The Effect of the Nonverbal Cue of Female Clothing on Perceived Leadership as Determined by Naive Judges

Julie Ann Larson
THE EFFECT OF THE NONVERBAL CUE OF FEMALE CLOTHING ON PERCEIVED LEADERSHIP AS DETERMINED BY NAIVE JUDGES

by

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THE EFFECT OF THE NONVERBAL CUE OF FEMALE CLOTHING ON PERCEIVED LEADERSHIP AS DETERMINED BY NAIVE JUDGES

Julie Ann Larson, M.A.
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The objective of this study was to explore the role that the nonverbal cue of clothing had in determining the perceived leadership potential of five women.

Given sketches of five females wearing five specific categories of clothing appropriate to the business or professional setting, subjects were asked to choose one figure to sit at the head of a rectangular table and serve as leader of the group. The study explored perceived leadership based only on the variable of clothing.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Julie Ann Larson
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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Leadership is an important and complex concept in American society. From childhood through adulthood, people are continually faced with the problem of who will lead. Yet somehow a leader usually seems to emerge. What criteria do people use in determining who the leader will be?

Natalie Porter and Florence Geis (1981) suggest that becoming a leader is based on the perceptions that other group members have of the concept of leadership. They write:

Leadership is a social phenomenon. Becoming a leader depends on acting like a leader, but more crucially, it depends on being seen by others as the leader. In our society people do not become leaders by their own individual fiat. They become leaders by being appointed to the position, being elected to it, or emerging over time as the group member to whom others look for guidance. In every case, leadership depends on recognition by others, by fellow group members, or by those doing the voting or appointing.

Since leadership is defined by social recognition, it is important to know what cues can identify a person as a leader. The kind of cues we think of as identifying leaders include personality characteristics like dominance or assertiveness, expertise at the task and perhaps previous experience. But potential candidates for leadership positions
are often matched on the major criteria, so choices are actually based on more subtle characteristics such as appearing "authoritative" (p. 39).

How does one become a leader in this society? In the absence of any other information about group members, the person seated at the head of the table is usually seen as the leader. It seems that this "head of the table effect" is probably a case of spatial dominance signals as suggested by Goffman (1967) and Henley (1977).

In human groups and organizations, according to Knapp (1978), authority is signaled by more spacious offices and/or larger desks. When group members interact in the same location, the leader occupies not only more space but more visually prominent space. This is exemplified everyday in our society. Teachers stand in the front of the classroom, speaker's podiums and preacher's pulpits are located in front of the audience. At family gatherings, the head of the household is generally found sitting at the head of the table. Elected group leaders generally put themselves in the head position at a rectangular table, and, other members try to position themselves so they can see the leader.

The studies conducted in the area of leadership, however, primarily concern themselves with the psychological characteristics of a good leader. Study after study looks
at characteristics like dominance, assertiveness, talkativeness, and so on. But the studies continually disregard the physical appearance of a leader, which plays an important role in impression formation and influences our perceptions of others.

The important role that clothing plays in impression formation is pointed out by Buckley and Roach (1981) when they write:

Since people know very little about each other when they first meet, symbolic cues provided by appearance, including dress, typically set the stage for interaction between them before any actual verbal interaction takes place. On the basis of what they see in each other's appearance, they make judgments about the possibility of satisfying interaction, and initial attraction between them is based on these judgments (p. 80).

Hamid (1968, 1969) and Gibbins (1969) also suggest that clothing is an important cue in interpersonal perception and Barthes (1980) and Gibbins (1971) conclude that clothing seems to resemble a language. Knapp (1978) concludes that "it is reasonable to assume that, in most instances, our perception of others is influenced partly by our clothes and partly by other factors." (p. 177).

Clothing does communicate a variety of messages. People may judge a person's political and social viewpoint from the type of dress worn. In one study conducted by Kelley (1969) 410 college students indicated consistent
stereotypes for various types of dress ranging from conventional to unconventional. Less conventional dress was associated with anti-Vietnam War, radicalism, use of marijuana, and LSD. Conventional dress was associated with more traditional activities of college life such as football and vocational interests.

In addition, clothing may be used as a cue of status and even occupation. Some clothing may even become the symbol for a particular occupation. Examples of this include: construction workers (hard hats), blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, pink-collar workers.

Perhaps, the most intentional use of clothing in the communication process is through uniforms. Individuals involved in many roles and activities are dressed differently, thus prestructuring the interactions people will have with each other. Knapp (1978) supports this idea when he writes: "you may have had the experience in a restaurant of responding only to the uniform of the waiter or waitress and later, when you were ready to leave, not knowing who waited on your table." (p. 177). The uniform a person wears indicates status and it may also help in establishing the appropriate interchange one will have with that person.
Unfortunately, little research has been conducted in the area of clothing and perceived leadership but what has been conducted in the area of clothing as a nonverbal cue verifies what is frequently observed. People do react to clothing.

The purpose of this study was to explore the role that the nonverbal cue of female clothing had in determining leadership. What does a woman have to wear in order to be seen as the leader and sit at the head of the table?
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review was to ascertain whether or not any prior research had been done in the area of clothing and leadership. Although no literature was found which directly linked the two, this literature review did help in establishing the importance of the "head of the table effect" and the importance of clothing as a nonverbal cue.

It is interesting to note that the "head of the table" position seems to confer leadership status on any occupant sitting in that position when all other qualifications are held constant. Several studies reinforce this idea.

Strodtebeck and Hook (1963) studies 69 trial juries and found that members sitting at the ends of the jury table were most likely to be elected foremen, and were rated by fellow group members as more influential and contributing most to the final decision.

Hare and Bales (1963) further tested this "head of the table" hypothesis. They gave subjects a pencil and paper dominance measure in which they asked the subjects to choose positions to occupy at a rectangular table for a group discussion. Those who scored highest on the
dominance test chose the end positions and talked the most. It seemed that dominant people chose dominant seating locations.

The hypothesis that the "head of the table" seating position serves as a leadership cue, independent of group members' personalities was studied in depth by Pellegrini (1971). Based on previous research from Sommer (1959) and Felipe (1966), Pellegrini designed a study which tested a hypothesis proposed by Sommer (1959) concerning the possibility that status and/or dominance may be ascribed to an individual more or less automatically as a function of the location he/she occupies.

Pellegrini (1971) photographed five-person groups of college women seated around a rectangular table, one at the head and two at each side, and he had subjects rate each group member for leadership, using the qualities: quiet-talkative, not persuasive-persuasive, dominant-submissive, follower-leader, self-confident-self-doubting, not-intelligent-intelligent. The head occupant was continually chosen as the most influential, talkative and leaderlike, and identified as the one who had contributed most to the group.

Davenport, Brooker and Munro (1971) reported similar findings in their research. They reasoned that reserving the head of the table for the high status person is a cul-
tural norm in our society. They reported that since we expect the high status member to be seated at the head of the table, we automatically ascribe status and dominance to whoever occupies that position. Thus, they reported, the head of the table serves as a nonverbal cue to leadership status.

Perhaps the most interesting and insightful study done in this area was conducted by Porter and Geis (1981). In their study they pitted sex-role stereotypes against the head of the table effect as determinants of leadership attributions. They hypothesized that if sex-role stereotypes were biasing perceptions, then a woman acting as a leader of a mixed-sex group may be seen as implausible, and the leadership cue of her seating position would be discounted. On the other hand, if sex-role stereotypes were no longer biasing perceptions, then a woman at the head of the table would be seen as the leader as readily as a man in that position.

This study found that sex-role stereotypes did operate on leadership cues, defining women as nonleaders when a man is available. A woman at the head of the table in a mixed-sex group was not seen as contributing most to the group, and was not rated highest in the group in leadership, dominance, or talkativeness. This did not mean that the nonverbal head of the table cue is not
powerful. Both of the stimulus women at the head of the table of all-female groups were clearly seen as the group's leader, thus replicating Pellegrini's original findings. Men at the head of all-male groups elicited the same response. Similarly, a man at the head of the mixed-sex group was also seen as the leader.

In the area of clothing, there are several studies which demonstrate the importance of clothing as a non-verbal cue. Hoult (1954) conducted an experiment in which he measured the effects of changing the type of clothing while keeping everything else the same. Hoult designed his experiments this way. First, forty-six students rated thirteen male students of similar background on such things as "best-looking," "most likely to succeed," "most intelligent," "most like to date or date with," "best personality," and "most likely to have as class president." The four men with the highest ratings were told to "dress down," while the four with the lowest ratings were told to "dress up." Others were told to dress the same. Two weeks later, when ratings were obtained again, Hoult found no evidence that the clothes had been influential in changing the ratings. A high correlation between the social closeness of the raters and the models and the social ratings prompted Hoult to conduct another study. In this study, Hoult used photos of male
strangers who were rated by 254 students from two colleges. Having obtained independent ratings of clothes and the models' heads, Hoult was able to place high-ranked outfits on models with low-ranked heads. Lower-ranked clothing was placed on models with high-ranked heads. Hoult found that higher-ranked clothing was associated with an increase in rank while lower-ranked clothing was associated with a loss of rank. Clothing, he concluded did seem to be a significant factor affecting the judgments students made about these strangers.

Lefkowitz, Blake and Mouton (1955) further demonstrated the importance of clothing in the communication process. They found that pedestrians will violate the instructions given by a traffic signal light more often when others violate it ahead of them. More important, there were significantly more violations when the original violator was dressed to represent a high-status person.

Several studies have investigated the effect of clothing on interpersonal behavior. For example, Suedfeld, Bochner and Matas (1971) found that the clothing worn by solicitors affected the signing of political petitions and Suedfeld, Bochner and Wnek (1972) found that clothing also affected the help given during a political demonstration. In another study conducted by
Raymond and Unger (1971), it was found that both black and white males received more cooperation from a general population sample in response to their requests for change for a dime when they were conventionally dressed rather than deviantly dressed. Schiavo, Sherlock and Westlund (1974) found in their study that when approached by a conventionally dressed female (skirt, blouse, heels, handbag, groomed hair) requesting directions, middle-aged Caucasian women were more likely to give detailed directions or to offer other helpful suggestions and were more willing to get involved with that person than when approached by a female in "hippie" attire (oversize tee-shirt, Army jacket, jeans, sneakers, ungroomed hair).

Bickman (1974) found similar results with males. He conducted an experiment in which he had four men stop 153 adults on the streets of Brooklyn and make various requests. The men were dressed in a variety of clothing which included: civilian (sports jacket and tie), milkman (uniform, white pants, milk bottles) and guard (uniform, badge, insignia, no gun). The men asked pedestrians either to pick-up a bag, put a dime in the parking meter for someone else, or to stand on the opposite side of a bus-stop sign. In each case, the guard uniform received greater compliance. In fact, 83 percent of those who were asked to put a dime in the parking meter obeyed even
after the person in the guard uniform had left the scene.

Not only does clothing affect a person's willingness to comply with requests from others but clothing is also important in the judgments that people make about each other. Several studies support this theory. In one of these studies, Buckley and Roach (1974) found that subjects—shown only a picture of stimulus person—attributed special political and social attitudes to that person. Similarly, Douty (1963) found that subjects make judgments about other people's personality traits and social status when given information just about their dress. Conners, Peters and Nagasawa (1975) in their study found that first impressions were based on the effect of the dress, as well as the physical characteristics of the persons wearing the dress.

Indeed, clothing does play a crucial role in impression formation and does serve as a viable nonverbal cue. It also seems, however, that the effect that clothing has on people's impressions of each other do not disappear overnight and may stay with them for a long period of time. A study conducted by Coursey (1973) supports this theory. In his study, Coursey had two college psychology teachers each come to their first class wearing the black suit and Roman collar of the Catholic priest. For another class, he had the same teachers wear a sports jacket
and tie. When he asked the classes to give their first impressions of the teachers, the classes to which the teachers had come in priestly dress rated them as significantly more moral, reputable, unusual and also more withdrawn, than the classes to which the same teachers had come in regular dress. Nine weeks later, one of the teachers was rated again. The class to which the teacher had worn priestly dress rated him significantly more introverted, solitary, unscientific, self-contained and discouraging than the class where he had started out wearing a coat and tie.

The last study cited in this section supports the importance of the uniform as an indicator of status. Randall Harrison (1974) in his book, Beyond Words describes this phenomenon. He writes:

At one large midwestern university, police were taken out of their uniforms. Their weapons were removed. They were dressed instead in blue blazers with a crest on the coat pocket. One immediate result was a morale problem on the police force. Many of the men simply quit. The uniform was an important part of their self-image. Their chief advanced several reasons for having the men back in uniform. He argued that without the uniform, people had a harder time finding a police officer. Second, he argued that the uniform was a symbol of authority which could stop trouble before it started. The uniform, he argued, would inhibit law breaking. Burglaries would be prevented. Fights would be stopped more easily. Potential rioters would think twice before taking destructive action. The chief also argued that the uniform made the officer impersonal. Finally, the chief
said he wanted his men in uniform because when there was trouble he wanted them to stand their ground. In case of a riot or a difficult situation, he didn't want them fading into the crowd. He wanted them to play their role, no matter how tough it might get. Somewhat surprisingly, the chief got support from some normally opposing forces. They, too, wanted the officers in uniform so they could be spotted. They didn't want police officers sulking around in "plain clothes." (p.148).

In summary, although there is no literature which directly links clothing with a person's ability to be perceived as a leader, there is literature which supports the importance of clothing as a nonverbal cue. In addition, significant literature demonstrating the importance of the "head of the table" effect as a determinant of leadership was also reviewed.

In the following chapters, this author will examine through the use of an empirical study the role that clothing plays in determining who the leader will be or who will be placed at the head of the table as leader of the group. Chapter Three details the methodology, Chapter Four details the results, and Chapter Five discusses the implications of this study.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This chapter describes how this particular empirical study was prepared and implemented. This chapter is comprised of the methodological and procedural elements which were used in this study.

Methods

The purpose behind this study was to investigate the role that the nonverbal cue of female clothing played in determining who the leader would be. Based on the previous review of the literature, it was concluded that clothing does serve as a powerful nonverbal cue, particularly in the area of impression formation. That is to say that the clothing a person wears will affect the way in which others will respond to that person.

Keeping this in mind, this author wondered if what a woman wore would affect her ability to be perceived by naive judges as a leader. Therefore the question posed by this researcher was: what does a woman have to wear in order to be perceived by naive judges as a leader and sit at the head of the table?

One prediction was explored at the beginning of this study to support the theory that what a woman wears
affects her ability to be perceived as a leader. This prediction was based on the work of John Molloy in his book, *The Woman's Dress For Success Book*.

Prediction 1: Males will not choose the pinstripe suit as the outfit with the most authority because as Molloy suggests, "the pinstripe, which is a status symbol for men, is a strong negative in women's suits. It gives off the 'imitation man' effect, and that look destroys a woman's authority with men." (p. 51).

While this prediction was explored, Molloy's work is not sufficiently credible to warrant a directional hypothesis. Therefore, this study explores the null hypothesis:

\[ H_0: \text{There will be no significant difference among the five clothing styles when subjects most choose one model to sit at the head of the table.} \]

**Questionnaire Development**

The first step in developing the questionnaire used in this study was to identify the five categories of clothing which would be used. Please note, throughout this study this author will use the generic term clothing to refer to what people wear on their bodies. Dress, it was decided, popularly appears to refer specifically to a particular item of clothing. Therefore, in an effort to eliminate confusion between "clothing" and "dress,"
clothing will be the term used.

The categories used in this study were based on styles of clothing discussed by John Molloy in his book, *The Woman's Dress For Success Book*. The five categories included:

A. Dresses - the dress designed for this study was a long-sleeved, shirt dress which was black with white pinstriping. It had white lapels which were narrow and came together a little below the neckline. It buttoned up the front with six buttons and had a white belt around the waist.

B. Pantsuit - the pantsuit designed for this study consisted of a black jacket and matching black pants with white pinstriping running through both the jacket and the pants. The jacket was double-breasted and had a belt around the waist which was made out of the same material as the outfit. The blouse worn under the jacket was white with two ties, which were draped over each other.

B. Skirt - the skirt and blouse combination designed for this study was a dark, A-lined skirt which was knee-length. It was belted at the waist with a narrow belt and had a buckle on it. The belt was made out of the same material as the skirt.

The blouse was a white oxford with long sleeves and it buttoned up the front. All the buttons were
closed.

D. Blazer - the blazer in this study was a black man's cut jacket (similar to a sportcoat) with narrow lapels. It had one button in the front of the jacket and two buttons on the underside of each sleeve. It was long-sleeved. All the buttons were left open.

The blazer, in this case, was accompanied by an A-lined skirt which was white and contrasted the black blazer. Under the blazer was a white blouse which had an open neckline. It had narrow lapels and was worn inside the blazer collar.

E. Skirted Suit - the skirted suit designed for this study was a jacket with a blazer cut and matching skirt. The jacket had long-sleeves and two buttons on the front which were closed. The skirt was regular cut and fell just below the knees in length. Under the jacket was a white, tailored oxford blouse, with no frills or lace. It buttoned up the front and all the buttons including the top button were closed. The collar was worn inside the coat.

After the outfits were categorized, an artist was commissioned to draw the women wearing these outfits in accordance with the descriptions supplied by the author. The artist drew the women so each one was the same height and the same width. The dimension used were 4 inches by
6 inches. The artist was also told to draw all the women standing in the same pose. Draw the arms and hands the same on all the women. Put basic, black pump shoes on each woman, an oval face on each woman with no facial features and draw just enough hair on the top of each woman's head so that each woman appeared to be a real person. The women drawn by the artist were then taken to the print shop where they were offset so that copies could be made. (See Appendix A)

The next step in preparing for this study was to develop the actual questionnaire or in this case the answer sheet. Since this study sought to explore what a woman has to wear in order to be seen by others as the leader and sit at the head of the table, this researcher reasoned that the best type of answer sheet to use would be one that provides subjects with a table so all they have to do is put the stimulus women around the table. The answer sheet, therefore, consisted of a rectangular table with five spaces around it. Each answer sheet had the following directions typed on the top:

"Below you will find a drawing of a rectangular table. You will notice after looking at it that blank spaces appear at the head, and at each side. It will be your job to decide who will occupy which seat."
"In order to decide who will sit around the table, I need subjects. That is why you have been handed drawings of five women. Look at the drawings and decide who you think in your own judgment best looks like a leader. Put the number which appears on the bottom of the drawing in the position of leadership around the table. Place the remaining women around the table in the order that you think they should be seated. Please be sure that each space has a number in it." (See Appendix B)

The last step in the development of the questionnaire was to develop a consent form to accompany the questionnaire. This consent form was designed to explain the nature of the study, assure respondent confidentiality and encourage response of the subjects. Confidentiality was assured with the promise that, "I further understand that my written answers will not be identified with me personally and that the data generated in this study will remain confidential with regard to my individual participation." Space was provided on the consent form for signatures and in all cases signatures were obtained before the questionnaire was distributed. (See Appendix C)
Subject Selection

Subjects used for questionnaire data were students at Western Michigan University during Spring and Summer sessions, 1983. All students used were enrolled in classes at the 100 through 300 level. For the total questionnaire distribution, 151 males and 150 females participated, for a sample size of 301.

Procedures

Since this researcher used subjects from classes at Western Michigan University, the first step in obtaining data was to secure the permission of faculty members whose classes were randomly selected.

After permission was obtained and times were set up with the instructors, this researcher went into the selected classes and distributed the questionnaire. In an effort to provide uniform instructions to each set of subjects, the following script was developed and read to all the subjects.

You will be handed a consent form which you will be asked to read. Please remember that all data collected in this study is strictly confidential, that is to say that nobody will know the answers that you have placed on your answer sheet.

The second sheet you will receive is the answer sheet. Please put a "M" or "F" in the upper right hand corner to signify your particular sex. Do nothing to the rest of the sheet at this moment.
The last item you will receive is the packet of subjects which will be used in this study. The subjects you have been handed are randomized. The order that the subjects are in at this moment makes no difference to the study. After receiving your packet of subjects, look at them and then place them in the order which you think best represents a leader and her followers. Which woman do you think looks most leaderlike? Put the leader in the position of leadership around the table and put her followers in the remaining positions. When you have completed the answer sheet, each blank space should contain a number. Turn your answer sheet over when you are finished and wait for further instructions.

Each respondent received a packet of five women, each wearing a different outfit. On the bottom of each drawing there was a number which the respondents used to identify the women. The numbers on the bottom were completely random and this is the order they were in:

1 = skirt and blouse combination,
2 = dress,
3 = the skirted suit,
4 = pantsuit, and
5 = blazer.

Please note that the numbers on the bottom on each woman subject were put there simply to provide a method of coding each outfit.

The respondents took the packets and arranged the women in the order that they thought the women looked most leaderlike. The answer sheet was completed and the answer sheet, consent form and packet of women were collected.
After everything was collected, the consent forms were put in one pile and the answer sheets were separated into male and female responses. After 301 answer sheets were completed and collected, the data was typed into the computer and analyzed. The method of analysis used on the data was chi-square tests. The results are available in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings obtained in this study. The data analyzed consisted of the frequency counts of the number of times a particular outfit was picked by males and females, independent of each other. Four chi-square tests were run on the data to find out what significant differences, if any, existed. The chi-square tests started out analyzing the data from a general perspective and then looked at the data from a more specific perspective. In addition, the chi-square tested the prediction explored at the beginning of this study that males will not choose the pin-stripe suit as the outfit with the most authority.

The first chi-square test analyzed the variables of sex and style. It tested the prediction that a difference would exist between males and females and the choices of the outfits they picked. This prediction was found not to be significant. In fact the choices made by males and females were closely matched ($x^2 = 4.30, p > .05, df = 4$). In the male group, 94 subjects or 62.2 percent chose the woman wearing the skirted suit as the leader while in the female group, 89 subjects or 59.3 percent chose the skirted suit as the outfit of leadership. Not only were the male
and female responses similar in choosing style 3, but there was very little difference between males and females in regard to any of the styles. These figures are recorded in Table 1.

Table 1
Clothing Choices By Sex Of Respondent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $n = 301, x^2 = 4.30, p > .05, df = 4$

The second chi-square analyzed the differences between all people, regardless of sex, and the outfits chosen. In this case, out of 301 subjects, 183 or 60.7 percent preferred one style over the other styles. The data showed a significant number of respondents preferred style 3, the skirted suit as the outfit with the most authority ($x^2 = 331.64, p < .05, df = 4$). These figures as well as the figures for the other outfits
are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Summary Table Of Clothing Choices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Styles</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = 301, $x^2 = 331.64$, $p < .05$, df = 4

The third test conducted on the data looked just at the choices that males made in relationship to the outfits. Again a chi-square test was used, looking just at the two variables: males and styles of clothing. The results showed that males preferred one style of clothing significantly more than the other styles. Out of 151 respondents, 94 or 62.2 percent preferred style 3, the skirted suit ($x^2 = 174.88$, $p < .05$, df = 4). These figures as well as the figures for the other outfits are presented in Table 3.
Table 3
Clothing Choices Made By Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Styles</th>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = 151, $x^2 = 174.85$, $p < .05$, df = 4

The last test run of the data looked at the choices of clothing by female subjects only. Again a chi-square was used to explore possible differences among the female choices. The result showed that females did choose one style significantly more often than any other style ($x^2 = 160.19$, $p < .05$, df = 4). In this case, out of 150 respondents 89, or 59.3 percent chose style 3, the skirted suit. Table 4 reflects the choices that females made.
Table 4
Clothing Choices Made By Females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Styles</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = 150, $x^2 = 160.19$, $p < .05$, df = 4

In summary, the prediction that there would be a difference in the choices males and females made was found not to be significant on the .05 level. Men did not show a preference for an outfit that differed from the choices made by women. When one cell of the chi-square was collapsed, and the total population was pitted against styles of clothing, the results showed that a significant number of people chose one style over the other styles. In this case, style 3, the skirted suit was picked more often than the others. In addition, when just males or females were examined independently, significant results occurred. Males, when not compared to females, chose one style of
clothing significantly more than other styles. Females, when not compared to males, also chose one style of clothing significantly more often than any other style. Thus, the null hypothesis posed in Chapter Three can be rejected. There is a significant difference among the five clothing styles. The skirted suit seems to convey the impression of authority and leadership. For a further discussion of these findings, see Chapter Five.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary

This study was based on the theory that what a woman wears will affect the perception that others have of her leadership ability. The basic research question asked throughout this study was: what does a woman have to wear in order to be perceived by others as a leader? One prediction was explored through this study. That prediction based on Molloy's book, *The Woman's Dress For Success Book*, said that males would not choose the pinstripe suit as the outfit having the most authority because as Molloy suggests, "the pinstripe, which is a status symbol for men, is a strong negative in women's suits. It gives off the 'imitation man' effect and that destroys a woman's authority with men" (p. 51). To test that prediction, 301 subjects were asked to rank five women wearing five different outfits in the order that they looked most leaderlike. Responses were coded based on the subject's sex and analyzed accordingly.

The prediction made by Molloy was not supported. Data from this investigation indicated that males did not find the pinstripe suit as threatening and negative. Evidence to the contrary was obtained. In fact, males
found the pinstripe suit as authoritative as females did. In addition, there was no evidence to suggest that males ranked the outfits any differently than females.

As explained in Chapter Three, while this prediction made by Molloy was explored, Molloy's work is not sufficiently credible to warrant a directional hypothesis. Therefore, what was really tested was the null hypothesis that there will be no significant difference among the five clothing styles when subjects must choose one model to sit at the head of the table.

Based on the findings, however, it appears that this null hypothesis must be rejected. As a total population, people selected the pinstripe suit significantly more often than any other outfit. Males as well as females when tested independently chose the pinstripe suit significantly more often than any other outfit. The pinstripe suit is definitely seen by both males and females as authoritative, and a symbol of high status. In addition to exploring both the prediction made by Molloy and the null hypothesis, this study also sought to answer to the research question: what does a woman have to wear in order to be perceived by others as a leader and sit at the head of the table? The answer to that question as supported by the findings is overwhelmingly the skirted suit.
The results also yielded another important consideration. Molloy writes in his book that:

We took pictures of 12 women in various skirt and blouse combinations and showed them to 100 executives. We asked them to guess the corporate position of that woman.

Sixty-one guessed that was a secretary, 30 guessed she was a typist, and 9 guessed that she did general clerical work. Not one guessed that she was a executive or that she was in an executive track. (p. 68)

According to the findings obtained in this study, people did not see the woman wearing the skirt and blouse combination as a failure. In fact, as a total population, 55 out of 301, picked her to sit at the head of the table. This outfit ranked second in leadership potential. If, as Molloy suggests, the skirt and blouse combination is a failure outfit, then one would conclude that none of the respondents would choose this outfit, but in fact, respondents did choose this outfit as a viable leadership outfit and did put the woman wearing this outfit at the head of the table. This does not verify the results obtained by Molloy. Ironically, this outfit was picked by more people than the dress, the blazer and the pantsuit and if one were to drop the outfits with the lowest ranking, the dress and the pantsuit would be eliminated.
Implications

This study suggests that clothing does play an important role in influencing people's perceptions as to who will lead and sit at the head of the table. The findings obtained in this study support the idea advanced by Porter and Geis that often the choices of who the leader will be are based on subtle characteristics such as appearing authoritative. People see the woman wearing the skirted suit as authoritative and would choose her to sit at the head of the table when all other qualifications of leadership are held constant. This conclusion is not surprising when one thinks about the emphasis that is currently being generated in this society by pop psychology books and articles which constantly preach the absolute truth on "dressing for success."

There is no doubt that clothing does affect the perceptions that people form about others when first impressions are involved. Just think, merely by looking at what a woman was wearing respondents could determine the woman who looked most leaderlike. Not one respondent indicated that there wasn't enough information to make a determination. Clothing does reveal many things about a person. There is little doubt that through the choice of clothing a person wears, his/her personality is re-
flected. Perhaps that would explain why the skirted suit was picked so often, because it represents high status for women. A woman wearing a skirted suit feels important but most importantly she is perceived by others when wearing the skirted suit as being of high status, whether in actuality she is or is not. The skirted suit is the key to success in this society because it allows a woman to be seen as a leader.

What does a woman have to wear in order to be perceived by others as a leader and sit at the head of the table? The answer seems overwhelmingly to be the skirted suit.
Limitations

Future investigation into the role that the non-verbal cue of clothing plays in determining leadership is warranted. Since no literature could be found in this area, this study was basically exploratory in nature. This study had several limitations which should be addressed in further studies done in this area.

This study used only university students since that was the population that was readily accessible. It would be beneficial in future studies to increase the sample size to include various age groups to see if age of the subjects would affect the results. Further, no breakdown of occupation, occupational goals (major or minor) nor year in school was obtained in this study. It would be interesting to analyze the personal data in relationship to participants' responses. In addition, it would be interesting to see if the same results would be replicated if this study were conducted outside of the academic world.

Clearer and sharper drawings should be used. It is imperative in this study that all the women are positioned in the same pose. One leg drawn a half of an inch off will change the pose that a woman is in and will change the perceptions that the participants will have of that particular woman. Each woman has to be the same in body
size, body positioning, pose, facial size, hair, etc.,
the only difference that should exist between the women is
the outfits that they are wearing. Also, the pinstriping
on the outfits needs to be exact. The stripes on the
clothes used in this study were too wide. They were not
pinstripes and caused the respondents to be offended with
the black and white combination of pinstripes and solids.
The striping seemed to be offensive to the respondents'
eyes.

The answer sheet used in this study did not provide
space on it for written comments made by the respondents.
This researcher knew what choices the respondents made
but had no idea why those particular choices were made.
Written comments made by the respondents may provide cues
as to why they select that particular outfit.
Suggestions For Future Research

Since there is no literature that links clothing and leadership, this area is very ripe for future research. This researcher has several suggestions for future research in this area that may be very helpful.

Increase the sample size to include subjects outside of the academic world. What do people in general see as an authoritative outfit? Is it the same outfit as subjects selected in this study?

Provide a space on the answer sheet for written comments from the respondents. This will provide insight into why particular choices were made.

Analyze the data collected from the spaces around the table and not just at the head of the table. What are people's second, third, fourth and fifth choices? Do they have any meaning?

Use colored models instead of black and white models and test the effects of different colors upon one's perceived leadership ability.

This study is just a beginning in an area that seems to be wide open. The conclusions drawn from this study are just the results of one investigation. Further research should be conducted which looks not only at different patterns of women's clothes, but also in-
cludes different types of men's clothing. Who will the leader be when men are added to the investigation? Perhaps the design used here will help others to pursue more information in the area of clothing as a non-verbal cue of perceived leadership.
APPENDIX B

ANSWER SHEET.

DIRECTIONS: Below you will find a drawing of a rectangular table. You will notice after looking at it that blank spaces appear at the head, and at each side. It will be your job to decide who will occupy which seat.

In order to decide who will sit around the table, you need subjects. That is why you have been handed drawings of five women. Look at the drawings and decide who you think in your own judgment best looks like a leader. Put the number that appears on the bottom of the drawing in the position of leadership around the table. Place the remaining women around the table in the order that you think they should be seated. Please be sure that each space has a number in it.
APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

During this term I am conducting a study involving the nonverbal cue of clothing. In order to conduct this study, I need your help. As a participant, I would like you simply to read the following consent form and then respond to the questionnaire.

Julie Ann Larson

CONSENT FORM

As a participant in this study I hereby agree to respond to the questionnaire as prepared by the researcher.

I understand that I am not required to respond to the accompanying questionnaire. I also understand that I will not be penalized should I elect not to participate in this study.

I further understand that my written answers will not be identified with me personally and that the data generated in this study will remain confidential with regard to my individual participation.

Participant's Signature

Date
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