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WHAT DOES CLOTHING COMMUNICATE?  
A SURVEY OF CORPORATE PROFESSIONALS.


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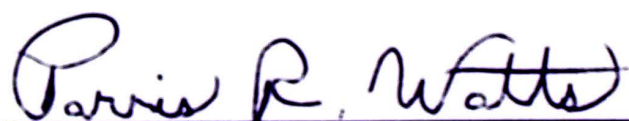
  
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WHAT DOES CLOTHING COMMUNICATE?  
A SURVEY OF CORPORATE PROFESSIONALS.

A thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree  
Austin Peay State University

Sheila K. Dotson

May 2000



## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my son, Brandon Peck and my parents Mary and Herbert Hunt for their love and support which has sustained me during this project. .

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my professors, Dr. Paul Shaffer, Dr. Ellen Kanervo, and Dr. Patrick Jablonski for their guidance and continuing support with this project and throughout my graduate studies.

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## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine the opinions and attitudes of employees regarding professional attire. A questionnaire was administered to 91 corporate professionals from two civic organizations. This sample was chosen because most respondents were established in professional types of employment. The results of the questionnaire concluded employees from both civic organizations believe professional attire is important in a corporate setting. Also, a large range of ages as well as both genders perceived clothing to be a valuable tool in a professional environment. Further research in the role clothing plays in the field of communication was suggested. This research would include an experiment to validate the findings from the questionnaire.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The development of the social psychology of clothing and personal adornment began in the nineteenth century. The three major reasons for the early interest in the social and behavioral consequences of clothing and fashion were the "women's dress reform movement; the democratization of fashion; and interest in sexuality," according to Roach and Eicher, 1973, p. 9) as cited by Kaiser (1985).

Kaiser (1985) reports the interdisciplinary nature of the study of appearance from the perspectives of symbolic interactionism and cognitive social psychology, as applied to social perception. First, the symbolic interactionist approach emphasizes the importance of meaningful communication. Second, a cognitive or social perception approach stresses the mental processes through which individuals form impressions about other persons. "Communication through appearance symbols is a two-way process; thus, the viewpoints of both the clothing wearer (the observed) and the clothing perceiver (the observer) should be considered. Clothing related impressions are managed by the wearer and formed by the perceiver" (p.4). Social psychology of clothing and personal adornment is concerned with the role clothes, as well as other aspects of appearance, play in people's everyday interactions with one another.

As cited by Kaiser (1985), psychologist Fritz Heider (1958) stated we are all social psychologists. "In our daily observations, we form ideas about others and about the social situations in which we are involved. We have a basic desire to understand the meanings behind others' appearances and actions, so we try to



interpret and explain them in hopes of better predicting future behavior (p.5)."

Kaiser reported in the 1970s and 1980s, research in the area of clothing and interpersonal relations has continued, with the emphasis placed on personal perceptions as influenced by physical attractiveness (for example, Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Adams, 1977a) and the style of dress (Conner, Peters, & Nagasawa, 1975; DeLong, Sabusso-Deonier, & Larntz, 1983).

### Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this thesis in the stated context:

Profession: A vocation or occupation requiring advanced education and training, and involving intellectual skills, as medicine, law, theology, engineering, teaching, etc. (Webster, 1986, p. 1074).

Professionalism: Of, engaged in, or worthy of the high standards of a profession (Webster, 1986, p. 1074).

Image: a) Mental picture of something; conception; idea; impression b) the concept of a person, product, institution, etc held by the general public, often one deliberately created or modified by publicity, advertising, propaganda, etc. (Webster, 1986, p. 673).

Attire: To dress, esp. in fine garments; clothe; array n. clothes, esp. fine or rich apparel; finery (Webster, 1986, p. 88).

Corporate: Legally associated for transaction of business; incorporated (Webster, 1984, p. 71).

Corporation: A legally formed business company (Webster, 1984, p. 71).

Corporate professionals may be judged superficially rather than by their work performance. Although some people believe looks should not be an issue, there are others who think image is important and should be addressed in the corporate workplace. The purpose of this study is to find out if professional attire influences the corporate image. This research is designed to measure attitudes in the corporate workplace regarding professional attire and to gain a better understanding of human interactions and the role clothes play in interactions with one another. The data gathered in this study will increase the understanding of professional attire and its contribution to success in the corporate workplace.

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be investigated in this study.

H1A: Professionals believe clothing is important for success in the workplace.

H1B: Women are more likely to believe clothing is important than are men.

H1C: Older professionals are more likely to believe clothing is important than are younger professionals.

H2: Professionals believe if two people are applying for the same position, and both are equally qualified, the one dressed more professionally will get the position.

H3: Professionals believe suits and ties are more appropriate for work than jeans and casual attire.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

People see a person's clothes before the individual even speaks. Everything a person says following those first few moments will be weighed by how he or she appears (Reynolds, 1995). "A well-groomed speaker probably will be more persuasive than one whose clothes have that slept-in look: the internal persuader who is disheveled will have more difficulty persuading others than the persuader who is neat, bathed, and mouthwashed" (Larson, 1986, p. 239). Of course, there are other factors involved in becoming a success. However, clothes play a large role since they are one of the first things noticed by others. Peters (1994) reports some important keys to success include dressing for success, good speaking skills, and proper etiquette. Hiroki Kato, an expert in American-Japanese business protocols, advises corporations on how to conduct business with the Japanese. Kato gives suggestions on proper business attire, gift-giving, personal contact, and business cards (Stuart, 1994). This service provides business executives with the proper etiquette regarding Japan which will enhance productivity when conducting business in Japan.

Davis (1990) reported on a study which examined social salience by exploring what categories come to perceivers' minds when making initial impressions about a person. The projective technique of association was used with 146 university students enrolled in an introductory social science course. The students wrote down the first word or image which came to their minds when they viewed individuals in five slides. Initial impressions were classified into one of five perceptual categories

which included: personal characteristics, personal and social roles, appearance characteristics, context of situation, or extended inferences. The slides depicted a person within a context (i.e., housewife in a kitchen, cowboy riding a horse, professionally dressed female in an office). The slide variations suggested category use in initial impressions may be related to the social salience of the person. The varying salient features of the stimulus person apparently elicited different categories from perceivers and thereby affected impressions formed of the person.

Many professionals know attire is an important aspect of their careers and they want to learn about fashion and ways they can improve their image. Wardrobe engineer Fenton (1986) states when he speaks at conferences that his seminar is usually the one program not based on the general subject of the meeting, but more men attend his seminars than the more technical topics. They go to the workshops to learn about appropriate dress because they understand how vital it is to look their best. One study explored the relationship among compliance-gaining strategy choice, communicator image, and sales person effectiveness. The study did not show any statistically significant relationship between the use of compliance-gaining strategies and sales success, but the study indicated a link between communicator image and sales success (Parrish & Sprowl, 1994).

Corporations are not alone in thinking dressing for success is important. Some business communication instructors incorporate an international business meal function in their courses to develop skills. Students research customary business hours, business meeting formats, table etiquette, and appropriate business attire.



During the business meal, students role-play business people from the countries they researched (Scott, 1995). Mortuary-science colleges usually concentrate on the technical side of their trade but are now emphasizing topics that are less mechanical, such as the psychology and sociology of grieving and funeral rituals. Students are advised to be professional and wear business attire (Gose, 1995).

Kwon and Farber (1992) investigated college students' perceived importance regarding occupational attributes related to the work of salespersons, clerks, and waiters/waitresses. They also explored the perceived role of appropriate dress in enhancement of the perception of occupational attributes associated with these occupations. The data from 134 men and 202 women supported the notion that the importance students placed on perceived occupational attributes increased as perceived job status increased; the expectations for salespersons were higher than for waiter/waitress. The results also supported the notion that appropriate dress often enhances perception of occupational attributes which especially reflects the workers' perceived professionalism, intelligence, and competence.

Braddack and McAndrew (1987) surveyed 119 male and 107 female undergraduate students. The survey investigated whether a job candidate of low, average, or high attractiveness who was appropriately or inappropriately dressed for an interview should be hired. Attractiveness and dress both influenced the decisions. Compared with males, females were less inclined to hire the unattractive candidate who did not dress well. Forsythe (1995) reported clothing cues are the basis for inferences about the wearer. There is an increase in salience when information



about the wearer is minimal or ambiguous (Secord & Backman, 1964). "Thus, during an employment interview, appearance is an important source of information because information about an applicant is limited" (Forsythe, Drake & Cox 1985,p. 374).

Spezialetti (1995) advises individuals on job interviewing techniques. He says to generate a positive and professional image one must be dressed in appropriate business attire. Sherlock and Spillane (1995) describe individuals going on their first job interview; most are prepared with a quality resume but have spent little time achieving an appropriate look for the interview. One should look neat, mature, and capable. One should also investigate the company to find out what the appropriate dress is for a particular corporation. It is important if one is making a career change into the business sector not to dress in the style of the profession one is leaving. One needs to look like a business professional. A conservative, tailored suit would be appropriate when applying for a job. Nonverbal cues, including the appearance of a candidate, have been found to influence the interviewer's perception of the candidate as well as subsequent hiring decisions (Hatfield & Gatewood, 1978, as cited by Forsythe et al.,p. 374).

Satrapa, Melhado, Coelho, Otta, Taubemblatt, & Siqueira (1992) report that clothes' characteristics transmit information regarding age, sex, personality traits, socioeconomic status, values, and political ideologies. "They may also indicate interpersonal attitudes, such as aggressiveness, availability, gracefulness, arrogance, etc" (159). These authors also reported persons considered physically attractive

were rated as happier and more successful than those considered not attractive. Observers tended to characterize attractive people more favorably, attributing to them higher competence, gentleness, responsibility, better jobs, and more happiness in marriage. Hamid (1968) as cited by Satrapa et al. (1992) suggested clothes play an important part in the formation of those stereotypes. As cited by Satrapa et al., Dion, Bersheid, and Walster (1972) suggested, if there is a correlation between persons' internal characteristics and appearance, then there are stereotypes by which personality traits are associated with characteristics inferred from appearance.

Fenton (1986) reported that, at an initial meeting, a first impression of someone is formed primarily based on appearance - usually in the first 40 seconds. "First impressions are lasting ones. There is no erase button" (p.1). Results of a study conducted by 52 female university students concluded people have a set image of what is considered professional attire which influences first impressions (Burns & Lennon, 1997).

Boyer (1990) said individuals should not take themselves out of the job competition before they have had a chance to prove their real worth. "If two people are vying for the same job and both are relatively equal for the position, who will likely get the job, the person dressed like an assistant manager or the man who looks like he plays a piano in a brothel?" (p. 35) Sherlock and Spillane (1995) stated until new contacts get to know us, they will judge us by appearance and behavior. The car we drive, the places we live, and the clothes we wear all help to complete the initial portrait. "The stark reality is that image does matter" (p. 11).



"An example of how little things can help create or destroy a dynamic image was President Carter's attempts to communicate dynamism by jogging in a 10,000 meter run. He suffered from the heat and had to be helped off the course to a rest area by his security guards. Even worse, as he was about to collapse and drop out of the race, Carter was photographed wearing black socks. He reminded us of that wimpy kid we all remember from junior high gym who wore the black crew socks. Details involving dress, actions, delivery, and word choice can create (or destroy) credibility by cuing (or miscuing) dynamism" (Larson, 1986, 24).

University travel administrators shared what qualities they look for in a travel manager. One manager said individuals representing themselves as knowledgeable, credible people should wear business attire. Another said if individuals do not look their best, it appears as though they do not care (Elliott, 1994).

Morris (1996) found that more formal dress was associated with increased ratings of teaching assistants' competence, particularly for female students rating female instructors. The study indicated significant relationships between instructor attire and student cognitive learning, affective learning, and ratings of instruction. Analysis of variance showed student misbehaviors were less likely for teaching assistants with high professional dress. Roach (1997) stated "professional attire appears to promote favorable impressions and elicit desirable results" (p. 14).

Not only people seeking employment in the corporate world need the knowledge of the importance of professional attire, but also those persons already working in the business world need to address the issue of changing their style. For



example, information technology is one of the most important industries in the United States. Edwards (1997) described information technologists as "Women and men who look like college kids pulling all-nighters during finals at one of those liberal arts colleges where looking good is notably bad form. These are, of course, the programmers, a motley crew that is, ironically, the creme de la creme of the company, a well-paid aristocracy perversely affecting the look of migrant farmworkers" (pp. 98-99). Edwards argued that information technology has developed and matured as an industry, and employees would better represent its importance by dressing in a professional manner, but the impact on salaries is unknown.

Moving from entry level or dead-end jobs depends on one's abilities as well as image. If people have proved themselves in a current position, they need to change their image to inform management that they want more. If people are wanting to be promoted, they should start dressing as if it has already happened (Sherlock & Spillane, 1995). The results of a survey of 177 businesses in Wyoming concluded that employers rated dress and appearance highly in the ability to advance on the job (Baird, 1991). It seems to be the general consensus of executives that one's attire is important for one's image (Fenton, 1986).

Sherlock and Spillane (1995) described Professor Albert Mehrabian's study, *Silent Messages*, which showed visual images do matter. He found the impact we make on each other depends: "55% on how we look and behave, 38% on how we speak, and 7% on what we say. If you expect anyone to believe you're successful,

creative, approachable or whatever, your image must say this before you even open your mouth" (p. 12).

A suit, according to most of the experts, seems to be the single most important clothing item in one's wardrobe, for both men and women. They seem to agree for most important meetings executives should wear a suit. According to Flusser (1981) "shirts, shoes, ties, and socks each plays an important role in a man's overall wardrobe, but none plays as major role as the suit. This piece of clothing covers 80 percent of the body and actually defines the general mood and impression of one's appearance" (p. 13). A suit is usually the most expensive item one purchases for a wardrobe and that is why careful deliberation should be made before purchasing. Before purchasing a suit, an expert should be consulted (Flusser, 1981).

Designers are still stressing suits as the most important office and business attire (DeCoursey, 1995). Individuals in the board room should look as though they belong there, and not as if they should be on the golf course with their khaki pants and polo shirts. Although many younger people prefer casual clothing, the fashion industry has discovered some consumers like a softer line of clothing, but consumers also want something appropriate for business wear. The new style of suits is more comfortable and in tune with casual attitudes of today but still appropriate for the office. They may not be as strict as they once were, but corporate uniforms still to exist (Gellers, 1994).

Although suits play a major role, accessories are also an important item for men. A tie is by far the most important accessory and men should have a large



selection in their wardrobe. A tie is the one item by which men can express themselves or add some flair. Fenton (1986), a wardrobe engineer, states if a man believes anything, he should believe others read volumes about his character by glancing at his tie. Many people often remember what a tie looks like, even when they cannot remember anything else. Men can choose various colors, but it is important to coordinate the tie with the rest of the clothing. Seeking advice from a clothing expert is recommended. A tie should be tied properly with a dimple under the knot and should come to the middle of the belt buckle. Also, shoes, belts, watches, hats, and many other items are important items that should be chosen with care because these are the items to complete the picture of a professional image one is trying to project.

A suit is also the most important item of clothing for women; however, women have more options. Women building a wardrobe on a limited budget should buy at least two suits that can be interchanged to create different looks. One jacket could be a dark color, such as navy, charcoal, or olive; the second jacket can be a lighter neutral, such as stone, pewter, or medium grey (Sherlock & Spillane, 1995). Having two colors such as these offers a variety to the wardrobe and a good beginning to build the wardrobe for a professional look.

According to Forsythe et al. (1985) 77 personnel administrators were used to determine the effect of female applicants' dress on interviews and the selections of decisions for management positions. The personnel administrators viewed videotaped interviews of four applicants in different costumes and made hiring

recommendations for each applicant. In this study, the results confirmed masculinity of the female applicant's dress had a significant effect on the interviewers' selection decisions. The study concluded female applicants' clothing is an avenue for influencing the selection decision for management positions. "The findings show that it is possible for a woman to dress in a manner that will improve the favorability of the hiring recommendation she receives (Forsythe et al., 378)." As cited by Forsythe et al., this research supports a finding of Lapitsky and Smith (1981), which indicates in a task-oriented situation, an observer's reaction to an individual's clothing may be reflected in a person's evaluation of the individual's performance of the task.

Professional women have come a long way and have taken positions in the corporate world once dominated by men. Pearce (1990) stated women are now taken seriously in most fields, including those formerly exclusive to males such as finance, law, and accounting. In the business world women are finally reaping rewards. As stated by Forsythe et al., (1985) several researchers concluded sex role stereotypes may limit employment opportunities for women (Dipboye, Fromkin, & Wilback, 1975; Rasen & Jerdee, 1973, 1974).

Creating the professional image through the way we dress is anything but a frivolous matter. In the business world, appearance is a good part of the battle. The way one looks and dresses is one of the prime ways in which the impressions of our talents are conveyed (Pearce, 1990).

(1980) argued, if a woman were "wearing a black-on-black



One study explored the issue of respectability and the changing image of public school teachers with 140 teachers of color in three urban school districts. Almost half the respondents felt that either the negative image or low status of teaching was one of the reasons students of color were not entering the profession of teaching. This assessment appeared to have little to do with money and a great deal to do with self-respect as defined in terms of dress, posture, and class. A strong consensus indicated a professional image was important to people of color (Gordon, 1994).

Women's attire for the corporate workplace is somewhat conservative. Image consultant Linda Craddock advises businesswomen to buy quality, classic clothing in rich tones which portray a sense of power (Fahys, 1996). Women do not have to wear plain grey or navy blue suits, but they still need to dress conservatively so they will be taken seriously.

In one study, 68 female management students rated one of four drawings of a woman on six bases of power: expert, legitimate, referent, coercive, reward, and information. The drawings varied in the type of clothing (skirt with blouse vs. dress) and the use of a jacket. A woman wearing a jacket was perceived as having more expert and legitimate power than was a woman not wearing a jacket (Lowen & Temple, 1993). According to Sherlock and Spillane (1995), a new positive image can be therapeutic to a woman who has been mildly depressed. If she is pleased with her image, she will respect herself more; therefore, more respect will be earned from others. Pearce (1990) argued, if a woman were "wearing a black-on-black

woven rayon black-on-ice white collarless jacket with exquisitely detailed pockets and rows of tiny black pearl buttons at the cuffs, chunky gold earrings, and a pair of black and white spectator "power" pumps, a lacy handkerchief barely peeping out of the breast pocket, who is going to convince us that we don't know what we're talking about? Dressing smart sends out a clear message to those who control career promotions; we know what we're doing and nobody can do it better" (pp. 22-23).

According to Buckley (1983), results from one study on physical attractiveness indicated that when subjects evaluated physical attractiveness which was manipulated by dress, more consistent stereotypical judgments were made than when independent judges defined physical attractiveness. Buckley and Haefner (1984) suggested dress can definitely be manipulated to vary a person's physical attractiveness. Because dress is used to define physical attractiveness, it affects the evaluative judgments about those wearing the dress. "The research suggests that all individuals have a chance to reap positive judgments from others. Manipulation of dress can improve upon physical attractiveness which facilitates positive judgments" (p. 357).

Some people resent having to look a certain way or worry about what others think of them. According to image consultants Cho and Lueders (1982), some people are uncomfortable with the word "image." To some it means a cover-up or trying to hide the real self. However, there are those who believe it is a shortcut to success. The authors suggested "developing a true image of your best self, as only you know how, is what dressing well is all about" (p. 29). Cho and Lueders argued



that if individuals change their clothing image, over time they will change. They will become more sure of themselves, more outgoing because of that, and therefore, more relaxed. People would do themselves justice by communicating their image message clearly. "People don't have to know about your private life if you don't want them to, but they'll read everything about you, right or not, from the way you dress, since they have no other information to go on". Some people have the view it should not matter what others think of an individual's image. People will pass judgment on superficial impressions.

Boyer (1990) reported the goal of appropriate dress is to present an unmistakable image which will reflect the professional and social endeavors with which a person is sending out and why, and those receiving the cues should be clear about the message. Results from the Florida Employer Opinion Survey (1991) concluded employers were frustrated with the inappropriate dress and lack of pride of employees. Dress should allow a person to decrease anxiety and gain confidence. In decreasing anxiety, appropriate dress will make one feel more comfortable. Boyer (1990) stated "appropriate dress, like other forms of communication, is merely a tool to use in achieving goals" (p. 35).



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Participants

The sample consisted of 91 respondents from two civic organizations, Business and Professional Women and the Rotary Club. Both organizations were located in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. The respondents completed a 19-item questionnaire which was approved by the Austin Peay State University committee on research involving human subjects (Appendix A). The percentage of males participating in the survey was 51.6%. The percentage of females participating in the survey was 48.4%. Age distributions fell into the following categories: The percentage of the respondents ages twenty-one to twenty-eight years old was 5.5%. The percentage of the respondents twenty-nine to thirty-six years old was 16.5%. The percentage of the respondents thirty-seven to forty-four years old was 18.7%. The percentage of the respondents forty-five to fifty-two was 24.2%. The percentage of the respondents over fifty-three years old was 35.2%.

#### Instrumentation

Data were collected using a questionnaire composed of 19 items (Appendix B). The questionnaire allowed for gender and age. The response selections were arranged in an ordinal Likert scale. The respondents circled the number which best matched with their opinions. The scale ranged from five to one. Five being strongly agree, four being agree, three being no opinion, two being disagree, and one being strongly disagree. The statements on the questionnaire were designed to

measure attitudes regarding professional attire in the corporate workplace. The Hypotheses were:

H1A: Professionals believe clothing is important for success in the workplace.

H1B: Women are more likely to believe clothing is important than are men.

H1C: Older professionals are more likely to believe clothing is important than are younger professionals.

H2: Professionals believe if two people are applying for the same position, and both are equally qualified, the one dressed more professionally will get the position.

H3: Professionals believe suits and ties are more appropriate for work than jeans and casual attire.

Statements regarding these hypotheses were randomly arranged on the questionnaire. Statements 3, 4, 6, 10, and 11 pertain to H1a. Statements 13, 15, 18, and 19 pertain to H1B. Statements 15, 18, and 19 pertain to H1C. Statements 4, 5, 6, 9, and 17 pertain to H3.

### Procedures

Prior to the administration of the questionnaire, all respondents were given written and verbal instructions. They were also briefed about the voluntary and confidential nature of their responses. By completing the survey the respondents were giving their consent. Respondents could choose to stop at any time. Those

who chose to participate completed the questionnaire and placed them in a collection box which was located outside of the room.

The same proctor administered the questionnaire to both civic organizations. Respondents' attitudes were evaluated by their answers to the statements concerning the importance of clothing in a professional work environment. The index of professional attire was based on a Likert scale.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

All responses to the questionnaire were tallied. There were 91 recorded responses. The summary of the results is reported in Table 1. Table 2 shows no significant differences between men's and women's beliefs in the importances of dressing professionally to achieve success.

H1A states "professionals believe clothing is important for success in the workplace." Results from statements three, four, six, ten, and eleven on the questionnaire support H1A. In statement three, 87% of the responses agreed "professional attire contributes to success in the corporate world." In statement four 89% of the responses agreed "a man is considered to look more professional if he wears a suit." In statement six, 70% of the responses agreed "a woman appears more powerful if she is wearing a suit." In statement ten, 70% of the responses agreed "workers in the corporate workplace should dress professionally to advance." In statement eleven, 57% of the responses agreed "people judge one's abilities based on the way he or she dresses."

H1B states "women are more likely to believe clothing is important than are men." Statements thirteen, fifteen, eighteen, and nineteen indicate H1B is well-founded. Table Two indicates there are no significant differences in men's and women's opinion regarding clothing. Men are just as likely to believe clothing is important.

H1C states "older professionals are more likely to believe clothing is important than are younger professionals." This statement is not supported by the

data as shown in Table 3. Younger professionals are just as likely to believe clothing is important.

Table 1  
Responses to Questionnaire

Q3. Professional attire contributes to success in the corporate world.	40.7	46.2	8.8	3.3	1.1
Q4. A man is considered to look more professional if he wears a suit.	46.2	42.9	5.5	4.4	1.1
Q5. Men should wear a tie when in a corporate setting.	34.1	38.5	15.4	11.0	1.1
Q6. A woman appears more powerful if she is wearing a suit.	26.4	44.0	20.9	8.8	
Q7. If a person goes on a job interview for a corporation, they should dress in a professional manner.	86.8	12.1		1.1	
Q8. First impressions are primarily based on one's appearance.	59.3	36.3	3.3	1.1	
Q9. Corporate workers appear professional if they wear jeans.	1.1	3.3	17.6	34.1	44.0
Q10. Workers in the corporate workplace should dress professionally to advance.	18.7	51.6	22.0	6.6	1.1
Q11. People judge one's abilities based on the way he or she dresses.	16.5	39.6	29.7	8.8	5.5
Q12. If workers dress badly, they will not perform their jobs as well.	3.3	7.7	41.8	24.2	23.1
Q13. If an individual wants to be promoted, he or she should dress as though it has already happened.	24.2	48.4	17.6	5.5	4.4
Q14. If two people are applying for the same position, and both are equally qualified, the one dressed more professionally will get the position.	35.2	39.6	13.2	9.9	2.2

N=91

Some totals are more than 100% due to rounding.

Table 1 continued  
Responses to Questionnaire

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Q15. One's attire is important in the corporate workplace.	36.3	52.7	4.4	4.4	2.2
Q16. Casual attire should be worn in the corporate workplace.	5.5	22.0	35.2	20.9	16.5
Q17. Conservative suits should be worn on job interviews.	37.4	45.1	13.2	3.3	1.1
Q18. Image is not a factor in the workplace.	3.3	8.8	8.8	34.1	45.1
Q19. People are judged by clothing they wear.	25.3	51.6	16.5	5.5	1.1

---

N=91

Some totals are more than 100% due to rounding.



Table 2  
T-tests for differences between men and women on dressing for success

Importance	Number of Cases	Mean	SD	T-value	df	2-tail signif
Men	47	15.68	2.27	-1.38	89	.510
Women	44	16.38	2.59			
<b>Q13</b>						
Men	47	3.81	.88	-.15	89	.879
Women	44	3.84	1.14			
<b>Q15</b>						
Men	47	4.04	.88	-1.39	89	.168
Women	44	4.30	.85			
<b>Q18</b>						
Men	47	2.00	1.216	.79	89	.430
Women	44	1.82	.947			
<b>Q19</b>						
Men	47	3.83	.82	-1.33	89	.188
Women	44	4.07	.90			

Q13. If an individual wants to be promoted, he or she should dress as though it has already happened.

Q15. One's attire is important in the corporate workplace.

\*Q18. Image is not a factor in the workplace.

Q19. People are judged by clothing they wear.

\*Q18 was recoded.

Table 3

T-Tests for differences between older and younger professionals on key questions

Importance	Number of Cases	Mean	SD	T-value	df	2-tail signif
Under 45	37	16.18	2.10	1.38	89	.170
45 & older	54	15.90	2.66			
<b>Q13</b>						
Under 45	37	3.78	1.05	-.32	89	.753
45 & older	54	3.85	.979			
<b>Q15</b>						
Under 45	37	4.24	.830	.71	89	.481
45 & older	54	4.11	.904			
<b>Q18</b>						
Under 45	37	1.94	.998	.24	89	.808
45 & older	54	1.88	1.16			
<b>Q19</b>						
Under 45	37	4.10	.699	1.51	89	.136
45 & older	54	3.83	.947			

N=91

Q13. If an individual wants to be promoted, he or she should dress as though it has already happened.

Q15. One's attire is important in the corporate workplace.

\*Q18. Image is not a factor in the workplace.

Q19. People are judged by clothing they wear.

\*Q18 was recoded.



H2 states "professionals believe if two people are applying for the same position, and both are equally qualified, the one dressed more professionally will get the position." Statements seven, eight, eleven, fourteen, and seventeen indicate most of the respondents support H2. In statement seven, 99% of respondents agreed "if a person goes on a job interview for a corporation, they should dress in a professional manner." In statement eight 95% of respondents agreed "first impressions are primarily based on one's appearance." In statement eleven, 57% of respondents agreed "people judge one's abilities based on the way he or she dresses." In statement fourteen, 75% of respondents agreed "if two people are applying for the same position, and both are equally qualified, the one dressed more professionally will get the position. In statement seventeen 82% of respondents agreed "conservative suits should be worn on job interviews."

H3 investigated the following: "professionals believe suits and ties are more appropriate for work than jeans and casual attire." According to statement four, five, six, nine, and seventeen indicates H3 is true. In statement four 89% of respondents agreed "a man is considered to look more professional if he wears a suit." In statement five, 73% of respondents agreed "men should wear a tie when in a corporate setting." In statement six, 70% of respondents agreed "a woman appears more powerful if she is wearing a suit. In statement nine, 78% of respondents disagreed "corporate workers appear professional if they wear jeans." In statement seventeen, 82% of respondents agreed "conservative suits should be worn on job interviews."

H1C states "older professionals are more likely to prefer suits and ties to jeans than are younger professionals." In statement fifteen, 89% of respondents agreed "one's attire is important in the corporate workplace." In statement eighteen, 79% of respondents disagreed "image is not a factor in the workplace." In statement nineteen, 77% of respondents agreed people are judged by clothing they wear. Overall, respondents felt professional clothing is important in the corporate work setting.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This study was designed to provide data about attitudes and opinions regarding professional attire in the corporate workplace. Based on the study conducted, the respondents believe professional clothing is an important factor in the corporate workplace. All respondents were employed; therefore, they were familiar with the various types of clothing worn in the workplace.

What does clothing communicate? Statistical data confirm most people believe clothes play a role in one's success in the workplace. Also, data indicates first impressions are primarily based on one's appearance. Both genders, and a large age range, indicated people are judged by the clothing they wear. Based on participants' responses to the questionnaire, participants' felt professional clothing was a definite factor in a business setting. People may think individuals are judged on their abilities. However, this study suggests people are also judged by the clothing they wear, especially regarding first impressions. Kaiser (1985) reported a cognitive or social perception approach stresses the mental processes through which individuals form impressions about other persons. The social psychology of clothing is concerned with the role clothes play in people's interactions with one another.

Although respondents indicated clothing is important, more research should be done. One future research methodology would be to conduct an experiment to see if the findings coincide with the questionnaire. Also, future work should explore what constitutes professional attire. Future research should extend this study with a larger sample size. There were only 91 people sampled in this questionnaire. A

larger sample would be a better representative. Also, the questionnaire was written in the third person format which might impact the study. In this particular study, respondents may have answered according to what they thought others' opinions were instead of how they actually felt. An experiment might give more of an indication if an individuals' perception is different from reality. A survey or experiment in different industries would also be beneficial. Presently, in many industries everyone from upper management to factory workers dress in the same type uniforms.

Attitudes and opinions have not changed much. Fenton (1986) reported at initial meetings, first impressions of individuals are formed primarily based on appearance which is usually in the first 40 seconds. Current data reveals this concept has not changed much in fourteen years. People still believe clothing plays a meaningful role in human interactions.



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## Appendix A

Page 1 of 1

The following information is for the participants. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of the intervention on the participants. The participants are asked to complete the questionnaire at the end of the intervention. The questionnaire is a self-report measure of the participants' experiences and perceptions.

The questionnaire is a self-report measure of the participants' experiences and perceptions. It is a 10-item questionnaire that asks the participants to rate their agreement with the statements on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

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1.
  - A. Subjects are adults from professional organization such as: Rotary and Business and Professional Women (BPW).
  - B. Instructions are attached to questionnaire.
  - C. See attached questionnaire.
  - D. There are no special incentives.
  - E. See attached questionnaire.

The subjects are not children, prisoners, mentally or physically infirm, etc.,

This questionnaire will be administered to consenting adults.

This questionnaire will not legally, physically, or socially harm.

2. No, people will only be answering questions on the questionnaire. Directions included state this is voluntary and you may stop at any time. Provisions have been made by close examination of questionnaire by communication professors. Facilities used will be where clubs always meet.
3. This questionnaire is to obtain peoples opinions and for this data to be analyzed. No risk no involved.
4. The consent and directions are included on a separate paper attached to the questionnaire (see attached questionnaire).
5. Yes, confidentiality will be maintained. Personal information will not be taken such as: name or social security numbers. a) data will be stored electronically, but personal data cannot be collected since there is no personal data on the survey. b) because information is not on the questionnaire, no steps are necessary.
6. No, there are no illegal activities. They are only being asked to give opinions on the questionnaire (see attached questionnaire).
7. Yes, I will not know names of people who participate in the questionnaire. No harm will come to participants.

For more information regarding this  
document, contact the IRB Human Subject

## Appendix B

...confidential. You are giving consent by  
...voluntarily and you may stop at any  
...anonymous. Please do not put your name on the

outside of this room.

1. Strongly Disagree

1. Strongly Disagree

1. Strongly Disagree

1. Strongly Disagree

1. Strongly Disagree



This research is designed to measure attitudes regarding attire in the corporate workplace.

This data will increase individuals' understanding of the role clothes play in interactions with one another. Also, this data will increase the understanding of professional attire and its contribution to success in the corporate workplace.

This questionnaire is being administered as part of a communications graduate class at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, TN. My professors, Dr. Paul Shaffer, Dr. Ellen Kanervo, and Dr. Patrick Jablonski, have approved this questionnaire.

Please contact Austin Peay State University for additional information regarding this questionnaire. Communications Department (931)221-7973, Human Subject Committee (931)221-7881.

Responses to this questionnaire are confidential. You are giving consent by completing the questionnaire. Participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time. Your responses will remain anonymous. Please do not put your name on the questionnaire.

A collection box is located outside of this room.



- Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree



9. Corporate workers appear professional if they wear jeans.

Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

10. Workers in the corporate workplace should dress professionally to advance.

Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

11. People judge one's abilities based on the way he or she dresses.

Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

12. If workers dress badly, they will not perform their jobs as well.

Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

13. If an individual wants to be promoted, he or she should dress as though it has already happened.

Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

14. If two people are applying for the same position, and both are equally qualified, the one dressed more professionally will get the position.

Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

15. One's attire is important in the corporate workplace.

Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

16. Casual attire should be worn in the corporate workplace.

Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

17. Conservative suits should be worn on job interviews.

Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

18. Image is not a factor in the workplace.

Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

19. People are judged by clothing they wear.

40

Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree