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Degree

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

When attempting to discuss fashion of any period with any educated authority, it is essential for us first and foremost to establish its importance and direct relevance within the society in which it exists. Only when one understands the social environment which fosters a given fashion can one then attempt to relate and appreciate the value of this fashion as a social barometer.

To consider fashion in isolation is to deny its function of a vivid and accurate visual illustration of how society is thinking. The relationship that exists between any given established society and dress within it is not only incredibly fascinating, but also shocking in its revelations.

There is nothing innocent or spontaneous about dress. It is controlled and contrived to society's ends and to consider it in a superficial way is to deprive oneself of a great insight.

As fashion is dictated by social change it therefore follows no path of rational progress, but instead alters the course according to demands made upon it.

Wendy Chapkis in *Beauty Secrets* relates this characteristic of fashion to contemporary society versus contemporary women's struggle to redefine and establish an image, realistic or otherwise, of exactly how the modern woman should be perceived -

"Until that conflict is resolved, each attempt to redefine female beauty will result in little more than a change in fashion."

Wendy Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets* (page 14)

Having chosen for my diploma thesis, the Victorian Era as the background to my study of female dress, not only to examine the costume of the time in isolation, but more importantly how dress was used as an instrument of social morality, and as a means of asserting man's superiority over his female counterparts, I felt the natural progression for me was to relate my findings from this initial study to contemporary women in society.

I do not intend to draw comparison with Victorian woman and her modern day sister, as essentially similarities do not exist between the actual fashions of these two generations, but moreso between the motivations of each given society in terms of how they used and contrived fashion to create their respective perceived images of the ideal woman of the time.

Guilty of many preconceived ideas and generalisations which stemmed from my original study of fashion as an enemy of women, I was fortunate in that by the nature of the contemporary setting of this thesis I could now call upon women themselves to express their own opinions rather than rely completely on historical texts.

My interviews with an eclectic selection of women are not only an integral part of this thesis in terms of research, but also pose many new questions for me, exclusive to contemporary society and a woman's role within it.

In an attempt to view contemporary woman with regard to how she has arrived at where she is today, how society views her, how secure her redefined image is and how the future looks for her, I have confined my representation of women to those familiar to myself - Western European, with a particular emphasis on the Irish Businesswoman and, so as to act as a contrast more than anything else, I shall also examine the American female, but only a certain breed and in a certain context.

The women this study is concerned with exist within a society borne of rapid change and still very much within the throes of revolution. However, unlike the situation in Victorian society when the symptoms of revolution (then industrial) were felt by all, albeit in a variety of ways and intensities, today the revolution I refer to is much more specific to women alone.

Although the struggle for female equality first became a major preoccupation and crusade for the Victorian woman, the rules have since changed dramatically and, in my opinion, every victory won over the past century can be considered to have culminated and manifested itself in the modern woman.

Some would say "she has arrived". I would ask "at what cost, and for how long?"

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE ULTIMATUM - a question of compromise.

The connection between conflict among social classes and the competitive nature of fashion is nothing new and was perhaps more marked in the turn of the century society than it is today.

The power game still exists of course, but is being played by new rules and a new team, i.e., women. It is no longer sufficient to recognisably belong to a certain class. Individuals have progressed from a visual display of group participation to asserting a strong personal image, not necessarily an individual one.

"There was a move from display to identity."  
Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* (page 155)

Whereas prior to the present generation, women were the passive recipients of fashion, they now employ it to their own ends. Just as the male-oriented, bourgeois class of Victorian society used dress to assert their new-found independence (freedom from the old class structure) and wealth, so too do women in contemporary society look to fashion as a visual display of all they have achieved over the last decade (ref. ill. No. 1).

However, as before, society, threatened by the pending breakdown of the hierarchy and the emergence of women as a formidable force challenging the power structure from within society, will react by simply redefining distinctions between class/ sex in an effort to confuse and distract.

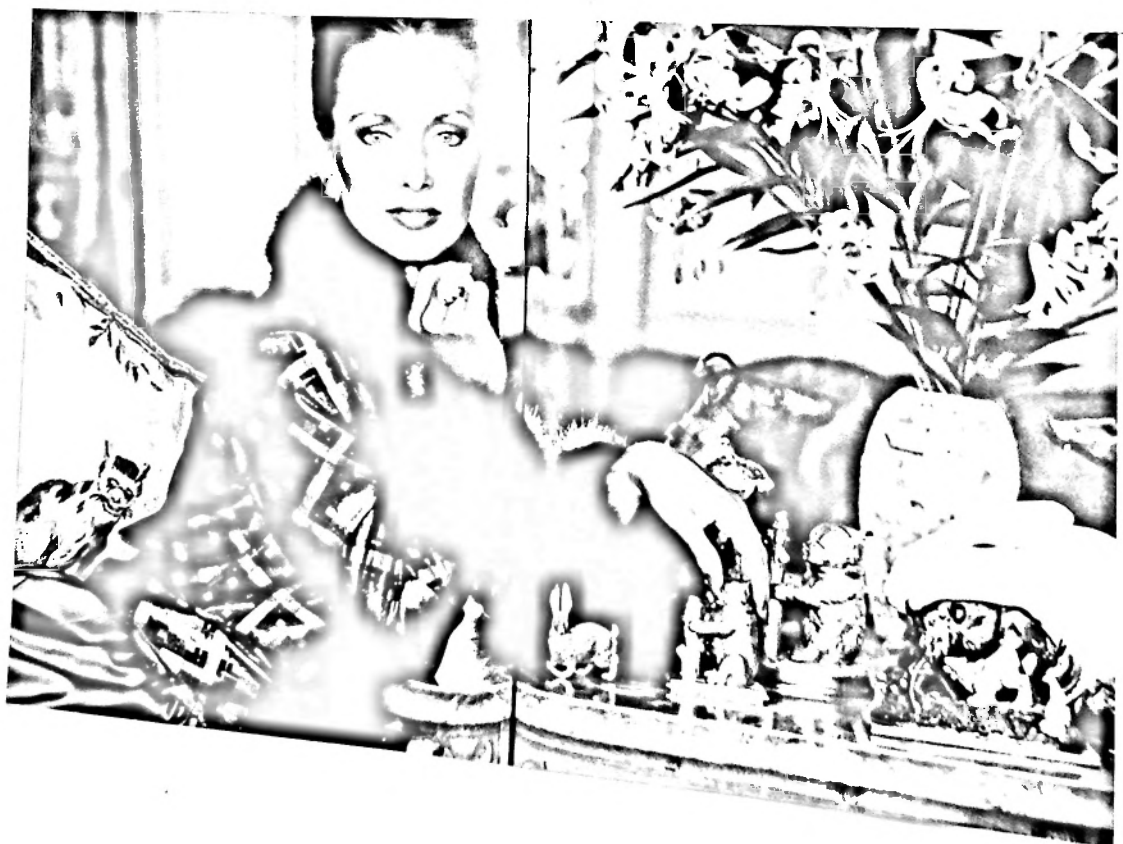
Just as women move closer to establishing their rights to equality, society checks their progress every step of the way by constantly playing on weaknesses and re-emphasising woman's responsibility for satisfying the traditional demand, felt by every generation, for beauty and the ideal (ref. ill. No. 2).

"She will be valued and rewarded on the basis of how close she comes to embodying the ideal."  
Wendy Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets* (page 14)





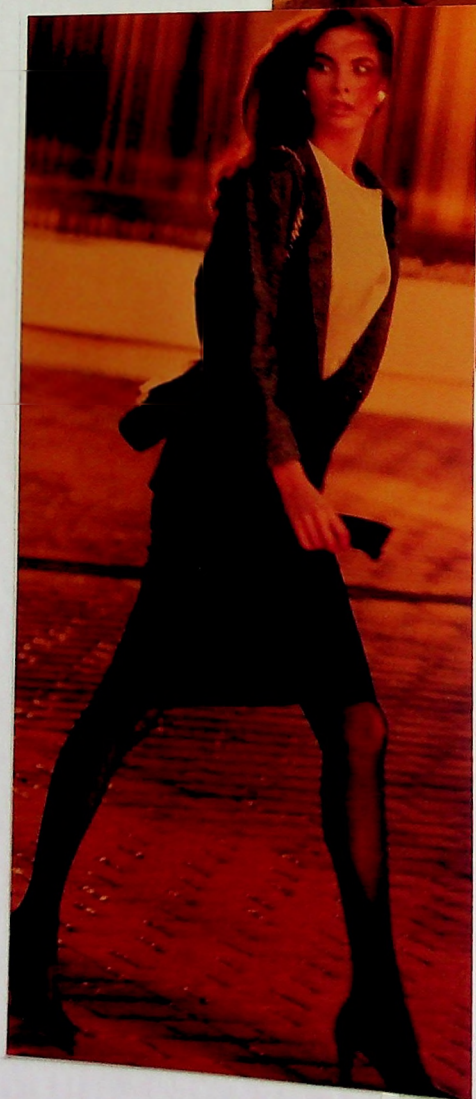
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ILL. 2



ILL. 3



ILL. 4



This responsibility which, far from being dispelled by modern, progressive women, is becoming more of a burden to the contemporary woman as she projects herself further and further into a man's world, alien and hostile to women.

"It is stark reality that men dominate the power structure... I am not suggesting that women dress to impress men simply because they are men (but more because they have the power). This is not sexism. This is realism."

J.T. Molloy, *Women - Dress For Success* (page 32)

Thus fashion and beauty have become armour, to protect and also to hide behind. Approximating beauty can be essential to a woman's chances of power, respect and attention. It is assumed that women were made to compromise and adjust :- "These are stereotypes, which one do you fit ?". Just as with fashion :- "These are the sizes, these are the colours and these are the styles, which one do you fit ?"

Allowed to assert their independence and capabilities, women still must play by the men's rules and conform to men's redefined images of the modern woman. It is considered a fair, even generous, exchange on the part of the modern male to allow women to realise their natural potential in return for women doing so in a way which will not rock the established power structure.

If women look different from men in a situation in which they are supposed to be equal, for example; business, it proves easier to justify unequal politics with regard to economic and social treatment. By drawing very clear distinctions between the sexes through the use of dress, men create for themselves the comforting, constant reminder that women, by virtue of being female, are subject to the weaknesses inherent in their (women's) sex, especially physical inferiority in terms of strength, compounded further by restrictive dress such as delicate, high-heeled shoes and tight skirted suits (ref. ill. No's. 3 & 4). By asserting their obvious physical superiority over women, men can intimidate and disarm a would be formidable opponent.

Consider for a moment the language used by men to quantify beauty in women:- "She's a knockout !", "That woman is ravishing.", "...a bombshell.", or "...stunning." all words of violence and power. To men, a woman's appearance is a threat, a weapon. In a context where men are in control, this threat is not so deeply felt. However, in a situation where a man is confronted with the image of female beauty coupled with formidable opposition/ assertiveness/ independence, this call for offensive action.



"A woman has the power to attract the men she needs and wants with her beauty. But men can be dangerous."

Timothy Beneke, *Men On Rape* (page 26)

Here, beauty is paradoxical in nature - described as both pure and evil/ innocent and seductive/ valuable and superficial. Society ascribes desirable qualities to physical attractiveness while at the same time thinking that beautiful people, particularly women, possess many negative traits, for example, that they are unintelligent, vain, superficial, fickle and with undeserving power over men (ref. ill No. 5). How simple it is to dismiss someone through the power of stereotyping.

"Many people are terribly uncomfortable with the idea that a woman can possess both beauty and brains. They often expect an explanation other than competence for why a pretty woman is successful."

Nancy Baker, *The Beauty Trap* (page 51)

And so as to keep a very tight rein on women who could challenge the status quo within the male-oriented society, women's greatest weaknesses, or more precisely insecurities, are exploited. Society, by way of fashion/ beauty/ media/ publishing, presents these women with an image. The fantasy that is this image is sold to them as the reality (ref. ill. No. 6). Women choose not to challenge this perceived image for various reasons.

"Given the reality of imposed femininity, each woman is faced with the choice of accomodation and its rewards of sexual and social approval, or rebellion and the punishing ridicule reserved for the asexual and ugly."

Wendy Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets* (page 131)

Is it any wonder that women find themselves feeling unattractive and guilty of failing somehow to embody the perceived image of the female while at the same time possessing a strong pride and conviction in the principles which govern their non-conformity to what they know to be a contrived fantasy image.

But the modern woman is under tremendous pressure not only to conform to stereotype role-playing, but also from the doctrine of feminism. The image the modern woman projects now will determine, in the eyes of men/ society, whether or not women are worthy of equality. Society watches them and waits for mistakes to be made in an effort to prove that in reality women can never successfully compete in a man's world.





ILL. 5

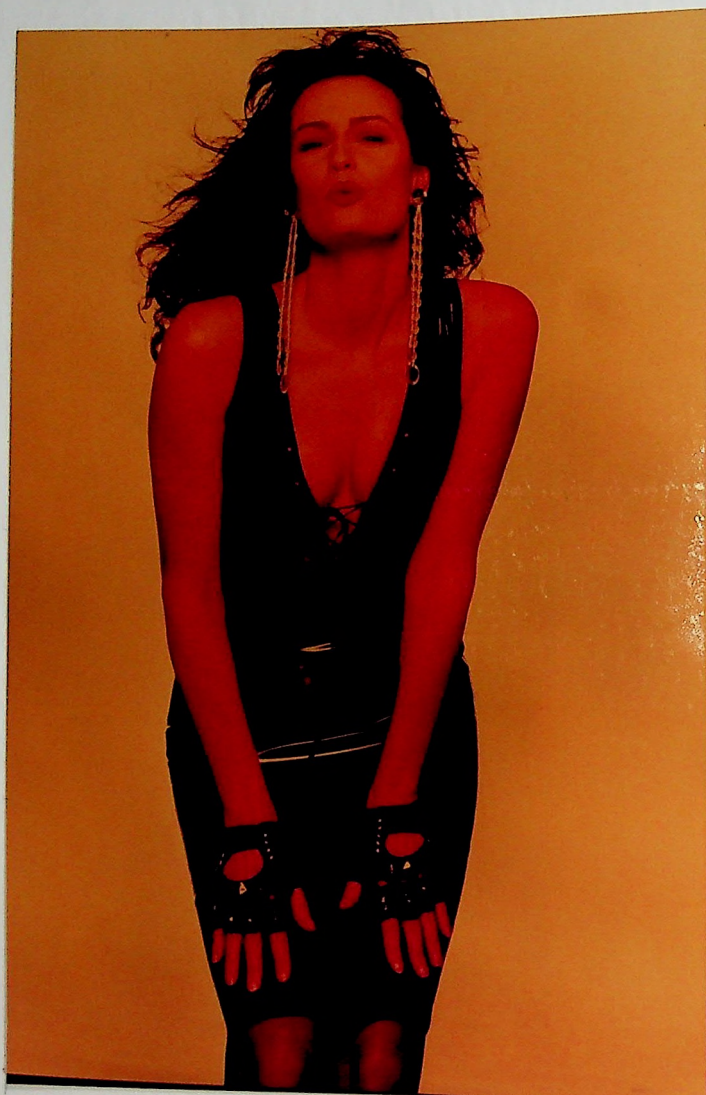


ILL. 6









ILL. 8





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ILL. 11



## CHAPTER TWO

### FASHION - the ultimate consumer industry

Hopefully, having successfully set the the mood of contemporary society, and having outlined how women are perceived within society's stereotypical roles, I feel it necessary to introduce the idea that there exists another motivating influence other than society's need to perpetuate class/ gender distinctions which control fashion and beauty images.

Fashion could be considered the ultimate consumer industry, and women are very much the pawns of our consumer society. It is highly profitable for both the media and the manufacturers to perpetuate women's beliefs in the power of dress and appearance.

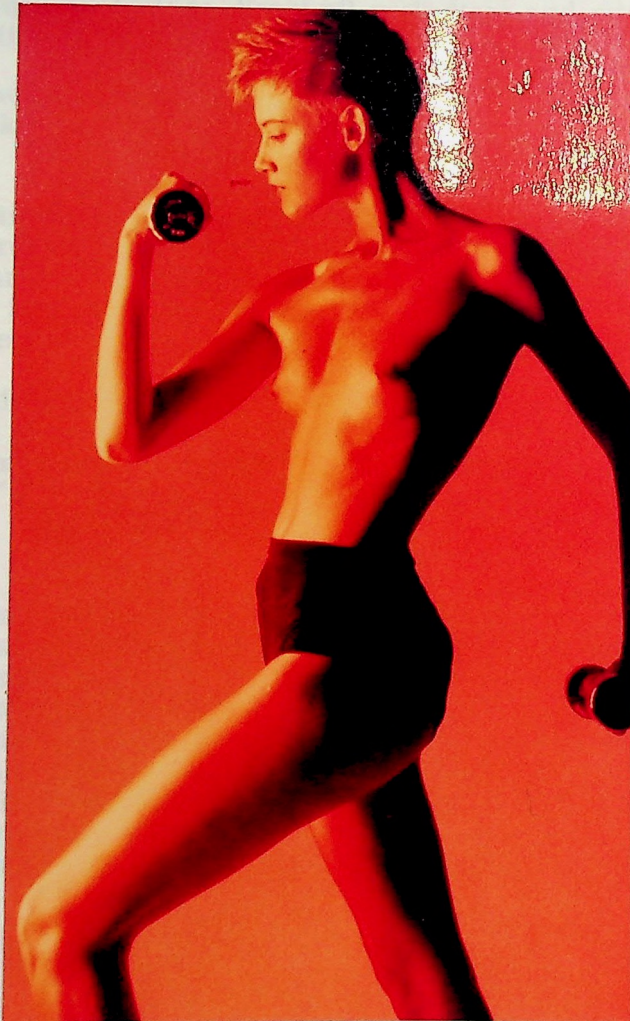
After a period of rejection in the late sixties and seventies, when feminism became a powerful force challenging women to break with all stereotyping and to redefine the image of women in a contemporary and conscious way.

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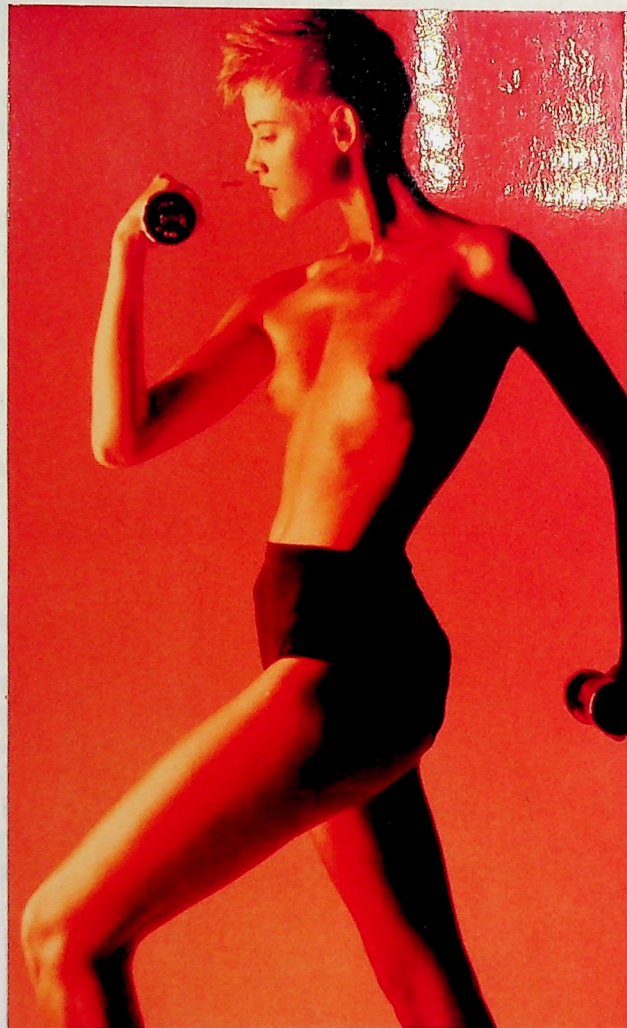
## CHAPTER TWO

### FASHION the ultimate consumer industry

Hopefully, having successfully set the the record of contemporary society, and having outlined how women are perceived within specific stereotypical roles, I feel it necessary to introduce the idea that there exists another motivating influence other than society's need to perpetuate class/ gender distinctions which creates fashion and beauty images.

Fashion could be considered the ultimate consumer industry, and women are very much the pawns of our consumer society. It is highly profitable for both the media and the manufacturers to perpetuate women's beliefs in the power of dress and appearance.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### FASHION - the ultimate consumer industry.

Hopefully, having successfully set the mood of contemporary society, and having outlined how women are perceived within specific stereotypical roles, I feel it necessary to introduce the idea that there exists another motivating influence other than society's need to perpetuate class/ gender distinctions which contrive fashion and beauty images.

Fashion could be considered the ultimate consumer industry, and women are very much the pawns of our consumer society. It is highly profitable for both the media and the manufacturers to perpetuate women's beliefs in the power of dress and appearance.

After a period of rejection in the late sixties and seventies, when feminism became a powerful force challenging women to break with all stereotyping and to redefine the image of women in a contemporary context; to dispel all prejudices and misconceptions was essential (ref. ill. No. 13).

"Devotion to fashion in dress was adduced as a natural weakness of women, something they could not help."

Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (page 360)

Women sought to assert their independence and pride in their sexuality, rejecting the belief that for a woman sexuality and femininity were one and the same thing. Society maintained that being female demanded femininity (ref. ill. No. 14). Unconvinced, women sought to liberate themselves from the burdens of feminine "role playing" :-

"And maybe it should be pointed out to the fashion experts that femininity is not what you wear - not a plunging neckline, a bit of sparkle or a puffed sleeve. If you are female, it's what you are."

Geri Joseph,

*Peasant Chic and Femininity*  
**The Washington Post** (1976)

However, fashion by nature being reactionary, simply redefined society's image of women by selling them yet another contrived role model to aspire to (ref. ill. No. 15). Hand in hand the fashion/ cosmetic/ advertising powers manipulated this revolution of women to their own advantage by pre-empting the inevitable change which would result, with regard to how these women might evolve. These industries knew that their appeal would be to a more independent, self-sufficient, educated female, often with her own discretionary income. Fearing redundancy, fashion took a new direction, appearing





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ILL. 15



to have compromised and progressed so as to facilitate the changing trends, whereas in reality victory was theirs as they again managed to successfully seduce women into the belief that fashion had come of age and finally woken up to reality.

The resulting stereotypes borne of this "awakening" were to prove even more challenging than those previously endured. The feminist insistence that a woman is beautiful just as she naturally appears was now re-written in a commercial translation as the "Natural Look" (ref. ill. No's. 16 & 17).

The standard shows little variance and the ideal remains - narrow hipped, high breasted women with flawless beauty, preferably white and Western (ref. ill. No. 18).

Whereas previously women attempted to embody the ideal through deception,

"Over the centuries women have willingly painted, powdered, scented, dyed, corseted, slimmed, fattened, paled, tanned and shaved ourselves all in the pursuit of an ever changing beauty."

Nancy Baker, *The Beauty Trap* (page 11)

they are supposed to conform to a male induced stereotype without the visible use of artifice (ref. ill. No. 19).

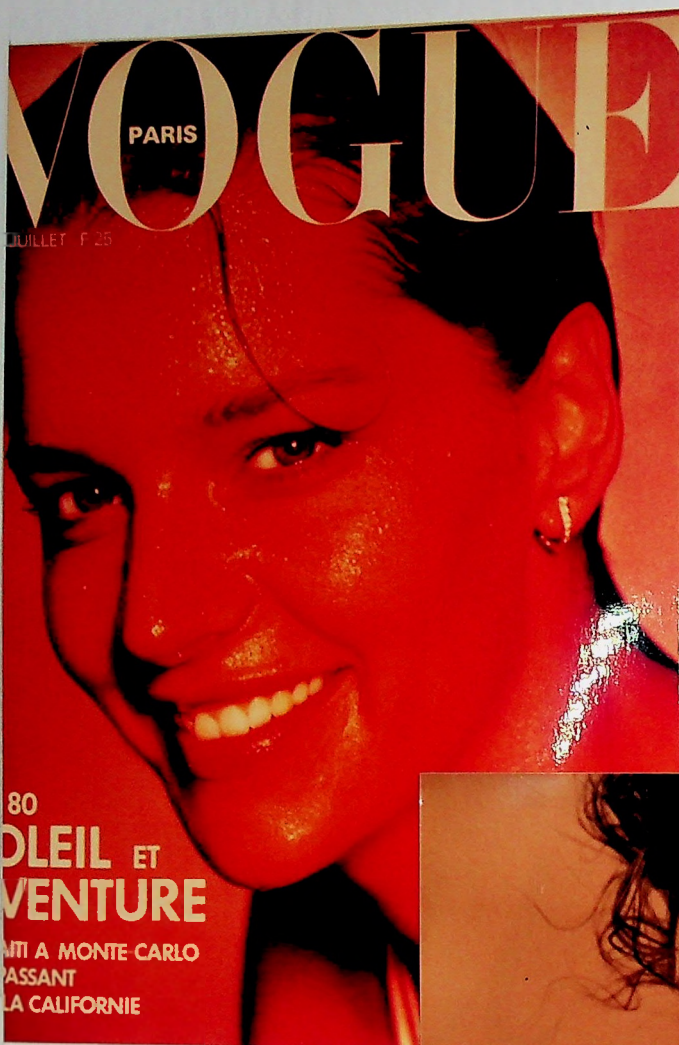
When one considers the scale and power of the fashion/ beauty industry in terms of economics and employment, it becomes very difficult to dismiss its obvious influence within society. There is nothing spontaneous or evolutionary about fashion. It is a conspiracy of contrivances. So perfectly marketed and so completely money motivated that the threat it poses to women is equalled only by the threat of social prejudices, stereotyping and misconceptions.

But should we not consider the fashion/ beauty industry as having been borne of these sociological concepts ? To do so is to come very close, uncomfortably close, to realising the magnitude of influence the fashion business wields over women. The concept behind the success of the industry can be considered in its essence, if somewhat over simplified, with reference to a study of women and the media.

"You create an image which few can attain and you are ensured of a market forever. And just to make sure, you change the "look" regularly."

Davies/ Hick/ Stratford, *Out of Focus* (page 76)

Why then, if the contrivance behind the fashion/ beauty ideal is so blatantly obvious and thus deserving of nothing more than ridicule and rejection, is the industry enjoying a regenerated popularity with what should be an enlightened, liberated generation of women in the late 1980's ? The anxieties and insecurities of these women - perhaps a result of asserting their sex in a sexist society - are exploited and

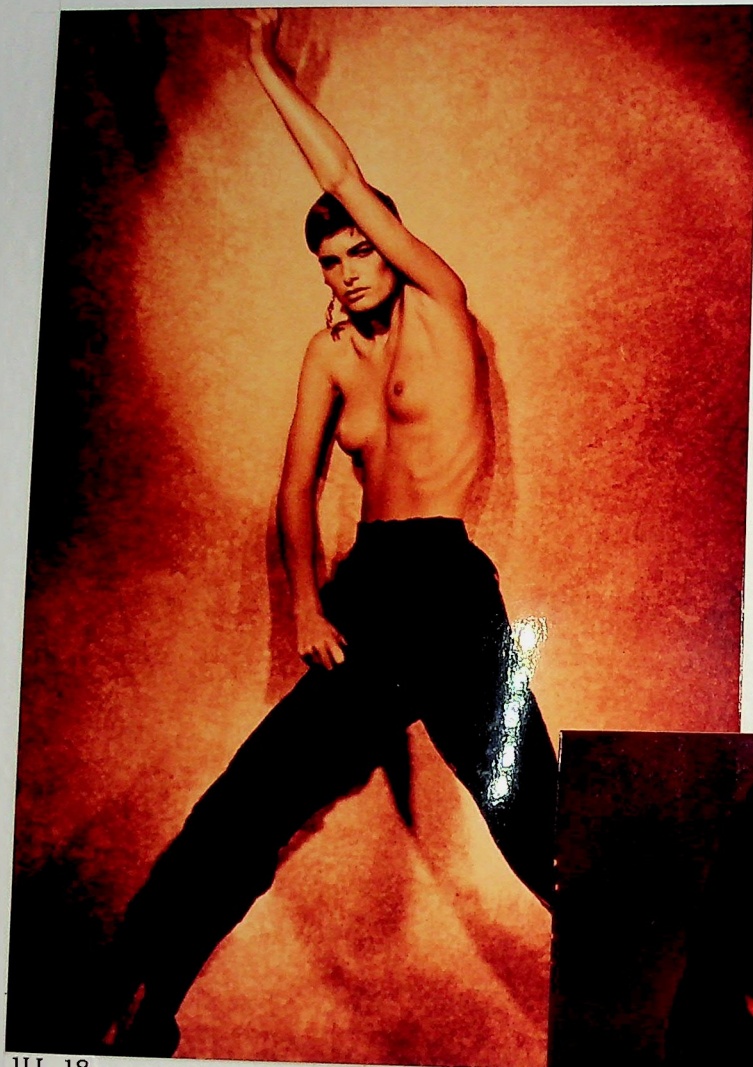


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ILL. 18



ILL. 19



emphasised. This is the problem. Next the industry (i.e., fashion, beauty and advertising) sells the same women a neatly packaged identity to disguise their anxieties and hide their insecurities. This is the solution. And everyone is happy ! (ref. ill. No. 20).

"Of course while it is true that advertising never sets the pace, it cannot escape its share of the responsibility for confirming the view that to "join the club" you've got to look like this, smell like this and dress like this."

Tony Bodine, Saatchi & Saatchi, London.  
Wendy Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets* (page 40)

Is it that women have fallen prey to the sophisticated seduction of fashion marketing ? Advertising is the art of the 1980's and women its most exploited victims. The greater independence and freedom gained by women recently has been met with a whole new series of advertisements and images which ostensibly take into account the changing interests of women and yet continue to perpetuate the importance of role-playing. By basing writing, broadcasting and advertisements on these stereotypes the media does much more than simply reflect the reality of women in that its influence extends to actually determining and then teaching sex roles. The compromise the beauty industry made to facilitate the changing image of women was simply to add to the traditional stereotype already in existence. A daunting role model is now the new, perceived reality.

"She is encouraged to be sleek and refined on the job, glowingly energetic on holiday, sweetly domestic at home with her children and irresistibly sexy in the presence of... her spouse equivalent."

(ref. ill. No's. 21, 22 & 23)  
Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes* (page 136)

Surely this "superwoman", embodying the ideal, is the brainchild of the fashion/ beauty industry, for no sane woman would willingly identify with such a role model. This "Renaissance Woman", as I choose to term her has singlehandedly kept the fashion industry alive, and not only that, but also prompted a surge of spin-off industries, for instance; cosmetics, plastic surgery, gums, health farms and diet industries (Nutrasweet. Reg. is her biggest fan), the media and female orientated journals and publications. Consider the enormous success of the "Dress for Success" bibles, for example; *Having It All* by Helen Gurley Brown, or J.T. Molloy's *Women - Dress For Success*.

"From decent skinny eating...exercising an hour a day, taking vitamins (sixty a day now), no smoking, no drinking, no caffeine, no drugs and being motivated to stay well, your life can utterly change. Mind did."

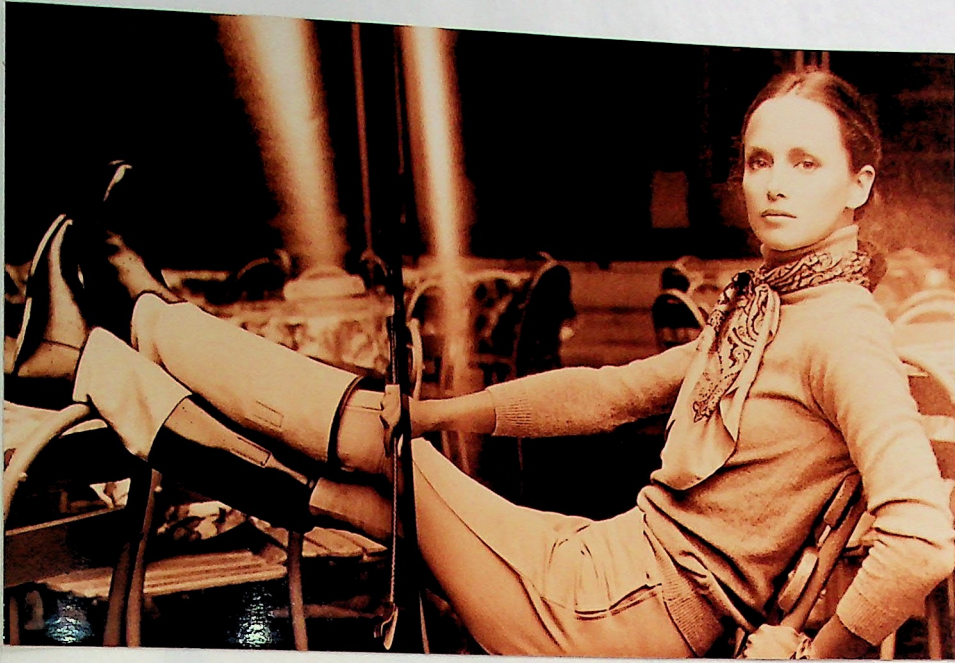
Helen Gurley Brown, *Having It All* (page 100)

But what of success, Mr Molloy ?



ILL. 20





ILL. 21





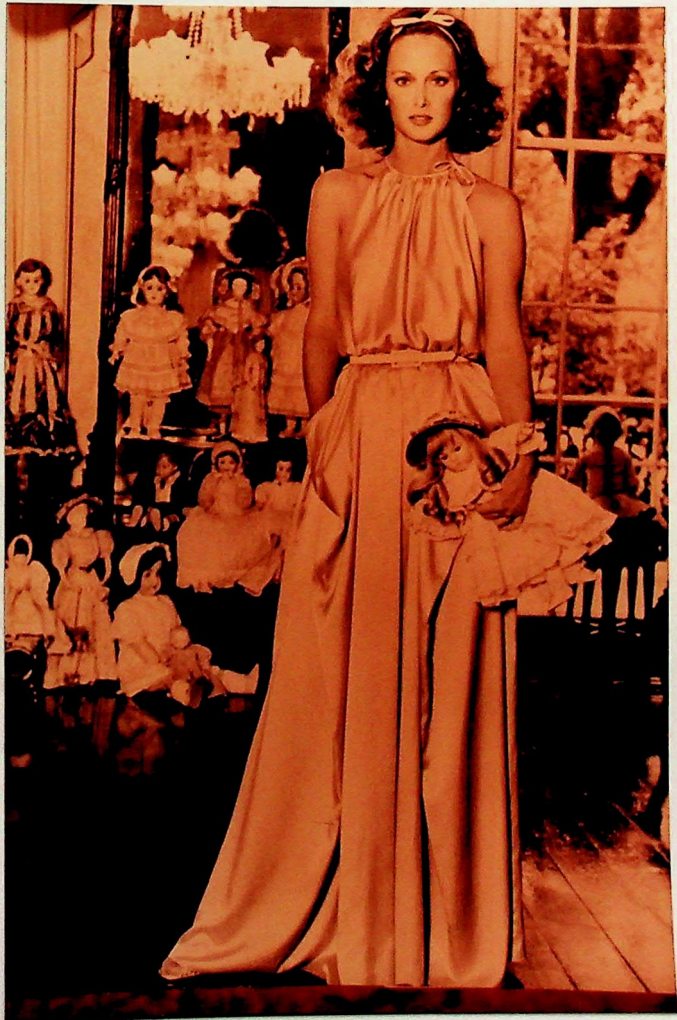
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page 12

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...if not more, women  
...to realize society's  
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...the way we look is a terrible  
...painful experience of  
...24 & 25

...the women and there are the  
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"We can increase (a woman's) chances of success in the business world; we can increase her chances of being a top executive; we can make her more attractive, to various kinds of men."

J.T. Molloy,

*Women - Dress for Success*

(page 15)

We can rebuild her; we have the technology !

This is the fashion/ beauty industries' concept of contemporary woman. Considering that the vast majority of women fall short in one or more areas of the total ideal, why then has fashion never felt pressure to conform to the reality. Instead many, if not most, women believe it is their duty to compromise in an effort to realise society's ambitions for them. We are told that somewhere down the line something went terribly wrong and that the way we look is a horrible mistake which must be put right no matter how painful, expensive or time consuming the transformation (ref. ill. No's. 24 & 25).

"These are the sizes, these are the colours and these are the styles. Which one do you fit ?"

Wendy Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets* (page 93)

The fashion business sells us dreams in a variety of shapes and sizes and colours.

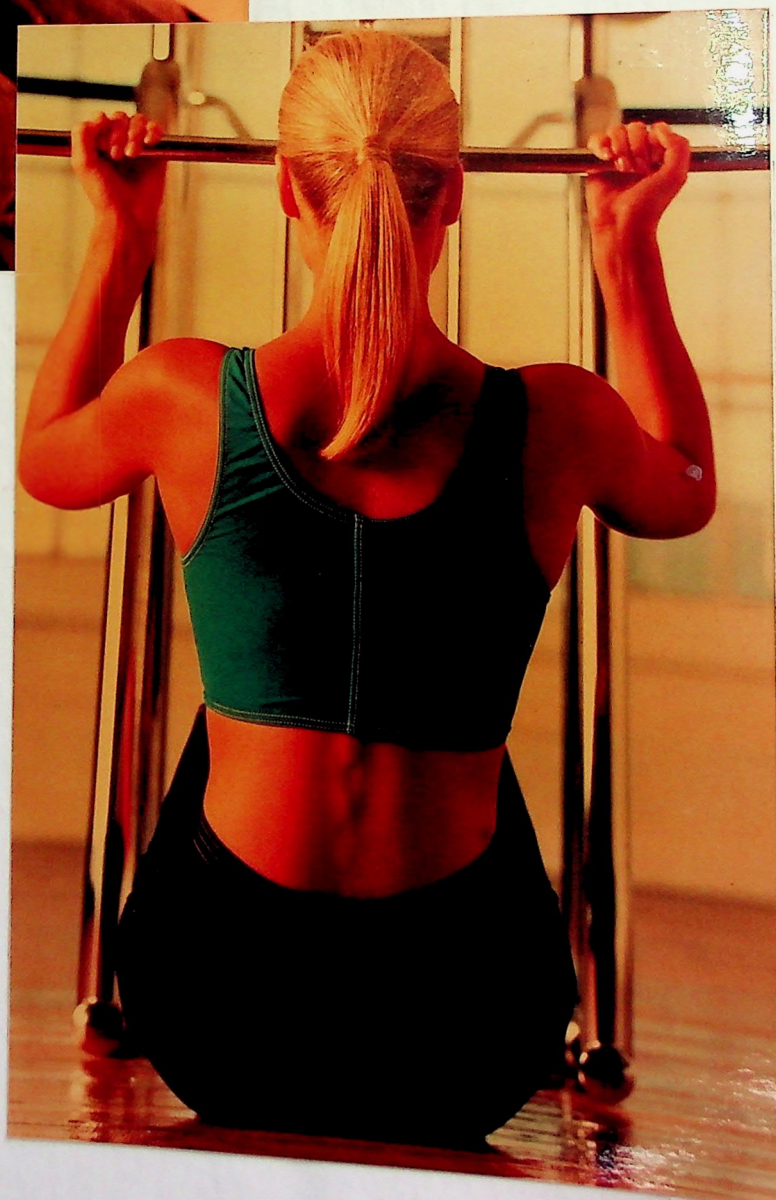
How exactly does the industry translate this image, which they have contrived for a woman, into the successful business it has become ?

Consider the theory of "Conspicuous Multiplication" (Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, page 123) - an extension of the "Veblen- esque" theory of conspicuous consumption concerned with the ostentatious display of wealth. The power of dress as a visible means of identification, in that it establishes distinctions between people of varying class, wealth, profession and persuasion, has been distilled, so to speak, by the fashion industry to its purest form in recent years and now operates in a highly contrived, sophisticated and understated way.

The power of dress is now through association rather than ostentation. "Conspicuous Multiplication" facilitates the power of association by encouraging the consumption of a varied and extensive quantity of clothing, each one particular to an activity which suggests wealth, social position, profession etc. For example, the costumes worn for high status sports have already a marked influence on fashion. A high status sport by definition is one which requires a great deal of expensive equipment or an expensive setting, or both, such as hunting, shooting, sailing or, on a much more exotic note, the ultimate - safari.



ILL. 24



ILL. 25



All dress particular to these, or other high-status pastimes acquire prestige through association by marketing the "look" rather than the clothes themselves (ref. ill. No's. 26 & 27).

To perhaps best illustrate the success of this cleverly contrived (and executed) marketing seduction as used by the fashion/ beauty industry, I wish to, at this point, consider the phenomenal success of of the American designer Ralph Lauren as the perfect case study in point.

American society is very much based on the philosophy of upward mobility. Wealth and income do not constitute anything until they have been converted into the right kind of of visual association, for example; clothes, manners, education, accomplishments, etc. Russell Lynes wrote with educated authority on the class structure of American society in *The Tastemakers* and *Snobs* (c. 1950's) and concluded the existence of a three-tier society. In brief, "The High Brows", being the elite intelligenzia with almost indifference to dress, "The Low Brows" do not count in terms of fashion, but are by far the largest in numbers, and "The Middle Brows", conforming to to all the conventional codes of dress in their search for culture and credibility. Most high fashion is found in the social class just below the "old monied" families.

Fashion today for American "Middle Brow Ladies" symbolises their relation to wealth rather than the family status. This yearning to belong to a class deep-rooted in traditional snobbery explains to a large degree the success of the Ralph Lauren Polo Company:-

"Lauren dangles old money prestige in front of new money clients"

(ref. ill. 28 & 29)

Nicolas Coleridge,

*The Fashion Conspiracy* (page 40)

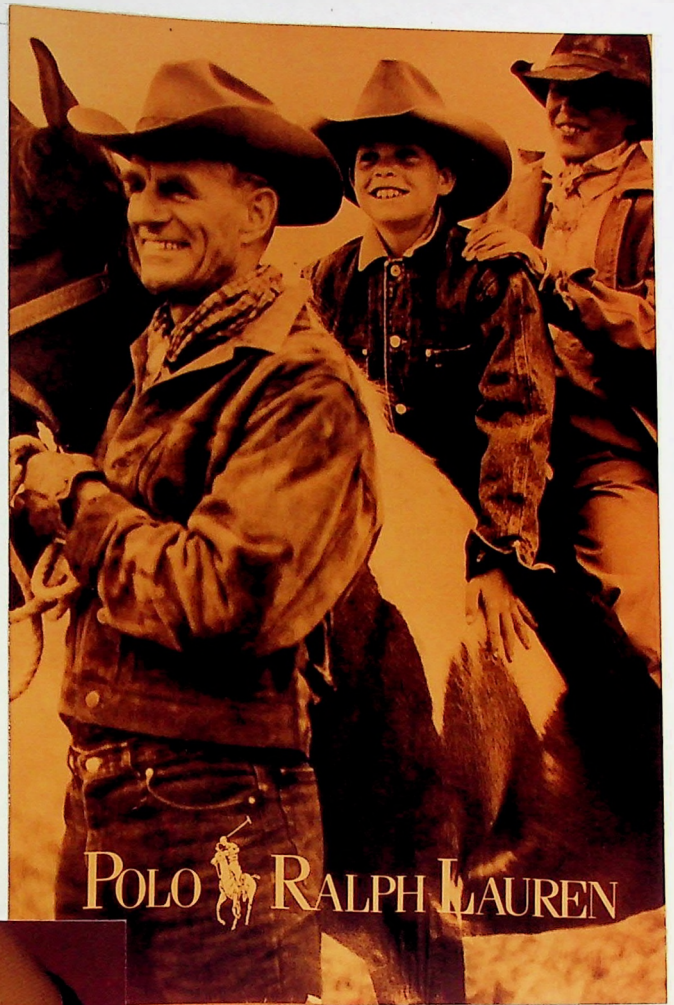
So carefully contrived is the Lauren image that any franchise must take it upon themselves to first create the mood and atmosphere that is 'Polo' before they may attempt to sell the product.

A Lauren store with its own mahogany shelves, fireplace, leather bound books, polo sticks, hunting prints, 'scuffed leather', boarding school travelling luggage, antique clocks and other bric-a-brac which have become de rigeur 'Polo', feeds the client's imagination, and promises a whole new quality of life through dress (ref. ill. No. 30). This is the power of dress through association at work. To us this sales pitch may appear cliché-ridden and much too obvious and self-conscious to succeed and yet it has, making Mr. Lauren the richest designer in the world.

"We sell a way of life, says Lauren over and over again."

Nicolas Coleridge,

*The Fashion Conspiracy* (page 43)



ILL. 26

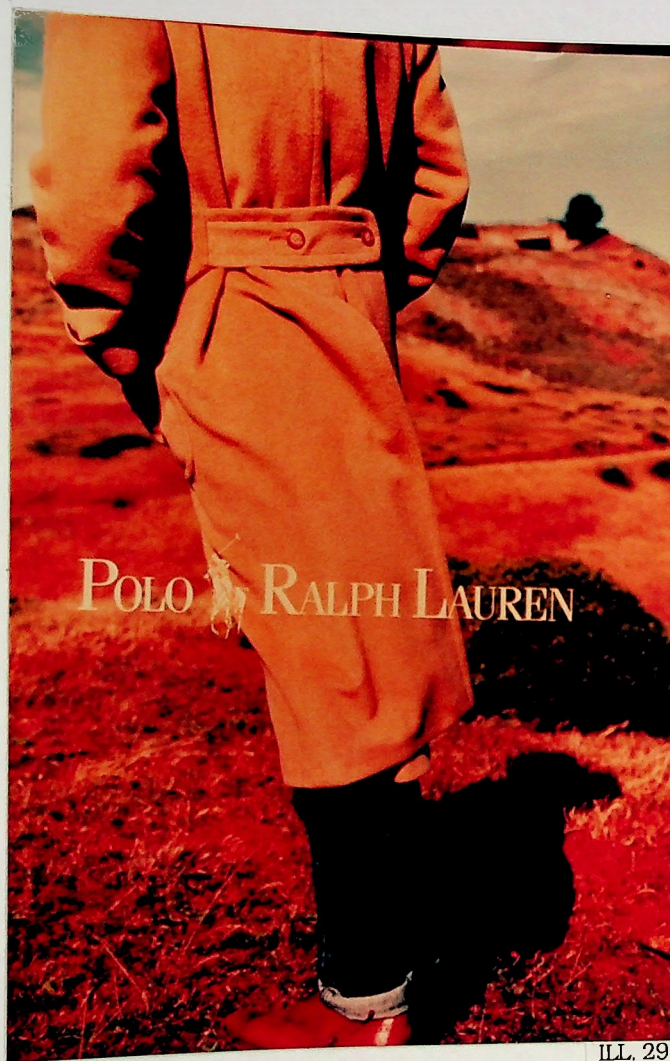


ILL. 27









ILL. 29





ILL. 30

Examples of such marketing strategy are everywhere. In 1990, the Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Lacoste, Oscar de la Renta and the other designers of the Ralph Lauren Polo collection, No. 30 & 30.

The sophisticated king of American fashion, Ralph Lauren, the founder of Polo, has been a leading force in the industry since...

...ranging from haute couture to designer jeans, which...  
...achieve an estimated annual income of \$10 million...  
...James Callaghan. The Fashion Company, Inc.

The beauty of the success the American fashion industry has made...  
...industry. This industry does not create a new fashion...  
...revolution and the designers name is the only one. A new...  
...industry has grown up during the last decade between...  
...designer. Fashion is no longer so much in the hands of...  
...people. The role of the designer has been reduced to...  
...is a position previously enjoyed only by and is...  
...fashion and the infamous, courted to establish the...  
...and...

As reaction against previous fashion trends of the 1970's and early 1980's, often experimental and frivolous in nature (ref. ill. No's 31 & 32), there now came a very neat fashion package.

"The old class number had been absolutely no-go territory in the media, with people drabbing off their accent or cleaning them up and aiming for the middle... A touch of class was really the most exciting thing ever. After years of official classlessness..."  
Peter York,  
*Style Wars* (page 15)

Conservative, reliable, expensive, constant and as instantly recognisable as an old school tie. Perfectly co-ordinated for him and her - The ideal 1980's couple (ref. ill. No. 33). The fashion industry loved this new consumer who demanded so little in the way of innovative imagination and who obeyed to the letter these codes of "association dress" as determined by designers such as Lauren.

As a direct result of the popularity enjoyed by the industry of the total look/ identity package, the multi-million business of licencing began. Due to the power of conspicuous display of wealth through association, it was realised that a high-status garment need not be recognisably of a superior quality than others, it need only be recognisably more expensive. What was needed was to somehow incorporate the price of each garment into the design. By simply moving the makers name from its modest position inside the garment to a place of outward prominence. This was followed then by a campaign of hyped-up publicity through marketing and advertising of these designer names or trademarks so that they might become household words and serve as an instant guide to the price of the product they adorned. These same products could then be priced ridiculously high, not because they were of a superior quality, but because the marketing budgets were so immense, thus justifying the price point.

Example of such marketing strategy are everywhere, for example; Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Lacoste, Oscar de la Renta and the ubiquitous Ralph Lauren 'Polo' (ref. ill. No's 34 & 35).

The undisputed king of licencing however, must be Pierre Cardin. He holds an incredible 840 licences alone...

"...ranging from scuba diving suits to designer igloos, which produce an estimated personal income of \$10 million."  
Nicolas Coleridge, *The Fashion Conspiracy* (page 8)

The beauty of the success the licencing business enjoys lies in its simplicity. This industry does not create - It regurgitates. Marketing is everything and the designers name is the sales pitch. A complex conspiracy has grown up during the last decade between customer and designer. Fashion is no longer so much to do with clothes as with patronage. The role of the designer has been elevated from anonymity to a position previously enjoyed only by artists and celebrities, the famous and the infamous, contrived to establish the glamorous and





ILL. 31



ILL. 32





ESPRIT





ILL. 34



ILL. 35

terrifically exciting world of culture as a modern day Hollywood. The person behind the name was exposed and marketed along with the product he/she designed. The appeal became personal and intimate and success was guaranteed.

The women patrons who conspire with the fashion gurus, i.e., society hostesses, prominent family members, celebrities and royalty, whether intentionally or otherwise, perpetuate the belief in women as vehicles of 'vicarious ostentation' (Veltzen) at a time when the majority of women have broken with this stereotype (ref. ill. No's. 36).

Having , at this point, an appreciation of the sheer magnitude of the influential power and profit orientated nature of the fashion/ beauty industry may perhaps explain the re-emergence of these professional fashion groupies/ fashion victims within the last decade.

Catherine Deneuve for Yves Saint Laurent; Grace Jones and Paloma Picasso for Montana; Princess Stephanie of Monaco for Chanel; Blaine Trump and Lynn Wyatt for Bill Blass; Lucy Ferry for Lacroix. These are among those faces ever present at the couture shows. These ladies never disappoint the public - big smiles, big effort and big money.

Let us consider these women and their actual importance to the fashion beauty industry.



Printed and manufactured by the Government Printing Office, London.



A celebration of style and taste by **YVES SAINT LAURENT** ILL.

ILL. 36

## CHAPTER THREE

### ROLE PLAYING -

The women who perpetuate the belief.

Nicolas Coleridge, in his study of the fashion industry, *The Fashion Conspiracy*, terms these women the "Shiny Set", and describes them beautifully as being:-

"...married or nearly married and yet the mistress of her own destiny, building a career but with a fully rounded character, confident but confiding, ambitious but yielding, a workaholic but intent one day to quit the rat-race for a beach house at Newport"

(page 29)

(ref. ill. No. 37)

Could this indecisive, yielding female be the role-model for any thinking woman? Obviously the fashion world would have us believe so. I would suggest that her influence lies, not so much in the capacity of role-model, as in the selling of dreams. This woman is a fashion fantasy, not a reality. The attraction of the unobtainable is a marketing power exploited by the fashion industry to perfection:-

"Yves Saint Laurent cashes in on the unobtainable - If you don't already have it, don't bother. This kind of sales approach is linked to limited distribution - "exclusively available in select stores"...to the right kind of customer."

Wendy Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets* (page 92)

Ridiculed and dismissed by most of their European contemporaries and by the fashion press, this "shiny set" (Coleridge) of American ladies must be admired for, if nothing else, their success in making a full-time occupation out of the responsibility they feel to appear beautiful and fashionable at all times despite the expense. It would be foolish to suggest that these 'professional beauties' wield no power within the fashion world. Their effect has been left not only at home in America, but also in Europe, due mainly to their spending power and their enthusiastic patronage of designers such as Bill Blass, Oscar de la Renta and Yves Saint Laurent (no relation to the Patron Saint of Harvard) and others. They feel no need to justify the spending of approximately \$367,500 per season on costume alone (Coleridge, page 64). As they see it, their role within their own society, albeit an elite minority, is simply one of conspicuous display of their husbands' wealth (ref. ill. No. 38)

Traditionally, a woman dressed in money was assumed to be making a statement, not about herself, but about a man. Being dressed in money demonstrates to the viewing public that, for these women their one all-important investment in life (i.e., marriage), has paid off very





ILL. 37

**"My husband loves me in anything romantic," says Pakula. "I love anything slithery." Below, in YSL panne velvet dinner dressing, at her New York apartment**



ILL. 38

nicely. Through dress, this woman can enjoy a certain security - she is visually stating that she is being protected by, or should we say the property of, someone, male, and not to be trifled with (ref. ill. No's. 39 & 40).

If these women are the fantasy, what is the reality? In terms of fashion/ beauty the reality itself is quite daunting in its complexity.

The New York womenswear designer Donna Karan, a recognised authority on the contemporary female, as she herself embodies the ideal, identifies this woman for us:-

"They may be businesswomen, mothers hostesses...women who love to look beautiful but don't have time to stop. Who are looking for something that's very clear, very new, very interesting...Clear, relaxed, professional clothes she can put on and forget about."

Nicolas Coleridge,

(ref. ill. No's. 41 & 42)  
*The Fashion Conspiracy*  
(page 30)

During the last decade, designers such as Donna Karan, Anne Klein, Giorgio Armani, Gianfranco Ferre and Calvin Klein became aware of new demands being made upon clothing by modern women and catered to that need. Fashion 1980's will always be remembered as being 'woman-conscious', embodying for them a fresh, new 'look' to reflect their new independence and confidence (ref. ill. No. 43).

So where then is the logical progression from this image of the liberated, modern woman to the contrived, controlled, restricted Lacroix woman of 1987:-

"Now is the spring of our discontentment. The sophisticated woman, that elegant creature at ease in her clothes is gone. In her place stands a simpering girl. Paris has spoken and it has said "short". Paris has decreed and it has called for sex."

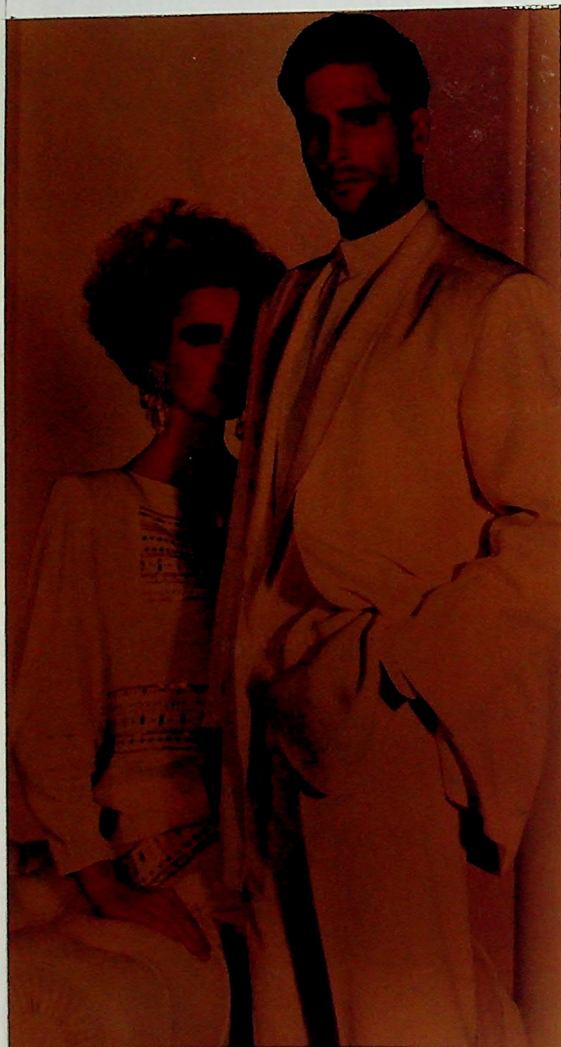
Sally Brampton - Editor, **Elle Magazine**.  
(from **The Sunday Times**, 25.10.87)

Even from a very brief glance at the couture collections, up until but not including perhaps the two last seasons, one cannot help but notice the regressive direction fashion has taken.

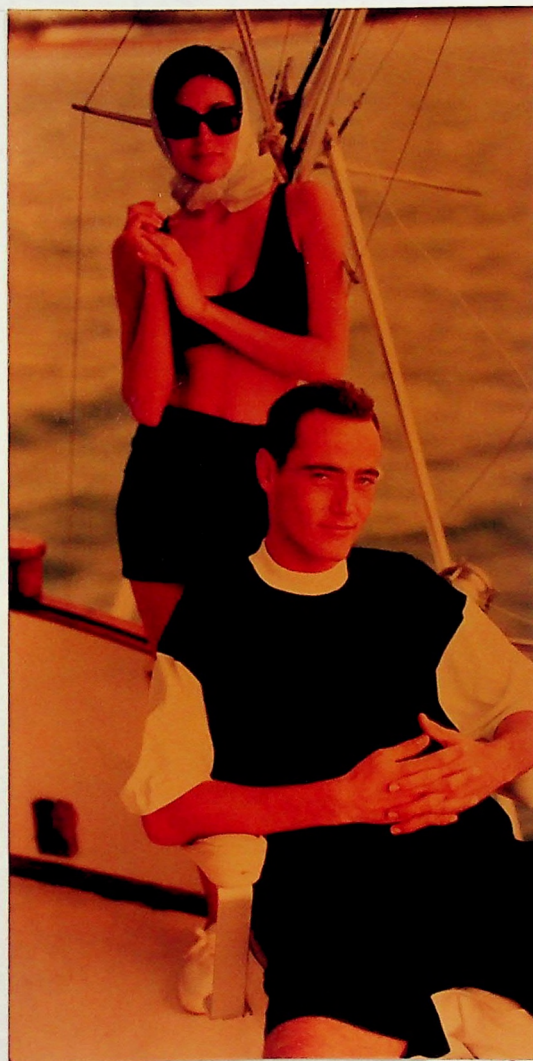
Previously women enjoyed angular, hard, positive lines in dress with practicality in mind in terms of ease of locomotion, freedom of movement, versatility and with an emphasis on function rather than decorative femininity (ref. ill. No's. 44 & 45).

Now, as if in an effort to counteract women's liberation from contrived costume, lines became much safer, shoulder pads were declared positively passe, curves were emphasised and accentuated, comfort



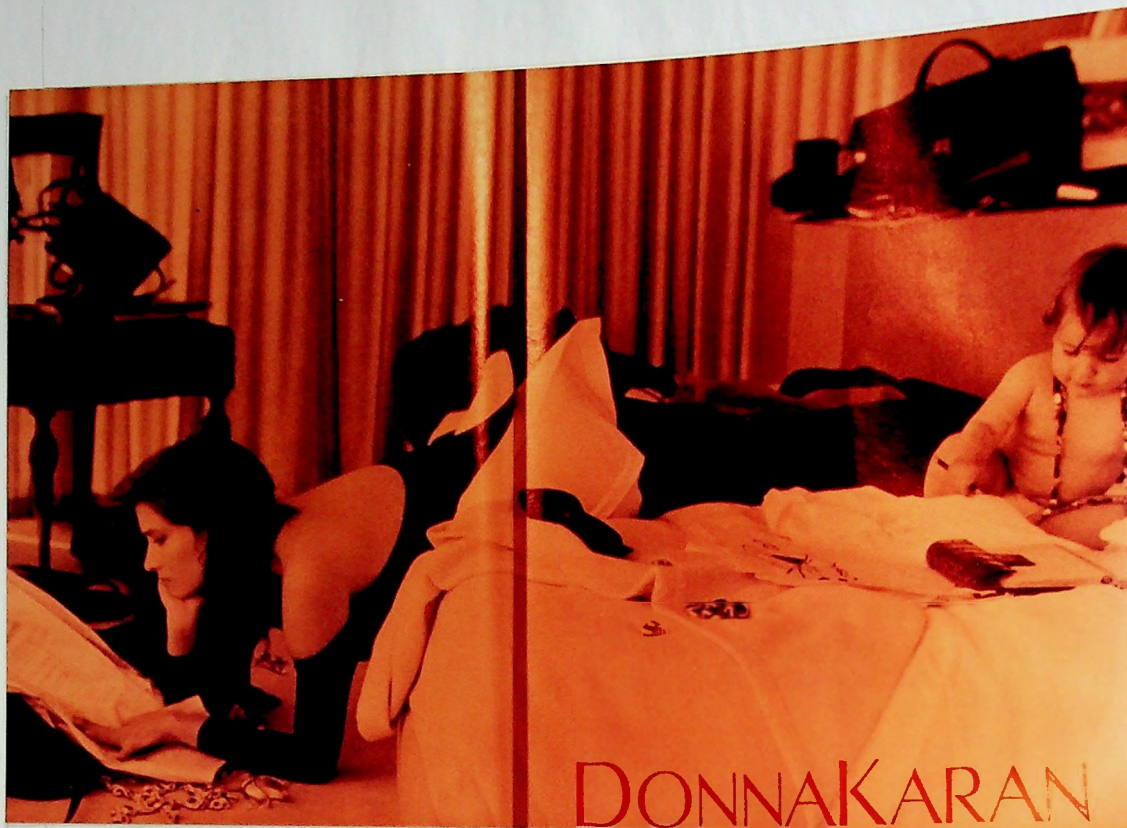


ILL. 39



ILL. 40



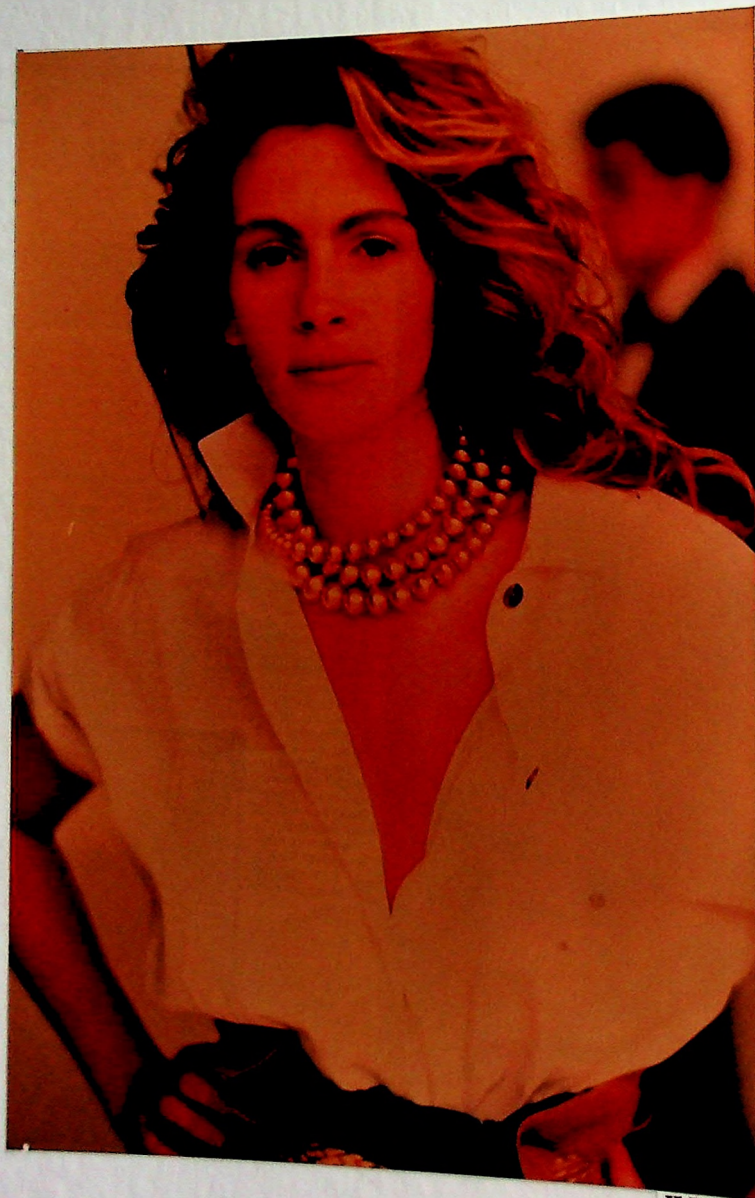


ILL. 41



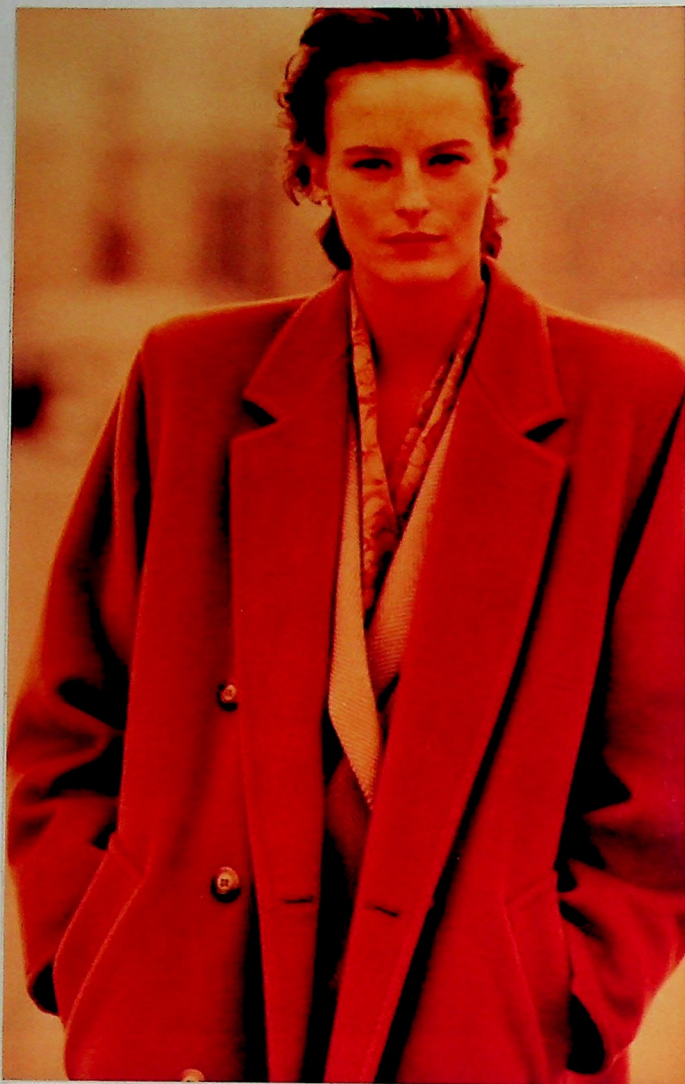
ILL. 42





ILL. 43





ILL. 44



ILL. 45



had been sacrificed for design, everything became pale, soft and feminine or short, vivid and sexy (ref. ill. No's 46 & 47).

"What is this notion of femininity? This caricature of womanliness? Why, when women have just attained that state of grace when freedom is in fashion in every sense, have we come full circle to an era of constraint and artifice?...It implies a tyranny that we are all well rid of."

Sally Brampton - Editor, **Elle Magazine**.

(from **The Sunday Times**, 25.10.87)

So why this ultimatum to women to compromise and conform yet again. My understanding of the situation is thus:-

The problem: Society has decided that certain sociological problems are 'women-related', for example, unemployment.

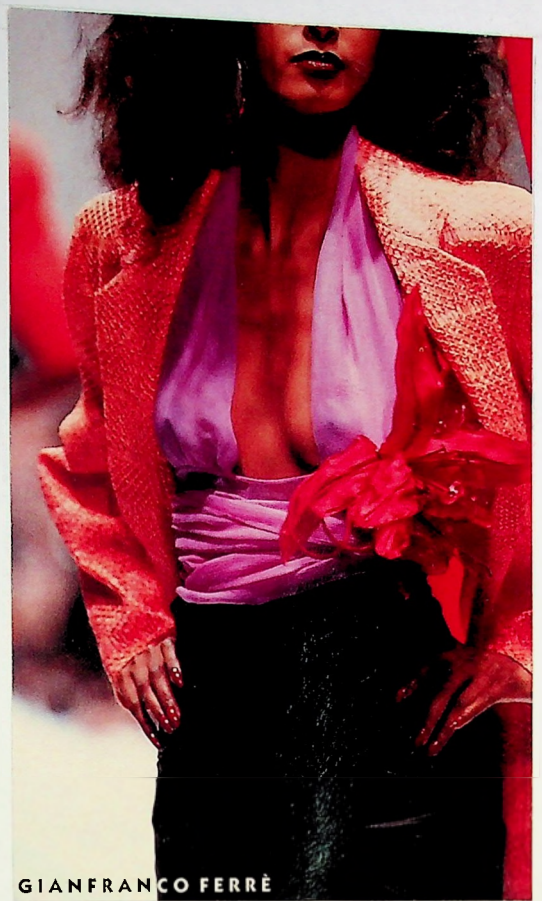
The answer: Coax women back into the home leaving jobs vacant (as a point of interest useful in appreciating the motivation behind this push; in Britain in 1980 there were 10.4 million women in the national labour force, including 54% of all mothers with young children.).

Through contrived and sophisticated marketing, the image of woman as mother/ wife was sold to the working woman. The world of domesticity became romanticised and glamourised by all of the conspiring industries (i.e., fashion, beauty, media, advertising and publishing) with an emphasis on everything traditional so as to revive an interest in the old class/ family structure (ref. ill. No's. 48 & 49).

Understanding fashion to be reactionary in nature, swinging from one extreme to the other, we can accept the rule - "after androgyny, femininity" (Sally Brampton). However, we cannot accept the lengths fashion is prepared to regress to in its efforts to impose traditional stereotypical roles upon women once more.

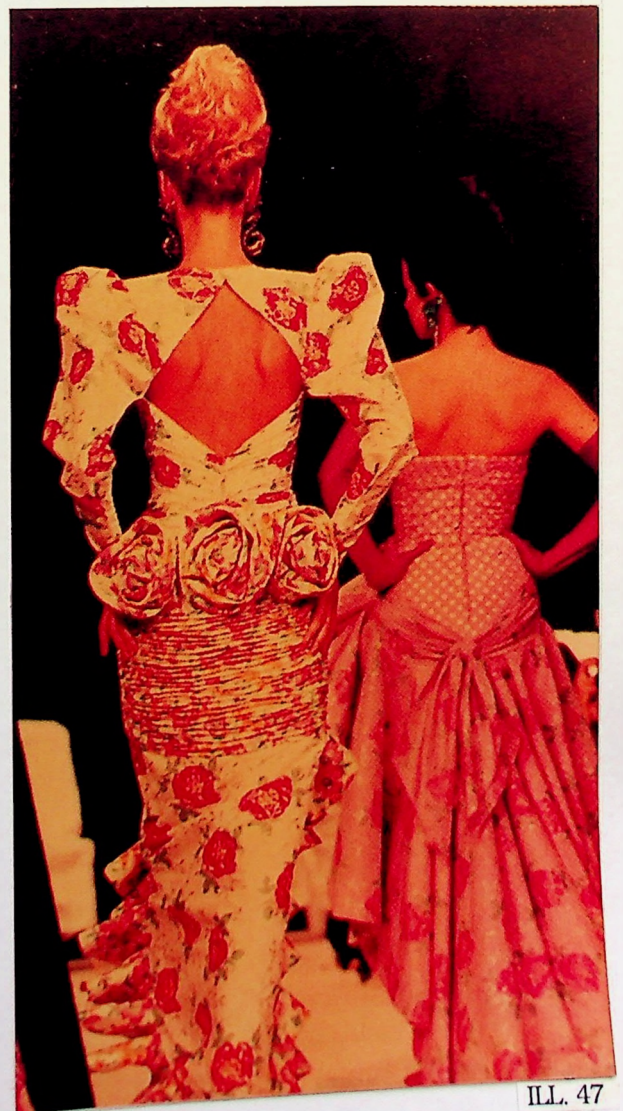
By presenting this new role-model (or re-role-model) to a generation of liberated women the fashion/ beauty industry is indirectly saying "Yes, you've proven your worth in a man's world, we (men) stand corrected. Now feel free to give in to your natural maternal/ domestic instincts and return to the home, because essentially, this is where your most acceptable role within society lies." Whereas fifty years ago women were discriminated against with regard to equal employment because of the widely felt belief that they were not capable of doing a man's job, today however, although considered competent, a woman is also seen as having a choice which men apparently do not have. It is now quite socially acceptable for a woman to remain in, or rather return to, the home.

And let us not forget that other 'woman related' problem facing society - A massive fall in the birth rate as women opted for a career rather than a family.



GIANFRANCO FERRÉ

ILL. 46



ILL. 47





ILL. 48



This being a period of androgyny, was soon followed by a period of femininity. This femininity-revival was contrived by the fashion/ beauty industry in an effort to sell domesticity to women, more educated, liberated and suspicious of all stereotype roles than those women who had broken from it originally. Thus begun the glamorous seduction. Consider the San Francisco based fashion company Esprit and their 'nuclear family' advertising campaign (ref. ill. No. 50) presently being used in many European magazines, having originally been restricted within the United States due to the belief that it held an appeal exclusively American. Consider also the recent surge of their "baby boom" movies, responsible for the belief in cute, clean, 'groomed for intelligence/ sports' babies as the ultimate "yuppie" accessory. And what of the success enjoyed by designers such as Lacroix and Dior whose 1987 collections epitomised traditional femininity:-

"...fit was it; flowers had power; cute was really cool. And got cuter, shorter and even more flowery."

(ref. ill. No. 51)

Sally Brampton - Editor, **Elle Magazine**.

(from **The Sunday Times**, 25.10.87)

Within contemporary society, particularly the last decade, there has been a marked swing toward traditionalism. As money continues to become more localised and the rich/ poor divide grows wider and wider, people appear to be mourning the demise of the old class structure and are attempting to redefine class distinctions based primarily on discretionary wealth and conspicuous ostentation.

Just as the fashion industry contrived a fresh stereotype for women in an effort to promote traditional values so too has it contrived a new image of fashion with an anti-fashion appeal for the same reason. I shall explain:-

In a society consciously aware of "interclass-barriers" (Horn/ Gurell), money, skills and appearance are the most effective means of gaining entrance to a higher class. These provide the passwords required for entry. Today these passwords take the shape of very subtle, contrived Conspicuous Consumption (Velben) directed towards one's peers rather than toward the world in general. This internal language or code is intended not to impress the multitudes, but to identify one as a member of an elite group - Power of association rather than ostentation. Recent trends in fashion, i.e., "Country Casual", "Equestrian", "Classical", all suggest the emulation by "new money" of "old money" through dress association (ref. ill. No's. 52, 53 & 54). These trends provoke connotations of traditional snobbery, mimicking the upper classes who, by virtue of their non-conformity to fashion trends, set themselves above and apart from other social classes, and also by virtue of their very distinct non-fashion code of dress which, as with a uniform, transcends all modishness and remains a steady, reliable, instantly recognisable constant.





ESPRIT

ILL. 50





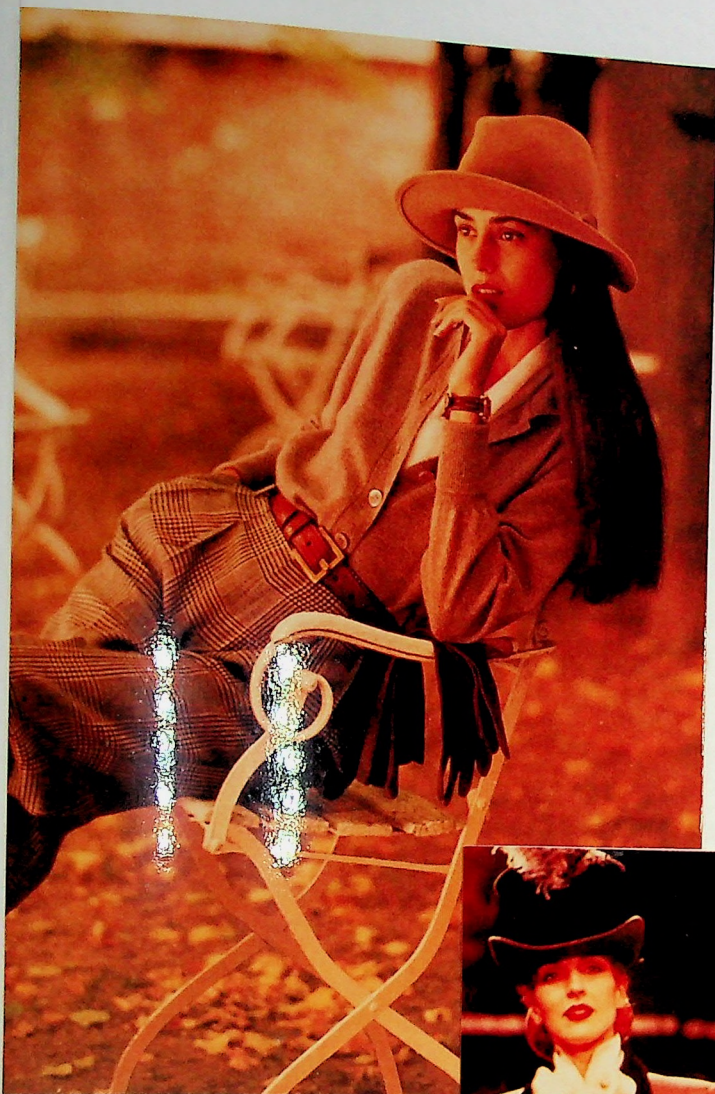
ILL. 51





ILL. 52





ILL. 53



ILL. 54




Proof of the successful marketing of this 'non-fashion' look by the fashion industry becomes more evident everyday with the growing popularity of such companies as Burberry, Barbour, Thomas Pink, Mulberry and Laura Ashley, along with many others (ref. ill. No.'s 55, 56 & 57).

The conclusion one may draw from this is that perhaps the function of fashion is not simply to reflect trends but more to make possible role-playing in society.







The Burberry Look

The Burberry look has grown a little younger with this delightful collection of clothing and accessories for children. Sporting an elegant blue interpretation of the traditional Burberry Check to please the discerning parental eye. For further information contact: The Wholesale Showroom, Burberrys Limited, 165 Regent Street, London W1R 8AS. Telephone: 01-734 5929.

**Burberrys**  
OF LONDON

ILL. 56





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Mulberry



*A tendency to Mulberry*





## CHAPTER FOUR

THE BUSINESSWOMAN -  
stereotyping at its best and the fashion/ beauty industry's biggest coup to date.

Having studied the success of the fashion industry's marketing of traditional stereotypes within contemporary society in the previous chapter and the sophisticated contrivance of dress by the industry - elevating costume from the position of catering to individuals and their own personal identity during the 1970's to a position enjoyed today by class/ gender differentiation and group identity reminiscent very much of pre-industrial revolution European society - there can be no question as to the power and influence of the fashion industry within contemporary society.

Designers, journalists, the media and the marketing/ advertising powers have conspired and succeeded in perpetuating the belief in, and dependancy on role-playing for women. Perhaps the motivations behind this collaboration differ from those previously responsible for the contrivance of fashion trends, i.e., social influences during the Victorian era, in that the scale and financial success of fashion as an industry would suggest a motivation perpetuated within the industry itself by feelings of competitiveness, opportunism, and most importantly, profit. This is not to suggest that fashion no longer reflects society; however, I would argue that any loyalties felt by the industry would be directed internally. Fashion no longer enjoys a position of actually determining the stereotypes itself, but more acts to translate the thinking behind this stereotype into a tangible, instantly recognisable visual image. It watches society and preempts change, exploits that change to its own ends by playing to the needs of the moment (ref. ill. No. 58).

At this point I wish to introduce a modern day phenomenon - "The Businesswoman" - An emerging stereotype well spotted by the fashion during the late 1970's and exploited to perfection today.

This woman, to my way thinking, embodies the ultimate stereotype. How better to appreciate the effects of a collaboration between all fashion/ beauty related industries than to consider her timely arrival



The quiet accessory  
 buttons. On two suits  
 by Yves Saint Laurent  
 Rive Gauche  
 This page: In black  
 wool grain de  
 poudre. Saint Laurent  
 Rive Gauche  
 Boutique Femme  
 NYC; Martha, Bal  
 Harbour FL; Bullock  
 Wilshire  
 Opposite: In white  
 wool grain de  
 poudre. Bergdorf  
 Goodman; Saint  
 Laurent Rive Gauche



and rapid evolution from conception during the seventies to maturity in recent years (ref. ill. No's. 59 & 60).

Singlehandedly this "Businesswoman" has saved the fashion industry from almost certain redundancy while professing total independence and liberation from this same power. Of the many professional women I interviewed, as part of my research for this study, most were insistant in their rejection of the idea that each of their individual images were in fact collectively a contrived stereotype developed by the fashion/beauty industry (ref. ill No. 61).

Wanting desperately to be proven wrong in my suspicion that these women had fallen victim to the sophisticated patronisation by the fashion world, I suggested to these various Dublin/ London based businesswomen the existence of a dress code, a uniform, contrived by men and strictly adhered to by women eager to win approval and acceptance in a male dominated world. To my horror there was unanimous agreement in the positive. Finding myself in the presence of a living, talking stereotype prompted fascination, a little amusement and a great deal of questioning.

In an effort to understand these women with whom I spoke I shall first consider "The Businesswoman" stereotype and then "The Businesswoman" reality.

#### Dress For Success - Stereotyping:

The fully fledged arrival of the female executive on the corporate scene, during the latter half of the eighties, has prompted the emergence of a new and distinct segment in the fashion/ beauty/ publishing market. Traditionally women's clothes have been evaluated and as an indicator of social placement and also as a means of simulating/ enhancing beauty. However, unlike women who choose clothes for use in a social context, the businesswoman sees the image which she projects through dress as a tactical weapon, contrived for the use in her fight for professional success.

For these women, sword of opposition is double-edged in that, within the male-dominated business world, sex-role stereotyping effects not just people but also positions. Thus women remain largely confined to "pink collar" (M.R. Solomon - *The Psychology of Fashion*) occupations. And as physical appearance serves to cue stereotyping, women who appear attractive or feminine suffer the prejudices and misconceptions linked with being a female. Since beauty suggests femininity, and femininity suggests weakness/ inferiority, then -



ILL. 59



ILL. 60





ILL. 61

"Women who wish to enter the masculine domain of management should make themselves as unattractive and as masculine as possible."

M.R. Solomon, (ref. ill. No. 62)  
*The Psychology of Fashion* (page 344)

During the early eighties, psychologist Madelaine E. Heilman concluded from an experiment conducted among management students at Yale University that pretty women are rated less qualified and less likely to be recommended for hire than unattractive women. If recommended, the starting salary for attractive women was considerably lower than originally decided. As a general progression from this, it was also found that attractive women already established in business, having proven their worth at a managerial level, were again judged less likely to be prompted and less deserving of a pay rise.

Considering this, any female executive wishing to be perceived as professional and competent, might wish to project masculine rather than feminine attributes since these are considered more desirable in a business context even though they may decrease her "attractiveness" to her peers.

"Wearing masculine clothing represses the aura of feminine characteristics associated with traditional female dress."

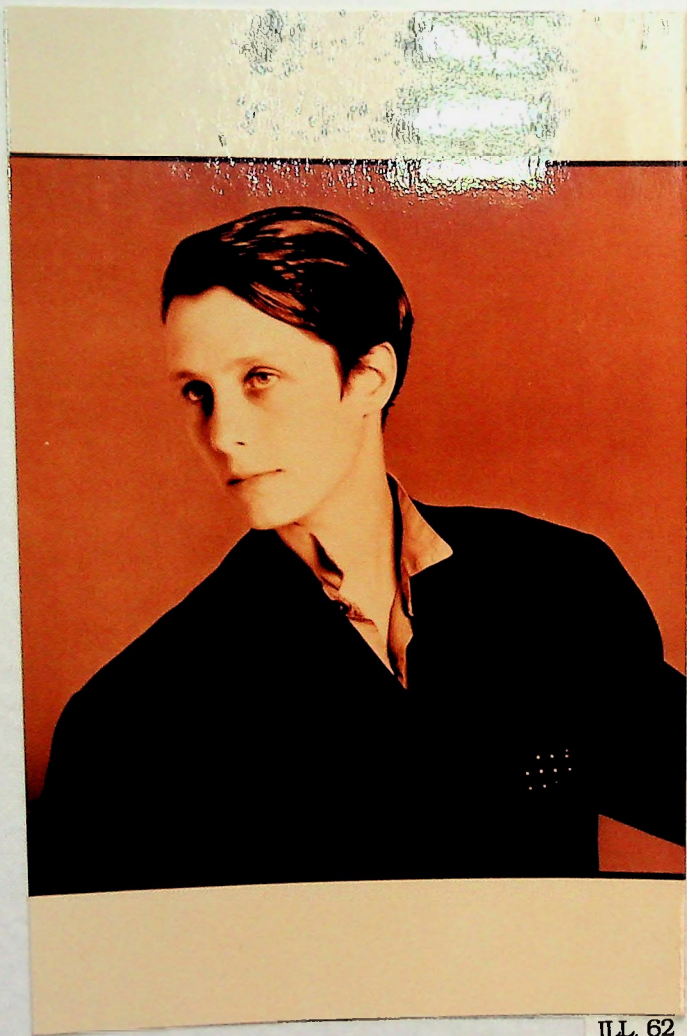
M.R. Solomon, *The Psychology of Fashion* (page 394)

Universally, for the male executive, the signals emitted by his traditional clothing are relatively well defined and the meaning of specific colours, patterns, cut and accessories is well catalogued in the 'corporate psyche'. Each item, as well as the overall 'look', emits a message. The tie may betray membership of a school, club or association, while the cut of one's suit might suggest age or profession. The traditional well tailored suit is the order of the day - thus the male executive enjoys a constant (ref. ill. No. 63), allowing him to channel his time and energy into other more important areas.

Victim yet again of stereotyping, "The Businesswoman", it is presumed, suffers from the affliction common only to women of a preoccupation with dress and appearance. Never having established an appropriate professional dress/ uniform which would project an accurate image unique to businesswomen, the female has, in general, opted to mimic the image frequently associated with the male executive role.

Although male executives often express a somewhat broader range of tolerance of clothing styles for businesswomen, a recent American





ILL. 62





ILL. 63



survey entitled, **Physical Appearance Cues Association with Perceived Nonmanagerial and Managerial Status in The Validation of Study** (M.R. Solomon, *The Psychology of Fashion*, page 345) shows, however, that male evaluators display consistent favouritism towards the managerial appearance, defined as :-

- "1. Overall grooming in a neat, easy-maintenance style.
2. Shorter, simpler hairstyles.
3. Hairstyles away from the face and which lack adornment.
4. Facial cosmetics moderate in amount and which complement clothing colour.
5. Tailored blouses - Plain or with tie collar.
6. Tailored jacket - The skirted kind.
7. Simple gold jewelry.
8. Direct smile and eye contact.
9. Not too young (i.e., 50 plus.)
10. Glasses with tasteful frames."

(ref. ill. No. 64)

M.R. Solomon, *The Psychology of Fashion* (page 345)

In contrast, female evaluators rejected this managerial "dress for success" ethic, perceiving it as an ultimatum to women to deny their femininity (female - ness) so as to gain male acceptance and approval. The fact, nevertheless remains :-

"It is a stark reality that men dominate the power structure...I am not suggesting that women dress to impress men simply because they are men...but rather because they have power."

J.T. Molloy, *Women - Dress For Success*  
(page 32)

This contemporary "Businesswoman" image is approximately ten years old. After a decade of active involvement within the business world women have quite easily, and naturally, assumed a very competitive nature - something previously considered an exclusively male trait.

In the early days of the contemporary women's movement an emphasis was placed upon shared experience and collective labour - a sisterhood. Naturally enough the taste of success being so sweet, and the road to success being so difficult, led to the belief amongst businesswomen that :-

"Every woman for herself and no holes barred in the pursuit of male approval."

Helen Gurley Brown, *Having It All* (page 50)

Perhaps, realising the need to compromise in order to succeed, these women opted to conform and play by the established rules, working



ИЛ. 64



their way quietly and inconspicuously up the corporate ladder. Women wishing to assert themselves above their female peers and to distinguish themselves as being ambitious, motivated and willing to accept any rules, looked to dress as a means of differentiating. These women defined business dress as indicative of role. Female business dress now becomes either "positively related to achievement motivation", in the case of power dressing, or "negatively related achievement motivation", as with feminine casual/ sexy dressing (Atkinson/ McClelland, *The Psychology of Fashion*, page 358).

"And women who do make it to a position of recognised power will have to quickly switch class and gender allegiance. Too close an identification with the secretarial crowd, too much empathy...will only be detrimental to one's own climb towards success."

Wendy Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets* (page 84)

Thus the importance of clothes with a high authority rating is compounded. Achievement through beauty is one of the few avenues to success over which a woman has some measure of control. Women are manipulated by the fashion/beauty industry through sophisticated seduction into believing that their bodies can be the key to success.

Consider the appeal of such success hardbacks as Helen Gurley Brown's *Having It All*. Applying oneself is the key to Brown's formula for success. The power of appearance, unique to women, is one which should be exploited. Women within business should educate themselves as to the influence dress can have on a person or situation. For generations women's bodies have been used and abused by men for their own ends. Why then, do women find it so hard to play upon their sexuality even within the context of business? Is it that women are suffering from some perverse sense of gratification directed towards men and thus could never break any of the rules determined for them by these men? Or could it be that due to massive insecurities and acute self-consciousness women fear attention as they assert themselves with an alien environment.

These women cling desperately to a stereotypical image of what they believe they must embody in order to succeed. This is their only security. Presented with the most contrived role-model ever by the fashion/ beauty industry, they are grateful for someone having determined for them the rules by which they must play. These career women, bent on success, believe in the strength of a common identity, instantly recognisable as belonging to a group. For years men have enjoyed the comfort of what could be termed as a solidarity through appearance. Businesswomen desperately need a similar image with which they can identify, not only for personal feelings of security in

belonging, but also as a means to protect a strong unanimous image of the modern businesswoman (ref. ill. No. 65).

Why then have women succumbed to the pressures imposed by the fashion, and all its related industries, to aspire to perfection. We are told by the powers that be that ultimately, for a woman, success can only come with perfection. She must be seen to successfully control and conquer her own body, manipulating and contriving it into becoming her most valued asset. Only when a woman has displayed obvious control and discipline over herself can she hope to appear acceptable and well suited to the world of business, itself so concerned with rules and discipline.

"It is from our image in the mirror and our reflection in the eyes of others that many women, including myself, try to derive a sense of security, some grounds of self esteem. Out of touch with our inner selves, we rely excessively on our outer selves. We can change our attention we so desperately require, - Body narcissism, psychiatrists call it. Our face, our bodies, our hair become excessively important."

(ref. ill No. 66)

Colette Dowling, *Perfect Women* (page 46)

Irrespective of whether an outfit/image is perceived as attractive, the knowledge that it is appropriate to a given situation may enhance self assurance for a businesswoman. Clothing which projects a professional image may also reinforce that woman's self-confidence and feelings of competence in her job. Consciousness of a good appearance frees her from fear of criticism which may otherwise distract from her work performance.

Such concern with approval is likely to be especially marked in the case of a junior female executive, or one in an organisation/ professional massively under-represented by females. While the senior female has already proven her worth, the junior is terribly aware of having to work for, and hopefully win, acceptance. Consequently she may tend to avoid styles of dress which draw attention to her age and sex, opting instead for clothing perceived as projecting a professional image so essential to any female professional attempting to assimilate into a male environment. It has been suggested however, that :-

"Women may be imposing a stricter code for themselves than is perhaps necessary."

Delong/ Larnitz, 1983.

M.R. Solomon, *The Psychology of Fashion* (page 394)

I would argue that the belief perpetuated by the fashion/ beauty/ publishing industries that "dress for success" plays upon women's









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belief that they may never separate their minds from their bodies. For generations women have been told that their greatest, and often their only, gift they may possess is their bodies. The vast majority of memorable women, familiar names in contemporary society, have earned immortality by virtue of their beauty only (ref. ill. No's. 67 & 68). Women are restricted and responsible for all that is physical. Despite the assertion of their intellect and talents to heights concerned with ambition, competitiveness and success, even now the modern woman continues to see herself firmly tied to her mortal body. To this woman, her body is as a constant challenge which can never be ignored or taken for granted.

Women have established themselves as being equal in a man's world through the rejection or suppression of their own sexuality. Through deception and artifice they may successfully embody male perception of the ideal. Through deception and artifice they assume a stereotype in an effort to disguise their sexuality. There is a certain comfort in anonymous androgyny (ref. ill. No. 69) and also the acceptance which comes with recognition of membership:-

"The elite who gather to be among their own, to see themselves reflected in each other's appearance."

Wendy Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets* (page 81)

This desire to suppress their sexuality while emphasising their willingness to conform to stereotyping is characteristic of the contemporary business woman. The idea of transforming one's body to change one's reality is the only logical extension of the belief that, for a woman, success is an intensely individual quality. You literally must take yourself in your own hands, relentlessly working towards a perfection which, by nature of what the psychologist J.C. Fluegel termed the "Shifting Erogenous Zones" (Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, page 250), will never remain constant long enough for any woman to realise it.

But work away girls all the same. If nothing else, you'll learn the eternal gratitude of the fashion/ beauty industry presently enjoying unprecedented popularity due to women's stupidity.

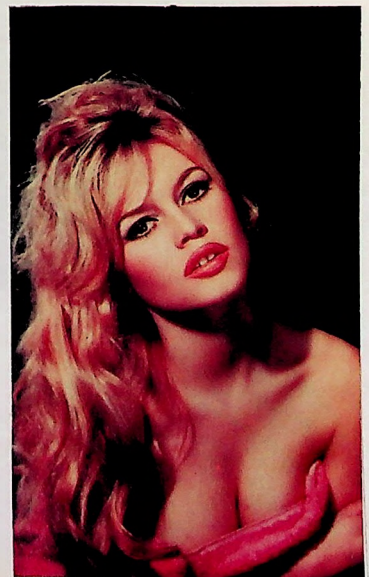
Helen Gurley Brown's bestselling achievement manual *Having It All* tells us that :-

"It is unthinkable that a woman, bent on having it all, would want to be fat, or even plump." (page 96)

Chapters on "Diet", "Exercise", "Your Face & Body" and "Clothes" constitute almost half of Ms. Gurley Brown's recipe for success. This success, which is the subject of so many books and magazine articles,



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is a blend only to be enjoyed by those women motivated and ambitious enough to compromise greatly.

"She will simply have to fulfill, or surpass male expectations of women. This strategy allows for little in the way of female solidarity. Other women are competition, not colleagues. The bosses are the prizes, not the problem."

Wendy Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets* (page 86)

As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, this businesswoman embodies the stereotype. I have also suggested the existence of an alternative - "The Businesswoman Reality". In an effort to identify this reality I spoke with a diverse cross section of businesswomen, mostly Irish, some based in Dublin and some in London: A highly successful image development consultant for a public relations company, a partner in a law firm, a director of sales and also a sales executive both working in The City, Sally Brampton, Editor of **Elle Magazine**, and Debbi Mason, Fashion Director of the same magazine, among others.

The conclusion I have drawn from approximately a dozen interviews, with little variance, is that essentially the stereotype is the reality, and the reality the stereotype.

With the exception of opinions expressed by both Sally Brampton and Debbi Mason (**Elle Magazine**, London), which I have reserved for use in my conclusion of this thesis (ending on a positive note, so to speak), these women expressed a unanimous acceptance of principles of "power-dressing" and "dressing for success". In order to illustrate this and also to consider the many opinions and beliefs held by these businesswomen, I shall attempt to compile a profile of the prototype businesswoman as I have found her to be. (Overleaf)



## A Businesswoman - The Reality.

Career motivated women are very aware of the power of dress in a business context, but also are aware of how dress can suggest sexuality and trigger stereotyping. Therefore, they must never dress as an extension of personality but rather acquire an approach similar to having a rigid, split personality :-

"The shift from full-time housekeeper to double duty has helped create a need for new symbols of identity. Women are discovering that they are expected to have, not one, but several conflicting images: The wholesome mother, the coolly professional businesswoman and the sexy mistress. No wonder women turn to the magic wardrobe and make-up to provide inspiration for their multiple selves."

Wendy Chapkis, (ref. ill. No's 70, 71, 72 & 73)  
*Beauty Secrets* (page 90)

It was noted by one of the women I spoke with that as a result of her extending her role from wife and mother to businesswoman, her husband's, parent's, friend's and children's attitude towards her changed dramatically in that when presented to them a professional woman, she received far more attention and respect than ever before. She became a figure of authority, triggered by dress.

However, women who "power dress" run the risk of antagonising and alienating their peers, particularly female:-

"Suits do help separate the women from the girls - providing the women can tolerate the separation, which is another question altogether."

Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes* (page 26)

These women who "dress for success" also suffer the wrath of their male contemporaries. They are now on level pegging in terms of qualification and capabilities, but also have the added advantage of being the "fairer sex". It became apparent to me during these interviews that the women saw this as an advantage but were very reluctant to use it to its full potential. It would take a very brave woman to assert her full potential sexuality in the face of male chauvinism, and quite often, aggressive sexism.

On this point, one businesswoman recalled to mind a particular incident in her personal experience of sexual harassment within a professional context. This of course is nothing new to women, however it illustrates perfectly a point made to me prior to this of how, even when women make a conscious effort to play down their

femininity through dress, they are still very aware of men, stereotyping them immediately and asserting an aggressive superiority over them. This case involved the advances of a male client towards a female executive who, blissfully ignorant of his intention, did not reciprocate these feelings in any way. There ensued a dilemma for this woman as her client, obviously displeased about something, did everything in his power to make her job difficult. As he saw it, she was a woman first and a professional second. The fact that she could so successfully separate her sexuality and her professional images intimidated and frustrated this man. Men feel threatened by women who equal them in accomplishment and yet also remain loyal to their sexuality.

Attractive women will always command more attention than any man and in a business context this gives women the edge. Apparently men's reaction to this threat is one easily read by these women - they assert their masculinity by aggressively intimidating or patronising, quite often bringing into play stereotyping, for example; women as sex objects. Because of this harassment,

"Many women function well below their capabilities, living in a kind of gender limbo of their own making."

Colette Dowling, *The Cinderella Complex* (page 28)

Faced with this aggression, businesswomen have acquired an assertiveness of their own - less blatant than aggression, yet equally effective, often more so. It would be unthinkable for a woman to display signs of aggression even within business. This remains exclusively a male emotion. However, the compromise has perhaps benefitted women greatly in that, of those with whom I spoke, most agreed that careful assertiveness constitutes one of the most effective and valued business assets exclusive to a woman. In almost any given situation a woman will have to employ controlled assertiveness if she is to dispell misconceptions and prejudices against women in the male oriented world of business. According to Carmel O'Carroll, image development consultant, these women admit to a dependency on "power dressing" as a visual expression of their assertiveness.

"...must be sharp, image-wise. Expensive but conservative with an appreciation of quality...The skirted suit...Credible, continuous look"

(ref. ill. No. 74)

Carmel O'Carroll, Image Development Consultant.

Because people in general tend to read more into women's appearance than a man's, it is terribly important that a professional woman's image instantly registers a positive reaction. Unfortunately, the "old boy" camaraderie and informal rapport enjoyed by men in business, due



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mainly to the inane connections syndrome, for example; rugby, golf, old school, etc., does not extend itself to include women. Quite the opposite apparently. Men, finding themselves conducting business with a female, almost immediately determine dissimilarities and, although admittedly depending on age and profession, invariably employ stereotyping.

This pressure to present oneself as an instantly recognisable, easily digested image, encourages concern with appearance to the point of obsession. Most of women interviewed suggested a concern with weight. It was explained to me thus :-

A woman in business cannot afford for her appearance to belie or even suggest a weakness such as obesity or anorexia. Because women are perceived much more at face value than they would choose to be, they must constantly project an image so neat, so contrived and so perfectly acceptable to all, in an effort to gain acceptance and recognition from those judging them. This is the reality. These are the women in business - ambitious, dynamic, successful. To them the compromise of "role playing" is little price to pay for access to and subsequent success in the world of business.

## CONCLUSION

When I originally conceived the idea for this thesis I had hoped to discover a new breed of woman that I imagined must exist. She would embody the "Arrival" of women, a reaction against the numerous contrived stereotypes which had gone before her. I imagined her to be aggressive in her ambition, uncompromising in her opinion of herself, not just proud but grateful for her sexuality and totally above manipulation by the fashion/ beauty industry (ref. ill. No. 75 & 76).

Instead I found not just one, but a feast of stereotypes. All equally as contrived and manipulated by the almost exclusively male influencing powers within society as those which I had discovered in my study of Victorian/ Edwardian women for my Diploma thesis.

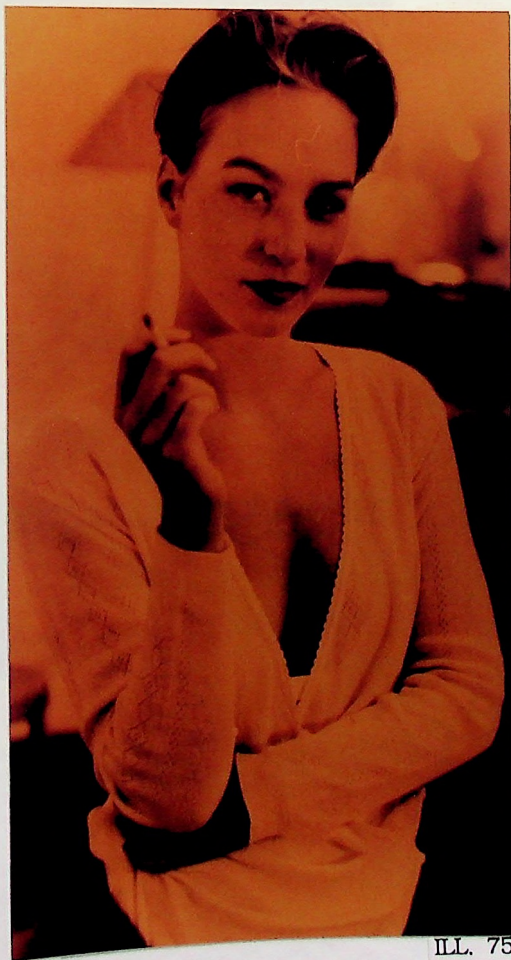
As if to fuel my fascination with this modern day phenomenon, articles and editorials began to appear in newspapers and magazines around me :- *The Body Politic* (**Elle Magazine**, August 1988), or *Success*, where it was written, "...Irish women of the 1990's, proving that brains, beauty and ambition are a potent combination." (**The Sunday Press**, January 29th. 1989). However the best one by far must be the **Evening Herald** of February 27th. 1989, entitled "Girls, You've Never Had It So Good" (...The ghost of Harold MacMillan appears in many guises...).

"Patronising !" I hear myself scream. The fact that, when examined, these articles actually do document a change in women is completely lost in the patronising translation from fact to quick-fire, easy to swallow generalisation.

These new, independent career women constitute a large enough proportion of modern women to justify the birth of a new stereotype exclusive to the 1990's. Having spoken with these women I can understand the success of yet another conspiracy by the fashion/ beauty industry in imposing rules and restrictions upon women. Faced with the often aggressive opposition experienced by businesswomen embarking on a career in an almost exclusively male oriented universe, the comfort of deception through artifice is one these women cling to. The fashion/ beauty industry has presented these women with an ultimatum. They sell a role-model to women, and not only this but to society in general, thus establishing the 'look' of success as it may only appear. This 'look' becomes the stereotype and all perceptions of women within business are made in direct reference to this image.

This is not so much the 'look' of success - this 'look' is success.





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It would take a very brave woman to dispute this. But what of my promise to end on a positive note ? Thankfully I did find a very positive note which may very well point toward the direction that women and their image will take. Sally Brampton, Editor, **Elle Magazine** :-

"They don't have to strut their stuff. Women do. And we don't appear to be as inclined to indulge those girlish fancies as they perhaps hoped we would. Well, hallelujah and God bless the grown-ups...The recent collections which indicate a move away from the fantasies about women and a move towards a closer interpretation of the realities of women."

(ref. Ill. No. 77)

**The Sunday Times**, 27th. March, 1988.

Have women finally woken up to the consiracy of fashion which has so successfully manipulated them into role-playing to its own ends ? Fashion is now fallible. Of the women I have spoken with, as part of this study, one thing became apparent to me. Yes, they admit to role-playing, yes, they admit to compromising and yes, they are victims of stereotyping. However, they are perfectly aware of what they are doing and why. By actively employing certain rules to play by, these women will very soon arrive at a position of security within the male dominated world of business. And once there, will very quickly begin the rejection of all contrived stereotyping imposed upon them when they they felt less inclined to fight back.

Perhaps the inevitable revolution of women has already begun. French designer Karl Lagerfeld seems to think so, and is quoted as saying :-

"...(designers) cannot hide behind the excesses of ruffles and huge shoulders...these are far more difficult clothes to make."

(designer mysticism ?)

Sally Brampton,

*Paris Sobers Up*

**The Sunday Times**, 27th. March, 1988.

A similar belief was voiced recently, albeit in a less glamorous context, by Frances Gardner, Chairperson of the Women's Political Association:-

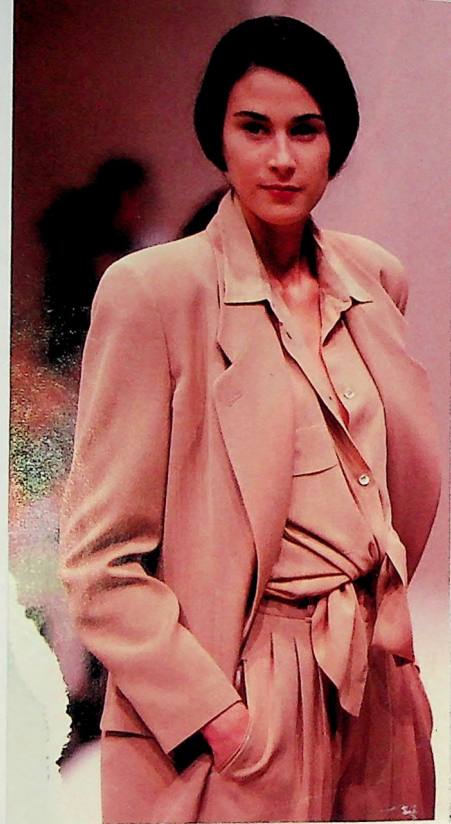
"It seems that if we stay at home, we're in trouble, and if we go out to work we're in for different trouble. The important thing, of course, is that we have the choice."

Sach's Hotel, Dublin.

23rd. February, 1989.

Now that women have the choice, if in fact we do, it should be quite interesting to see just exactly what we do with it.

JIL SANDER



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