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# Does Dressing for Success Imply Undressing for Failure?

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DOES DRESSING FOR SUCCESS IMPLY UNDRRESSING FOR FAILURE?

By

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B.S., Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2014

A Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Arts

Department of Communication Studies  
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

DOES DRESS FOR SUCCESS IMPLY UNDESSING FOR FAILURE?

By

Elizabeth A. Fines

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the field of Communication Studies

Approved by:

Suzanne M. Daughton, Chair

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
May 12, 2017

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this research report for all the working women in the world. We can do whatever we set our minds to. Keep fighting for what's ours.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank some special people in my life. First of all, I want to thank my parents, David and Lisa Fines. Dad, thank you for always believing in me and never giving up on me. When I come to you with a problem you always have a solution and I am forever in debt to you for that. Also, thank you for the outrageous and random one-liners you tell me, they kept me going.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

When discussing women in the workplace, some people say “Progress is progress.” And they’ve got a point. But as of 2017, women in the U.S. still make on average 77 cents for every dollar a man makes (Sahadi, 2016). And those are the “lucky ones,” who were born white; just for comparison, African-American women average 63 and Latina women average 55 cents (National Partnership for Women & Families, 2017). And although we have seen progress over the past decades, women are still dramatically under-represented in STEM fields, law, politics, and the highest levels of the educational and corporate worlds. It’s not that women don’t want to hold such jobs; ever since the second wave of the women’s movement, books, advice columns, and blogs have been published offering guidance and support to women about how to achieve professional success in the workplace. For example, *Cosmopolitan* regularly features articles with titles such as *6 Things Successful Women Should do for Other Woman*, *14 Office Problems Every Women Understands*, and *4 Incredibly Useful Tips for Speaking Up at Work* (*Cosmopolitan*, 2017). *Dress for Success*, published in 1988 was one of the first, and arguably created the genre of self-help books for rising corporate women (Molloy). But apparently, dressing for success did not fix the problem of women’s workplace inequality once and for all, as evidenced by the equal pay issue I mentioned above, and continuing discrimination in other areas.

Certainly such advice has been useful for some women, providing specific practical tips for how to get ahead. However, systematic inequality persists, and it’s going to take more than a wardrobe change to fix it. So what does such advice offer women? These books, (etc.) offer a sense of empowerment to women, a sense that they can take responsibility for their lives and

livelihoods. They also implicitly and explicitly model sisterly support for other women in one's place of employment, both providing a sense of companionship to the reader, and even sometimes offering specific recommendations for how to create a more female-friendly workplace.

I was curious about what tips women were offering other women. *Dress for Success* advised women to wear a suit to garner the same respect as their male counterparts. What has happened in the 35 years since then? As a result of many changes in society, even corporate culture has loosened dress codes; many employers feature "Casual Fridays," and the business suit is no longer the only acceptable uniform even on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. In order to take the pulse of these changes and how they have shown up in women's advice books, I have chosen to analyze excerpts from books from two different time periods, to see what women were encouraged to think about themselves as workers, and whether that changed much over the years. I browsed widely among representatives of the genre and selected two books for comparison, *Women Who Want to be Boss* written by Marlene Jensen in 1987 and *Play Like a Man, Win Like a Woman* written by Gail Evans's in 2000. My criteria for selection centered on breadth of coverage, as well as specificity. That is, I wanted to examine and compare works from two different moments in history, that both offered readers a wide range of topics, with detailed examples to support the authors' claims. (So, for example, I chose not to include books focused primarily on single issues, such as how to get a raise, how to get a job, or how to negotiate in a business setting.) In making my choices, I prioritized parallel artifacts (in terms of range of topics), instead of comparing the most recent with the oldest publications. (The most current advice books tended to focus more on an individual woman's story, rather than offering general advice to all women. This may signal a "post-feminist" attitude that books are more

marketable if they present individual rather than systemic solutions to sexist oppression.)

Specifically, I am interested in the idea that women in the workplace have faced, and may still face, discrimination, including wage penalties, because of their attire, body weight, or physical appearance (Roehling, 2011). Also, a related area of discrimination is that women have previously been shamed or even cast out of the workplace if they have had a sexual relationship with their supervisor or work comrades, but unless and until complaints of sexual harassment are filed, male bosses have historically been freer to have sex with whomever they want without any consequences. I examine specific passages from two artifacts: *Women Who Want to be Boss* and *Play Like a Man, Win Like a Woman*. I chose these two advice books to professional women, written by successful professional women, because not only is the notion of supporting other women powerfully beautiful, but also to see whether, in the decade between their publication dates, the wisdom that these women have to share with their sisters has changed. I selected passages that focused on the themes I've identified about appearance and sexual behavior. From comparing the two, I hope to learn whether and how professional corporate norms have changed at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the context of feminist activism and increased presence of women in the workplace. In order to find similarities and differences between the two, I will take a feminist rhetorical criticism perspective. I chose to analyze my artifacts using feminist rhetorical criticism because issues of self-determination in personal as well as professional behavior have been of concern to feminists, and because rhetorical criticism allows us to analyze the persuasive potential of discourse, such as advice books.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In Roderick Hart and Suzanne Daughton's book *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* (2005) the authors offer critical probes for analyzing artifacts from a feminist perspective. They describe how "unpacking the interpretive possibilities of a message is likely to be more productive insight" than simply labeling an artifact as "sexist" (2005, p. 285). Accordingly, I have selected for my research question their critical probe, "In what ways does this artifact encourage women and men to look, think, feel and behave?" (p. 285).

#### WOMEN'S WEIGHT ARTICLES

The first major theme I want to talk about is women's weight. Several scholars discuss how social attitudes, not women's weight, are the problem. These authors urge feminists to resist such surveillance, and offer vocal support for women no matter their size. Patricia Vincent Roehling explains how bias against fat women negatively affects their wages; she says that issues pertaining to fat women need to be addressed in the feminist community. She addresses these topics in her article, "Fat is a feminist issue, but it is complicated: Commentary on Fikkan and Rothblum" (2011). Roehling argues that a bias against fat women is so ordinary that it is the only remaining form of socially-acceptable discrimination. She backs up this claim by showing data from field studies such as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), which tells researchers whether employees' weight has a direct effect on their wages over time (Roehling, 2011). The study showed that even women who start at a petite size and eventually grow into a "normal" body size still face wage penalties. So according to these data, women are penalized for their weight, whether "normal" or "overweight." However, when men were surveyed, there was a surprising difference. Men who are overweight or mildly obese earned a wage increase,

while men who were seen as underweight or morbidly obese experienced a wage penalty. Overall, it seems that in the workplace women are penalized for their weight (unless they start, and remain petite), yet men are rewarded for being overweight. Although weight discrimination can be a pay issue for both men and women, studies show that it is a bigger issue for women.

With this in mind, Roehling continues the discussion of women's weight as a feminist issue. Roehling first lays out what she believes to be the two core concepts of current feminist thought. First, "Feminism concerns equality and justice for all women and seeks to eliminate systems of inequality and injustice in all aspects of women's lives" (Roehling, 2011, p. 596). Although she argues that overweight men receive unfair treatment in the workplace, it seems as if overweight women are treated with a higher degree of injustice. She goes on to say that the second core concept regarding feminism is that women should be inclusive and affirming of other women. They should celebrate their struggles and achievements, and strive to be a positive influence in the lives of other women (Roehling, 2011). Roehling thinks overweight women are held to a more stringent weight standard than men, and so she sees this as a feminist issue. She argues that women's weight has not previously been embraced as a feminist issue because people see body weight as something that individuals can control; therefore, they conclude that prejudice against people of size is warranted. Thus, this article really hones in on the different ways that feminism does not always include women's body weight as an issue of sexist oppression, and it should.

Courtney E. Martin's short magazine article, "Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters: The Frightening New Normalcy of Hating Your Body," discusses how it is not enough for girls' bodies to be "good," but they must be "perfect." Because of society's emphasis on having a perfect body, 90% of high-school-aged girls think they are overweight, which leads to seven

million American girls and women suffering from an eating disorder (Martin, 2007). The author argues that fathers have a lot to do with their daughters' eating disorders, because fathers often strive for their daughters to be great athletes. In pursuit of this perfection, girls tend to starve themselves in order to become faster. At the end of the article, Martin calls for girls and women to stop spending all their emotional and intellectual energy on searching for the perfect body and learn to love their imperfections.

Jennifer Bennett Shinall's article, "Occupational Characteristics and the Obesity Wage Penalty," focuses on the fact that obese women are more likely to work jobs that require physical labor, rather than occupations that allow women to interact with the public (Shinall, 2014). She observes that obese men do not experience the same discrimination: they are more often placed in jobs that allow them to be seen. The problem, Shinall says, is that obese women are being forced into jobs that require physical labor, which do not pay as much as a secretarial position. These physical jobs pay less than jobs that interact with the public; this difference allows obese men to make significantly more money than obese women. Overall, Shinall is focused on trying to figure out why obesity lowers wages for obese females, but not obese males.

Like Shinall, Sanburn (2012) mentions in her journal article that recently workplaces have required their employees to take a body mass index test (BMI). Specifically, Sanburn mentions a hospital in Texas that requires male workers to fit the BMI of 245 pounds and 5 ft. 10 in. (which is a BMI of 35.1), while a woman who is 5-ft. 2-in. has to weigh less than 195 pounds (which is a BMI of 35.7). The hospital stated that they wanted their employees' physiques to represent what they believed a health care professional should look like. The article goes on to explain how in a female-only study, female employees often felt pressured to remain thin, leading to the finding that women are 16 times more likely than men to report weight

discrimination at work. As Roehling establishes at the conclusion of her essay, although almost all other forms of discrimination are banned in the workplace, weight discrimination remains *legal* in every U.S. state except Michigan.

In Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1991), she discusses the professional beauty qualifications of women in the workplace. Specifically, she argues that women have often been hired for jobs based on their beauty. Women in jobs such as dancers, fashion mannequins, higher-paid sex workers, and escorts were hired based solely on their looks (Wolf, 1991). Along with this idea of hiring women because of appearance came a famous case, *Miller v. Bank of America*, wherein the court refused to weigh in on issues of woman's appearance in regards to employment, thus offering women no legal recourse to protest discrimination based on looks. Wolf discusses another case, *Barnes v. Costle*, following the *Miller* outcome, where the court concluded, "That if a woman's unique physical characteristics- red hair, say or large breasts- were the reasons given by her employer for sexual harassment, then her personal appearance was the issue and not her gender, in which case she could not expect protection under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act" (Wolf, 1991, p. 38). To me, this is a shocking and disturbing comment. She continues with another situation where Dan-Air, an airline based in the United Kingdom, was only hiring beautiful, thin women to be "air stewardesses" (p. 75). It has been a long-standing stereotype that flight attendants be visually pleasing. The airline defended themselves in court by saying that they were only giving the public what they wanted: something beautiful to look at. Thus, Wolf wants readers to consider the public discourse relating to women's beauty and their employment, and the unfair results when women are penalized for their supposed "lack" of beauty.

Wolf also has a chapter questioning whether women really have a choice when it comes to violent procedures done to their bodies. Wolf (1991) alleges that what she calls the Surgical Age is a human rights issue. She says that women are being tortured to try to fit the beauty standard. For example, Wolf argues that, “When a class of people is denied food, or forced to vomit regularly, or repeatedly cut open and stitched together to no medical purpose, we call it torture” (1991, p. 257). Wolf says that this is why women are going through these surgeries and body transformations: in order to fit a standard of beauty that is unattainable. She goes on to explain that institutions give a clear message that women should be beautiful if they want to work for them. In order to look beautiful, Wolf says that employers are condoning a level of “violence” to these women’s bodies. Specifically, she discusses how surgical brochures focus on women looking “youthful” in order to get, or keep, a good career. Wolf explains, by women’s testimonials, that when women see these brochures they think they need to get surgery in order to get a job. This leads women to get unnecessary surgeries that could be life threatening. In interviews with Wolf, women expressed their belief that if they do not get plastic surgery, other women will get ahead of them in the workplace.

## CHAPTER 3

### SEX IN THE WORKPLACE

Barbra A. Gutek (1985), in her article, “Sex in the Workplace: The Impact of Sexual Behavior and Harassment on Women, Men and Organizations,” determined that sex-role spillover occurs because women are treated as their gendered stereotype “woman” rather than coworkers. For example, the expectations men might have for women are not based on their working skills, but rather on their being feminine (Gutek, 1985). She argues that women are valued when they are good looking, have good personalities, are accommodating, and supportive of men. Gutek goes on to explain that sex-role spillover occurs when there is segregation in the workplace. Even today we still see segregation in the workplace with male-only and female-only jobs. For example, nurses may be mainly female, but doctors are mostly male. When these two professions come in contact with one another, women are seen as women and expected to have a pleasant personality and be attractive in order to be successful. According to Gutek’s interviews, women say that when men see women in these professions, they see them as people to be taken advantage of. This article discusses how sex-role spillover leads women to be sexually harassed, due to how men see women in the workplace.

In Philip Backlund and Mary Rose Williams’s *Readings in Gender Communication* (2004), they discuss a section titled “Sexual Harassment as Power.” The sexual harassment they describe is a case between Theresa Harris and her male boss. The case went all the way to the Appeals Court and Harris won her sexual harassment case, but not without a struggle. Harris describes her workplace environment as somewhere she does not feel safe. Backlund and William’s discuss how Harris’s harasser was her boss, president and owner of the company, so he could fire or demote any woman who did not agree to his sexual advances. However, Harris

went along with her harasser's sexual advances, in fear of repercussions, and her harasser was not found guilty until the case reached the Supreme Court. In fact, before the Supreme Court, the Appeals Court told Harris that she was being too sensitive towards her harasser's advances. The authors sum up this section by describing how female employees should not be held responsible for being "too sensitive" when it is the harassers who are using their power to take advantage of their employees.

Also in Backlund and Williams (2004) book, Margret Cavin's section describes the theory of sexual harassment as structural. Cavin discusses Patrice Buzzanell's argument that communication patterns in the typical workplace exclude women from advancement. Buzzanell says, "The usual structure of American workplaces is based on a hierarchical system that has traditionally and overwhelmingly favored males, who in 1995, still held 97% of all top management jobs" (Cavin, 2004, p. 273). Buzzanell goes on to explain that women will continue to stay in low-ranking jobs because organizations are not willing to change their ways. Buzzanell describes her theory about why women are not moving up the ranks: she says that women are not in the inner circle for communication with the men. One may think of this as the "good old boys' club" where men discuss "important" things that women are not allowed to hear. Backlund and Williams explain that men are afraid that they will become sexually attracted to their protégées, which could lead to a sexual relationship. Instead of letting themselves be tempted, and potentially facing the need to control their urges, they choose to exclude women from their communication.

An article written by Rachel Torgerson (2017) in *Cosmopolitan*, titled "Sexist Dress Codes Declared Unlawful in the U.K." discusses Nicola Thorp, a temporary receptionist and actress, who was told to go home for the day and change her flats to stilettos, without being paid

for her time. Thorp was told that if she did not go out and buy stilettos with at least a 2-inch heel, she could not come back to work. Thorp decided that she had had enough, and decided to start a petition against the company's sexist dress codes. When Parliament looked into these accusations, they found that Thorp's employer also had other rules including, "Instructions on how many times to reapply lipstick, which colors were acceptable as nail polish, and the ideal thickness of employees' nylons" (Torgerson, 2017, p.1). Parliament found that these requirements of female employees were against the law. A spokesperson for the government said, "Dress codes must be reasonable and include equivalent requirements for both men and women. The Government Equalities Office will carefully consider this report and will work with its partners to make sure employers comply with the law" (Torgerson, 2017, p. 1). Even though this statement was not a complete win for Thorp, she has hope for the future. Thorp said, "People say sexism is not an issue anymore. But when a man who has admitted publicly to sexually harassing women is the leader of the free world, it is more critical than ever to have laws that protect women" (Torgerson, 2017, p.1). This article is important to my research because it gives women the idea that even though the world is tough on us right now, we should not give up, but instead should keep fighting for what we deserve, equality.

## CHAPTER 4

### CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Research question: “In what ways does this artifact suggest that women and men should look, think, feel, behave?” (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 285).

Both Jensen and Evans cover many topics in their advice books. Before I begin closely analyzing specific moments from each text, I will provide a bit of context by offering an overview of each book. In Marlene Jensen’s book *Women Who Want to be Boss* (1987), she discusses how women need to develop a successful image as a woman in the workplace. When designing a successful image, Jensen discusses a lot of topics: everything from having a good sense of humor, how to appear powerful, how to stand out, and what women should and shouldn’t wear to work. My focus is on what Jensen discusses when dealing with how women in the workplace should dress. Jensen asks a top executive recruiter what kind of appearances could hurt the interviewee’s potential of receiving a job and she answered,

being really overweight is such a negative that clients don’t even want to see the candidates. They perceive it as indicative of a lazy or sloppy attitude that would carry over to their work; and they expect it would mean a lot of health problems on the job. (Jensen, 1987, p. 24)

Jensen goes on to explain that age is not usually a problem, but if women are overweight, they are not likely to get the job. Jensen explains how there are lots of books, magazines, and so forth about overweight women not getting jobs due to their weight, but little to no such writing on men.

First I will analyze how the artifact suggests that women look. Jensen says, “Being really overweight is such a negative that clients don’t even want to see the candidates” is a pretty harsh statement to make. Jensen is referring to top executive recruiters who are discussing how overweight women are not welcomed in the company because clients cannot stand the sight of them. This statement suggests that women should look either “under weight” or “normal weight” in order to get a job where clients are looking at them. Women are held to such high standards that not only do they need to be educated and qualified for their posts, but they also need to strive for a body that they potentially cannot obtain. In Martin’s 2007 article “Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters: The Fragile New Normalcy of Hating Your Body” she discusses how “it is no longer good enough for girls to be good” (p. 171). In the workplace it is no longer acceptable for a woman just to be knowledgeable, but her make up must also be perfect, her clothes should fit perfectly, and her weight must meet society’s standards as “skinny.” Shinall’s article “Occupational Characteristics and the Obesity Wage Penalty” also discusses issues where women are expected to look a certain way for certain jobs (2014). Similar to Martin’s statement, Shinall’s article discusses how women who look overweight are given jobs that require physical labor. If women do not look a certain way, they are given jobs to keep them out of view of their clients. Most of these physical labor jobs pay less money than office jobs, such as secretaries. I thought about this for a moment and noticed that most secretaries I see are not overweight and seem to fit society’s standards of “good looking.” So, to conclude on how does this statement suggest women should look, I think this quote suggests that women should fit society’s standards of beauty physically and not be overweight. If women are overweight their chance at getting hired, or advancing in their careers, is low.

Moving forward to how this artifact suggests women should behave, I focus on the portion of the quote that says, “they perceive [being overweight] as indicative of a lazy or sloppy attitude that would carry over to their work; and they expect it would mean a lot of health problems on the job” (Jensen, 1987, p. 24). This is obviously a problem: when employers see overweight women, they automatically assume they are lazy. If women believe these stigmas, they may fall into the behavior of which they are being accused. Roehling discusses this issue of overweight women’s suggested behavior in her article. She says that people, women especially, feel free to discriminate against women who are overweight because society tells us that it is the woman’s fault for being fat (Roehling, 2011). This is a problem because if women are not supporting other women, who will? Women, no matter their size, want to know that their feminist peers overtly support them. Roehling argues that the “lazy and sloppy” attributions will continue if feminist scholars fail to talk about weight issues. I agree with Roehling. Prejudice against those who are overweight has become the only remaining socially acceptable form of discrimination. I, too, am guilty of thinking that it is the woman’s fault for being overweight. For example, I saw one of my friends after high school and I told another friend that she looked like she had gained weight. I instantly thought to myself, “Well, she needs to work out and put down the brownies.” I blamed her; just as Jensen’s quote suggests that overweight women’s behavior is attributed to laziness, I suggested that my friend was just being lazy. Furthermore, there is an assumption that overweight women can lose the weight. Although some argue that overweight people are slothful, others cannot physically do anything to lose weight. They may have a medical condition that does not allow them to lose weight or they may be on medication that is vital to their well-being that makes them gain weight. Another reason for a person’s obesity could be that their bodies cannot handle the stress of working out. Thus sometimes it is not

because women are lazy, it is because other preexisting conditions do not allow their bodies to lose weight. I am sure that if one asked an overweight person whether they want to be overweight, most would probably say no. Overall, this quote suggests that employers, and society in general, see it as women's fault if they are overweight. The quote also suggests that employers are unwilling to hire overweight women because they believe that being overweight automatically means being unhealthy. Employers then conclude that the overweight employee's health might become a problem, and therefore that she might potentially leave the company without a worker. Even worse, she might need to go on paid leave, thus depriving the company of both productivity and capital. Overall, the quote suggests that if women are overweight they will not do a good job simply because they are fat.

The other book I primarily focus on is *Play Like a Man, Win Like a Woman* by Gail Evans (2000). Specifically, I focus on the chapter, "Preparing How to Play," which discusses everything from what women should wear, to goal setting. Other sections of the book discuss "Don't Expect to Make Friends," "You're Always a Mother, Daughter, Wife or Mistress," and "They Can Have Bad Manners. You Can't" (p. 77, 29, & 129). The section titled "Wear the Right Uniform" is important to my research because Evans gives an example of a woman who does not wear the right uniform and suffers the consequences. Evans describes a situation where an intelligent woman she knows can never get into positions of power because of her physical attributes and the "uniform" she chooses to wear. Evans (2000) says, "Overweight, she dresses like a hippie in shapeless clothes designed to hide her body. Her company has carefully moved her out of positions of power and excluded her from meetings with outside executives" (p. 48). In this instance, the woman Evans knows has two strikes against her in the business world. Not only is she overweight, but her dress is not appealing to the eye. Therefore she is not allowed to

be in meetings with the executives or get promoted because her physical appearance is not appealing.

Using the same feminist critical probe as above, “In what ways does this artifact suggest women and men should look, think, feel, behave” I will closely examine how Evans’s (2000) book talks about women’s dress and weight (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 285). First I want to focus on the part of the critical probe discussing in what ways the artifact suggests women should look (Hart & Daughton, 2005). Unfortunately my suspicions were correct and it seems as if women are still being discriminated against for their weight and dress. Evans’s book came out thirteen years after Jensen’s book and in the intervening years, it appears that not much has changed. Evans’s book still suggests that women should not be overweight. Similar to Jensen, Evans tells a story about a woman she knows who is overweight and who is put in positions where people of power does not see her. To me, this suggests that women should look “perfect” at all times. Not only should they look perfect, but they should also dress appropriately for their weight. I feel as if it is a lose/lose situation for women who are overweight, because if they dress like a “hippie in shapeless clothes designed to hid her body” they look frumpy (Evans, 2000, p. 48). However if overweight women dress in tighter clothes that cling to the body, their bosses may think that they are dressed inappropriately.

Evans discusses another example where a successful woman working at a California financial company had the opposite problem to the woman described above: her outfits were too attractive. Although this woman is an important member of the financial company, she is not as high up in the company as she aspires to be (Evans, 2000). Evans explains that her boss says, “Her outfits are attractive but a little too tight. They show off her excellent figure, but they are inappropriate--so much so that her male associates feel uncomfortable around her” (2000, p. 49).

Obviously it is a problem if anyone, male or female, dresses inappropriately for work. However, if wearing “hippy clothes” like the first woman is inappropriate, and wearing clothes too tight like the second woman is unacceptable, where is the happy medium? (And who gets to decide?) Evans gives some advice at the end of this section telling women how they should dress for work. She says, “The bottom line: Dress for the team, but do it with confidence, creativity, and within the range of your own personal comfort. Clothing telegraphs to the world not just who you think you are, but who you want to be” (Evans, 2000, p. 50).

Next I want to move on to discuss how this artifact suggests that women should feel (Hart and Daughton, 2005, p. 285). When Evans says, “her company moved her out of positions of power and excluded her from meetings with outside executives,” this must make that employee feel unwanted (2000, p. 48). If this woman knew that she was smart enough to move up the ladder and be in meetings with people in positions of power, she may sense that she is being discriminated against just because of her weight. I can imagine this is a very harmful thought to a person. To know that you are educated enough, but cannot have the job just because you do not look the part could take its toll on one’s self-image. Even if she would change her attire, she still would be overweight. Wolf argues in *The Beauty Myth* that violence is being committed against women in the workplace when it comes to beauty standards (1991). Women see plastic surgery brochures that say in order to get a job, they need to look more youthful through plastic surgery. So, women around the world are getting these life-threatening surgeries in order to look the way society tells them they must. It suggests that women should not feel good about their natural bodies. They should change virtually everything about themselves to get a job. They should feel ashamed to go to work because they do not fit certain physical criteria. Overall, Evans’s discussion about the woman who dresses like a hippie may make women feel ashamed to be in

their own skin, which is similar, I would assume, to how women feel when reading Jensen's book.

## CHAPTER 5

### OFFICE RELATIONSHIPS

In the next section of my analysis, I want to discuss the artifacts dealing with women having sexual or romantic relationships with their bosses or fellow employees. The first artifact comes from Jensen's 1987 book where Jensen tells her own story about when she worked for a company where she described her male boss as a "jowly, overweight, married boss who would develop tics when nervous" (p. 110). Jensen tells readers how she made friends with a woman who worked in a different department of the company and had lunch occasionally with her. One day Jensen was talking about a man she was dating and her female friend asked, "you're really *not* sleeping with your boss, are you" (1987, p. 108). Jensen describes her shock when her female friend asks her this, because it is such a personal question. Furthermore, since she found nothing attractive about her married boss, she heard the comment as an insult to her taste in men. This is the part of this section I want to hone in on throughout my analysis. So, how do comments like these suggest that women should feel? First I want to delve into the question of "are you really sleeping with your boss" and how women should behave. In my opinion this question makes it sound like a crime if a woman decided to sleep with her boss. The emphasis on the word "not" shows that there is already a preconceived notion that it is wrong to sleep with a man just because he is her boss. Women at work should behave by refusing to date anyone at work, keeping work and social life separate; Evans's book even recommended that women not take a job if they're attracted to anyone who works there (2000). Moving forward to how women should feel when they hear this, I think this comment implies that women "should" feel shame and guilt if they sleep with a coworker or boss. When the friend uses the phrase "are you," she

assumes that it is her friend's business if she is sleeping with the boss, and that she should know about it. However, if the tables were turned, I do not think that men would usually shame other men for sleeping with a female boss, colleague or subordinate. This seems to be a subset of the sexual norms that applaud, or at least forgive, male sexual activity, and punish or shame women for any sexual activity outside of marriage. (Consider the number of words for a sexually active man: ladies' man, player, and stud. When women engage in similar actions, the terms used to describe them are laden with negative connotations: slut, whore, skank, and tramp.) I would argue that most of the time women get the blame for the 'sin' of sexual activity or sexual expression, which encourages women to feel guilty. Think of a situation where a male boss has sex with his female secretary, and it ruins his marriage. In most situations people will say things about how the woman is a home wrecker. I decided to do a quick search of the phrase "home wrecker" and every time it pops up it happens to say, "*She's* a home wrecker." (Although the official definition I found on Google does not specify sex or gender, "A person who is blamed for the breakup of a marriage or family, especially due to having engaged in an affair with one member of a couple," in the application, it was always used with a feminine pronoun, "she" [Google, 2017, p. 1].) In none of the situations did I see the phrase "home wrecker" being used about a man. Even though the phrase "home wrecker" does not appear in this quotation, I see strong parallels to how this moment encourages women to feel. If a woman has sex with her boss, and a friend asks this casual question, the structure of it as a *rhetorical question* (wherein the one 'correct' answer is clearly implied) prompts me to believe that women's default response "should" be shame. The woman is encouraged not to respect herself as a worker, or as a person. The phrase "home wrecker" evokes negative stereotypes of women, implying that they are promiscuous and always are on the prowl for a man, not caring whether he is married or not.

Another chapter in Evans's book discusses "Six Things Men Can Do at Work That Women Can't" (2000). She says succinctly, "They can have sex. You can't" (Evans, 2000, p. 122). For instance, Evans discusses a woman who had an affair with her boss and did not get a demotion; however, she was shunned. Evans believes, "People will always see her differently; they'll say her success is due to her sexual skills. And without her team's respect, she's not a desirable player" (2000, p. 123). Clearly, Evans implies, there are very different expectations for how women and men should behave and feel. She goes on to explain that even if a man has a sexual relationship in the office, the worst thing that can happen to him is a sexual harassment suit. If a woman wants to win her sexual harassment case she has to prove that the sex was not consensual and that may be hard, according to Evans, if they have had a relationship for longer than a year. Thus, Evans's research points to men being able to have sex in the office with little to no consequences. However, if a woman wants to have sex with someone she works with, the dangers are grave.

In the Jensen artifact ("you're really not sleeping with your boss, are you"), all of the social shame implicitly seemed to fall on the woman. The Evans artifact addresses in some detail women having sexual relationships with coworkers (2000). Tellingly, Evans titles an entire *section* of her book, "They can have sex. You can't." In this section, she relates stories about women who have affairs with their bosses (2000, p. 123). One woman, a sales executive at a California financial company, had a sexual relationship with her coworker. The sales executive, who Evans does not name, assumed that because she had the same status in the company as her coworker, she would not be looked down upon from her staff if they had a sexual relationship. Unfortunately, Evan says, "at company social events many of the men began to come on to her [the woman who had sex with her coworker] as if she were sexually available" (2000, p.124). To

me, this suggests that men can treat women however they want without fear of consequences. So what? A woman had sex with a person she works with? Apparently if a woman has sex with one man in her company, she is liable to have sex with all the male employees. This is the infamous logic that men use in order to condone their behavior in rape, especially gang rape: any kind of female sexual expression is promiscuous, and promiscuity means that consent is no longer at issue. And although now against the law, this stereotype may still bear some influence in legal proceedings, wherein rape survivors are implicitly put on trial for their sexual behavior. In Gutek's article, dealing with gendered stereotypes for women, she argues for the existence of what she calls sex-role spillover, as I mentioned above. She explains that sex-role spillover is when men in the workplace see women as women and not as co-workers. By this she means that men believe that their female counterparts should behave in ways that support gender stereotypes. For example, women should be good looking; have friendly, positive personalities; be accommodating; and be supportive of men (Gutek, 1985). I would go even further in this argument to say that men also expect women to behave sexually. According to Evan's story if one of the secretaries has sex with her boss, another boss may think he has a free pass on the secretary. If men follow through on these beliefs, then women could be in danger of sexual harassment. Gutek confirms that when sex-role spillover happens, it often leads to sexual harassment of women employees. Overall, Evans suggests that a very lopsided expectation, a double standard, exists and persists (at least, as of 2000): Not only can men have relationships with female coworkers with impunity, but when other men in the workplace learn about such affairs, they may believe that it is "open season" on the woman in question.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Through my research, I have not found much progress for women between the years 1987 and 2000. When I started this research report I had a feeling that this would be the case but I did not realize how consistent advice to women on dress, weight, and office relationships would remain throughout the years. Similarly I noticed that the same themes seem to come up in both of these books. Whether it is dress, weight, or sexual office relationships, both authors give similar advice on each of these subjects. Future research might investigate whether these themes are still issues for women in the workplace. My concern is that no matter how much advice is in books, women will always face the same discriminations.

However there have been a few differences. For example, Evans's (2000) book sells itself more as an advice tool, by giving step-by-step instructions and guidelines to help the working woman. Jensen's (1987) book, by contrast, almost seems as if it is a survival guide. Evan has designated areas in her book that gives step-by-step instructions how to do things such as get ahead, dress, and get a raise. On the other hand Jensen seems to be giving women advice on how to survive the workplace such as dealing with male colleagues when a woman finds herself in a tough position. This makes sense to me because in 1987 it was not as widely accepted for women to hold their own jobs. In Jensen's book I notice that a lot of the advice she has is how to survive the workplace, instead of just tips like Evans offers. For example Jensen offers survival tactics like "Protecting your back" (p. 99). Whereas Evans offers more tip like advice such as "playing the game: Fourteen basic rules for success" (p. 61). I have a problem with Evans's advice to women because whereas I believe that a key tenet of feminism is to support women's self-expression without judgment, it seems as if Evans wants to regulate women's self-expression.

Whereas Jensen seems to be genuinely concerned about women being in the workplace, Evans sounds like she is almost being a little bit judgmental when it comes to women wearing certain clothes and having sex with their colleagues or supervisors. In saying that, I do think that Evans has good intentions, but she seems more judgmental than Jensen. There may be a bit of post-feminist logic going on, that says that “Ok, we’re all equal now, so anything that still is unsatisfying in your own life is your own fault.” I’m all for personal responsibility, but I think that there may well be a subtle erosion of the phrase “The personal is political” going on; perhaps now the political is being relegated to the personal once more, and women are encouraged to blame themselves, rather than seeing larger patterns of sexist oppression. The tricky thing is that this erosion is actually disempowering, while it simultaneously claims to empower women.

While researching the advice that these women gave other working women, I thought to myself how lucky I am to be in academia, and particularly in a program where self-expression is welcomed. I go to work and class wearing whatever feels comfortable or right that day. None of my peers, professors or students look down on me because I wear yoga pants, a baseball cap, and tennis shoes from time to time, or if I wear clothes that may be, by society’s standards, a “little too tight.” Being able to express myself through my dress allows me to enjoy my job and feel safe in my work environment. Maybe if workplaces did not discriminate against women so much, their productivity would be significantly higher. When I was in law school I could hardly focus on school because of all the harsh judgments I faced on a daily basis. Whether that be wearing a pant suit instead of a skirt, hearing comments about gaining weight, or dealing with rumors about having relationships with other students, I could not focus on the one reason I was in law school... to become a lawyer. I do think that the advice to working women is important

and sometimes can be a very valuable source of guidance; however, at other times, it seems as if it is just another thing to worry about, and actually may be counter-productive to women's self-esteem and workplace success.

In conclusion, while writing this research report I came to a harsh realization. I thought back to my childhood of playing with Barbie Dolls and I remember my parents telling me I could "Be whatever I wanted to be when I grow up." I remember having a Stewardess Barbie, Beach Barbie, Dance Barbie, along with a whole host of other stereotypical "female occupations." All the Barbies had blonde hair, small waists, big boobs, perfect outfits, and accessories for any occasion except one: a real professional career. I write this research report for a younger me: an Elizabeth who was chubby, flat chested, not considered "gifted," and teased for having multiple boyfriends. I am hopeful for the future of women. I am optimistic that women can soon dress like "hippies," wear their clothes "too tight," be accepted for not fitting society's standards of "thin," and have sex with whomever they want and not be shamed for it. I believe that women are strong, beautiful, and passionate beings. Through this research report my belief that women can break through the glass ceiling has only gotten stronger.

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Does Dressing For Success Imply Undressing For Failure?

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