regional Technical Colleges	3,265	1,680	4,945
Aided by other Departments	29	37	66
Non-Aided			
Religious Institutions	962	184	1,146
Other	67	186	253
Total - Third Level	22,085	16,805	38,890
Grand Total	454,847	445,377	900,224

TABLE NUMBER 2B

**Number of persons receiving full-time education
by gender and type of school or college attended 1984/85**

Type of school or college attended	Male	Female	Total
First Level			
Aided by Department of Education			
National Schools	291,361	274,928	566,289
Private non-aided Primary Schools	5,109	5,448	10,557
Total - First Level	296,470	280,376	576,846
Second Level			
Aided by Department of Education			
Junior Cycle	107,356	103,471	210,827
Senior Cycle (General)	47,798	53,792	101,590
Senior Cycle (Vocational)	5,472	11,619	17,091
Other courses	-	49	49
Regional Technical Colleges	95	109	204
Technology Colleges	136	102	238
Aided by other Departments	1,322	232	1,554
Non-aided Commercial	192	820	1,012
Total - Second Level	162,371	170,194	332,565
Third Level			
Aided by Department of Education			
Higher Education Authority (HEA) Institutions	16,783	14,642	31,425
Universities	13,251	12,661	25,912
Other HEA Institutions	3,532	1,981	5,513
Teacher Training	362	1,858	2,220
Primary	361	1,596	1,957
Home Economics	1	262	263
Vocational Technological	4,420	2,886	7,306
Regional Technical Colleges	5,776	4,109	9,885
Other Vocational Technological			
Aided by other Departments	101	8	109
Non-Aided			
Religious Institutions	789	224	1,013
Other	98	108	206
Total - Third Level	28,329	23,835	52,164
Grand Total	487,170	474,405	961,575

TABLE NUMBER 2C

**Number of persons receiving full-time education by gender and type
of school or college attended, 1992/93**

Type of school or college attended	Male	Female	Total
First Level:			
Department of Education Aided National Schools	268,449	253,082	521,531
Private Non-Aided Primary Schools	4,295	3,985	8,280
Total - First Level	272,744	257,067	529,811
Second Level:			
Aided by Department of Education			
Junior Cycle	105,556	102,348	207,904
*Senior Cycle (General)	62,884	65,893	128,777
**Senior Cycle (Vocational)	7,813	13,915	21,728
Other Courses	228	349	577
Regional Technical Colleges	228	349	577
Aided by Other Departments (Agriculture/Defence)	1,337	204	1,541
Non-Aided Commercial	565	1,138	1,703
Total - Second Level	178,383	183,847	362,230
Third Level:			
Aided by Department of Education:			
Higher Education Authority (HEA) Institutions	22,933	25,191	48,124
Universities	22,164	24,376	46,540
Other HEA Institutions	769	815	1,584
Teacher Training	62	666	728
Primary	61	462	523
Home Economics	1	204	205
Vocational Technological	18,395	13,803	32,198
Regional Technical Colleges	12,990	9,374	22,364
Other Vocational Technological	5,405	4,429	9,834
Aided by Department of Defence	53	10	63
Non-Aided	1,574	1,453	3,027
Religious Institutions	574	341	915
Other	1,000	1,112	2,112
Total: Third Level	43,017	41,123	84,140
Grand Total	494,144	482,037	976,181

* Includes Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, Senior Certificate and Transition Year Option

** Includes Vocational Preparation and Training (VPT1) and Post-Leaving Certificate (or VPT2)

Source: Department of Education Statistical Report, 1992/93

TABLE NUMBER 3**Third level students by sex and field of study**

Field of Study	Primary Degrees					
	1980		1985		1991	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Arts	1089	1448	757	1153	1067	1504
Education	39	14	104	160	88	163
Art and Design	9	--	24	33	61	89
Economic and Social Studies	140	57	227	100	211	214
European Studies	9	15	25	32	32	74
Social Science	11	86	11	105	23	96
Communications and Information Studies	--	--	26	63	21	118
Commerce	372	154	578	293	662	487
Law	158	66	122	102	157	127
Science	432	283	487	520	626	613
Engineering	541	33	899	131	1068	198
Architecture	51	12	43	17	32	20
Medicine	292	174	260	198	233	332
Dentistry	52	19	37	29	40	33
Veterinary Medicine	54	14	37	17	38	19
Agricultural Science	88	10	80	12	103	28
Dairy Science	21	3	24	7	36	15
Total	3358	2518	3743	2972	4498	4130

Source: Higher Education Authority

Fiona Heaney,
National College
of Art & Design,
100 Thomas Street,
Dublin 8.

27th November, 1995

Dear

I am a fashion student in the National College of Art & Design, and am writing a design history thesis on womens' working clothes in the late twentieth century.

Working in a key position, as you are, would make your response to this selective research particularly relevant.

I would very much appreciate it if you felt able to participate in this survey.

I look forward to hearing from you, and thank you in anticipation for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Heaney,
Final Year Fashion Student.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your present career position and how long have you held it?
2. What was your job title in the early 1980s?
3. Of the four photos overleaf which is closest to the way you dressed for work in the 1980s?

Please tick: a b c d

If none of these apply please state why.
4. Did the fashions of the time affect what you wore to work?

Please tick: a always
 b sometimes
 c never
5. Where did you buy your clothes for work in the 1980s?
6. Did your dress at work give you more confidence to complete your job?
7. Do you think that what you wore to work made you seem more authoritative to your colleagues?

a Yes b No
8. Do you think a person's appearance in work e.g. being efficiently and neatly dressed, affect other peoples' perception of how they can or cannot do the job?

a Yes b No

Please state why

contd./

/contd.

9. In the mid 1980s, did you dress differently from other women in less senior positions?

a Yes b No

Please state why

10. Many employers insist that all staff wear a uniform when dealing with the public. Many people prefer this as they automatically acquire the 'correct' image for work.

a Do you believe that a corporate identity for work is a good thing?

a Always b Sometime c Never

b Do you think it is important to distinguish rank within the uniform system?

a Yes b No

11. Due to a change overall in society women have more freedom to choose what area they wish to work in and how they can dress for this position. Do you think there is a more relaxed approach in dressing for work since the 1980s?

a Yes b No

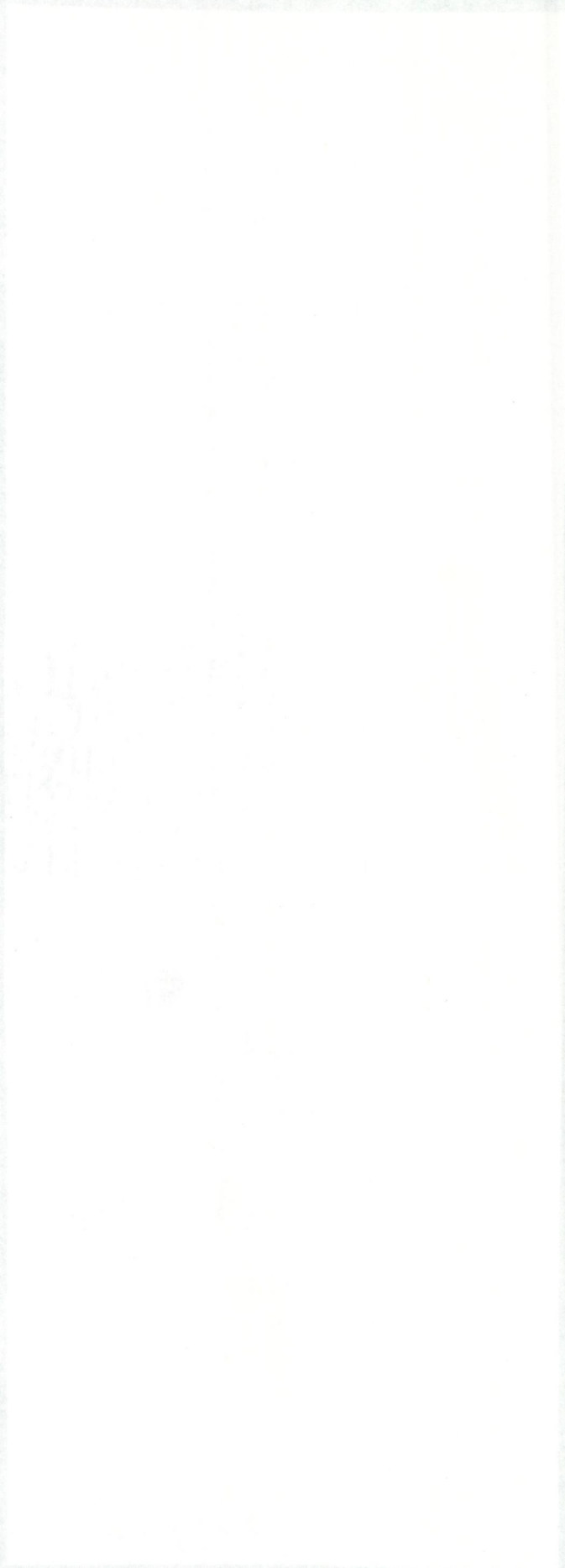
If 'yes' is this a good thing or a bad thing, and why?

12. What would you wear to an important meeting today?
(Please describe in terms of colour, style, fabric and accessories.)

N.B. If you would allow me to use published photographs from the 1980s and 1990s of yourself, I would be most grateful. Perhaps you would like to choose these photographs yourself and let me know which publications I can obtain these from.

QUESTIONNAIRE: ILLUSTRATION NUMBER 1





QUESTIONNAIRE: ILLUSTRATION NUMBER 2



QUESTIONNAIRE: ILLUSTRATION NUMBER 3



QUESTIONNAIRE: ILLUSTRATION NUMBER 4





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*** Indicates a photograph**

