



## Power Dressing and its influence on Business Performance

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### ABSTRACT

*The way we dress has an incredible impact on how we are perceived by others in the work place. Paying fine attention to details and having a strong Fashion style can effectively enhance the business performance strategy. However, Power dressing is a truth which can be visually communicated to help bring forth a significant contribution towards corporate fulfillment. Top designers use the slogan "Power Dressing" in their advertising campaign. For example the Designer Birioni, used the words "Power suit" in his add for the Spring Summer Collection 2012, as he named the suit: White power suit. The intention was to address the needs of the 21st century man as well as their powerfully communicated lifestyles by recognizing the important balance in the workplace, with direction and empowerment. This study will explain: What is power dressing? How it contributes to the advancement at work, and what makes people wear Fashion?*

**Keywords : Power Dressing, Psychology of clothing, Dress for success, Power dressing in the 80's, Accessories, Influential, Assertiveness, Advertisement**

### Introduction:

The way we dress has an incredible impact on how we are perceived by others in the work place. Paying fine attention to details and having a strong Fashion style can effectively enhance the business performance strategy. However, Power dressing is a truth which can be visually communicated to help bring forth a significant contribution towards corporate fulfillment. Top designers use the slogan "Power Dressing" in their advertising campaign. For example the Designer Birioni, used the words "Power suit" in his add for the Spring Summer Collection 2012, as he named the suit: White power suit (Fig 1). The intention was to address the needs of the 21st century man as well as their powerfully communicated lifestyles by recognizing the important balance in the workplace with direction, and empowerment. This study will explain: What is power dressing? How it contributes to the advancement at work, and what makes people wear Fashion?

### Meaning & Origin of Power Dressing:

Power Dressing refers to a style of clothing and hair intended to make wearers seem authoritative and competent, especially in professional settings in business, law, and government. While references to the style apply more typically to women, the look is the same for both sexes: Medium-length parted hair (trimmed on the back and sides for men); dark, conservative, usually matching pants and jacket (sometimes a long skirt for women); and bold, colorful "accents", such as ties, kerchiefs, or brooches. The 1970s books *Dress for Success* and *The Women's Dress for Success Book* popularized the concept of "power dressing." Meaning: A stylish and expensive clothing style, intended to convey the impression of assertiveness and competence and predominantly worn by women. Origin: This term has been used since the late 1970s, which reflected the clothing styles favored in business and politics in the US and UK throughout the 1980s. The style was heavily influenced by influential women who were in the news at the time, for example: The cast of the television shows *Dynasty* (Fig 2) and *Dallas*, the UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Princess of Wales. Men also had form of 'power dressing' too but this was less distinctive and innovative and often manifested itself in little more than an unusually

expensive business suit.

### What is Power Dressing?

Power Dressing is for anyone old enough to remember the 1980's in all its Dynasty/Duran Duran-inspired glory, this entails shoulder pads that are the envy of an American football team, color so brash it necessitates the wearing of sunglasses and viscose-knit dresses so eye-wateringly tight they come with their very own knickers attached. But while all these elements of the Decade that subtly forgot have been re-visited for autumn/winter 2009, the notion of projecting power through dress today is, of course, a little more complicated than that. Those enamored with the Eighties revival will not be disappointed by Balmain designer Christophe Decamin's re-working of signatures from that era to high-end effect. Marc Jacobs, too, is pushing a proudly triangular silhouette and a palette worthy of vintage Versace. Leggings continue to be the trouser shape to be seen wearing – along, of course, with harem pants, another Eighties favorite. There is at least a certain irony to fashion's continuing love affair with the decade; this is not boom-time, after all. With status high on the agenda, referencing the mid-20th-century glory days of haute couture is also de rigueur this season. Alexander McQueen's darkly provocative subversion of Dior's hound's-tooth check resonates. Standing 7ft tall in platform-soled boots, and wearing elaborately conceived tailoring and make-up straight out of Terry Gilliam's Brazil, McQueen's models represent a fractured, fierce view of a feminine ideal that is, quite intentionally, almost impossible to live up to. Wear it if you dare. Then there's "stealth wealth" – the assertion of power via apparently classic clothing. Little black dresses, trench coats and borrowing from menswear all loom large, with designers putting their individual stamp on to time-honored staples. Alber Elbaz, fashion's technician par excellence, knows how to project a discreet luxury and emotional content that is unprecedented. Consider also Balenciaga designer Nicolas Ghesquière's take on the draped jersey dress. This is not Diane Von Furstenberg (or at least, only in her dreams). Instead, the print, partly inspired by the Cristobal Balenciaga archive, is nothing short of visionary and the strong, high shoulder is more reminiscent of the Forties silhouette – another era that spoke of sartori-

al perfection in hard times. Fashion's avant-garde is again to the fore. While Rei Kawakubo's collection for Comme des Garçons may focus on innocence and softly veiled femininity, it remains confrontationally unconventional.

### Power Dressing in the 80's:

Power dressing means a stylish and expensive clothing style, intended to convey the impression of assertiveness and competence and predominantly worn by women. Its origin is dated to the late 1970's early 1980's, where this term reflected the clothing style favored in the business and politics field in the USA and UK, and it continued through the 1980's. The style was heavily influenced by powerful women who were in the news at the time, for example: The cast of the television shows *Dynasty* (Fig 2) and *Dallas*, the UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Princess of Wales. Men also had form of 'power dressing' too but this was less distinctive and innovative and often manifested itself in little more than an unusually expensive business suit.

### The First time the term "Power Dressing" was recorded:

The term 'power dressing' is first recorded in the New York paper *The Post-Standard*, September 1979: "The accent has shifted to glamour and power dressing for the city rather than the casual look of past seasons." The style itself leaned towards a somewhat masculine shape and frequently included a tailored jacket, almost always complete with shoulder pads. The clothes were often made from silk or other expensive materials and their high cost emphasized the elite status of the women wearing them. *Dress for Success: A book* was written in 1975 by John T. Molloy about the effect of clothing on a person's success in business and personal life. It was a best-seller, and it was followed in 1977 by *The Women's Dress for Success Book*. Together, both books popularized the concept of power dressing.

### Power Dressing In History:

The authors of the book: *Power and Style*, emphasized the role of dress as a symbol of power through history and discusses a variety of settings from tribal communities to monarchs and elected officials. *Power & Style: World History of Politics and Dress* is a new book written by French journalist Dominique Gaulme and anthropologist and historian Francois Gaulme. It was translated from the French by Deke Dusinberre. This volume adds to the expanding literature discussing the history of dress and fashion from a global perspective. The authors emphasize the role of dress as a symbol of power through history and discuss a variety of settings from tribal communities to monarchs and elected officials. A great example is Louis XIV (Fig 4), aged 63, in *Full Royal Dress, 1702, Oil on Canvas*, at the National Museum of the Chateaux of Versailles and Trianon, Versailles. Louis the XIV is a great example of a fashion leader who loved luxurious fabrics and represented power dressing in History. However, the authors lay out a good case for the argument that dress plays functions that go beyond mere protection of the body and that decoration and indication of status are primary functions. Men and women in history played important roles and created unique looks that are memorable. Some of the special influential people who had a strong impact in history are: Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, and Queen Victoria, Golda Meyer, and Indira Gandhi. These women, along with many others, held political power as appointed or elected rulers and cleverly used their appearance and dress to express and symbolize their authority. Certain objects such as feathers were a symbol of power to ancient Rome and Byzantium. For example: Augustus in Imperial Rome, calculating the precise fullness of his toga as a way to manage the full transition of Rome from Republic to Empire, or Hitler rummaging in his mind about ways in which his adoption of modest forms of dress could distinguish him from the spectacular uniforms formerly used in Germany. Powerful male figures through history include Constantine, Philip the Good, Louis XIV of France, and Charles II of England. Famous dandy Beau Brummell whose sartorial power did not arise solely from political power but from social power as Brummell promoted the idea of dressing as a moral exer-

cise in simplicity and elegance. Other notable figures in history include Napoleon, Prince Albert, and Edward VII, who is portrayed as a man so passionate about clothing that he was often considered vain and wasteful. Edward VII had a remarkable impact on the development of cosmopolitan wardrobe to accommodate twentieth century active lifestyles. The American style with John F. Kennedy marked as a leading figure in the actualizations of the American look and the development of the country's obsession with comfort and muscularity. As women did not occupy positions of power until the twentieth century, with a long list of powerful women in the twentieth century such as: Margaret Thatcher, Hillary Clinton (Fig 3), Benazir Bhutto, Angela Merkel, one can give a great credit to Coco Chanel who invented the power pant suit for women during the twenties, and added the pearl necklace as a symbol of femininity. The look is classic, powerful, and elegant. This forward thinking of how women should dress in the work force, and yet look feminine, but intelligent has made it through till today. Chanel suits remain the ultimate symbol of power dressing in the twentieth century

### The History of the Power Suit:

During the 1920's Chanel liberates women. Coco Chanel was the one who freed women from those horribly restrictive corsets and gave us some room to actually move and breath. According to the Emerald Street, the original power suit did not involve polyester and shoulder pads, but rather a knitted wool cardigan paired with a matching skirt. This came to be known as the Chanel suit. The suit was usually accessorized with a long string of pearls and was called the "woman's new uniform." Hollywood icon Marlene Dietrich helped popularize the look with her slouchy stylish way of wearing the suit. 1931 The first wide-shouldered suits, according to Vogue, the house of Rochas introduced the 20th century's first wide-shouldered suits for women. Marcel Rochas says that his new silhouette is based on the costumes worn by Balinese dancers. 1942 Kate the Great shows us that suits are for girls too. Katherine Hepburn showed us that a man's suit could actually be quite feminine. Her film *Woman of the Year* made the suit iconic and a wardrobe staple for working women. 1966 The suit gets sexy. Yves Saint Laurent introduces le smoking, the "first male-inspired couture evening suit with pants for women. 1977 Shoulder pads enter the picture. Suits with extreme shoulders became the new fashion rage. "The bigger the better". It was all about power. 1980's Power dressing came into the decade of power clothes in the 80s. Giorgio Armani, Ralph Lauren, and Anne Klein all embraced the power suit in their designs. The film *Working Girl* (1988) also capitalized on the fashion of the decade. Melanie Griffith stars as a smart but undereducated secretary, who can't get ahead, partly because of her looks (big hair, big makeup, and big fail). But when she realizes her classy but terrible boss is stealing her ideas, she gets back at her by stealing her wardrobe which includes those classic power suits and a haircut. It's a Cinderella story, except the fairy godmother is a power wardrobe and the happy ending is a great job (and Harrison Ford). Donna Karan and other designs started producing "softer suits" which often paired the power blazer with a skirt instead of pants. 1990s The softer side Madonna's "Blond Ambition" tour in 1990 featured her wearing a pinstripe suit designed by Jean Paul Gaultier. Pairing the suit with lacy camisoles and that famous cone-shaped bra she injected pieces of femininity into this masculine ensemble ushering a new, softer era of fashion. Working women started pairing lacy camisoles and floral silk shells with their pant and skirt suits. With *Casual Fridays* introduced into offices, Vogue declares it the end of the power dressing era as long flowy dressings and leggings become fashionable. Chanel designer Karl Lagerfeld says, "There is not only a change in fashion going on, but a change of mind." 2000's the skirt of the issue. In the second half of the 1990s we were introduced to the television character Ally McBeal (played by Calista Flockhart). A neurotic but successful lawyer wore the power suit blazer, but with a tiny skirt on the bottom. The length of her skirt drew so much attention that Time magazine famously ran a cover featuring Flockhart's face and asking *Is Feminism Dead? Power*

dressings may have been declared over, but clearly people are still paying attention to what women's clothing says. And some women still look at a pants suit as a source of power. Think of Hillary Clinton—the poster child for the power suit. In 2007 she told David Letterman, “In my White House, we all know who wears the pantsuits.” 2012 The death of the power suit. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the old-fashioned power suit look for professional women is over. The new power look for women includes a soft color (like pink), beading, prints, patterns, and very feminine tailoring—all of which were once considered fashion sins in the workplace. This fashion movement is being sported by women at the executive level who have the confidence to embrace a more integrated and diverse look. We are seeing this trend because there are just more women in these top positions who determine what is an appropriate look for the office. There has been a shift in what is considered appropriate for women in the workplace. It has moved away from women trying to fit into the stiff, male-influenced power suit. Christina Binkley of the *Wall Street Journal* writes, “The matched crimson suit—once deemed essential for a female executive—reflected an era when women tried, often clumsily, to fit into male molds. There was also a militant element to that office apparel.” She wrote of her days at Procter & Gamble in the 1980s when she was informed by a boss that only the “secretaries” wore dresses. The power suit “has had a total demise,” says Bridget Brennan, chief executive of Female Factor, a Chicago-based consulting firm that advises clients on marketing to women. Brennan thinks this is happening because women are more comfortable in their own skins. 2013 The future of power dressing. Women can wear pink, not just powerful red, in the office. They can wear floral and lace. They can wear leopard print shoes and flats. That's right; flats can now be considered just as fierce as heels. Brinkley writes, “Long stuck in the purgatory of casual wear, flats are suddenly being promoted for polished occasions. Flats sleek enough to be dress shoes were paired with tailored suits and even with eveningwear on the spring runways from Marc Jacobs to Giorgio Armani.” In a recent issue of *The Hollywood Reporter*, female executives in the Hollywood talked about the evolution of power dressing. It used to be all about the power suit but now more fashionable and feminine items are considered just as powerful. Giorgio Armani, who made the power suit famous, recently said that women no longer need to wear powerful-looking clothes in order to earn respect from their peers in the workplace. “[Women] have edged out their standing in the world. Today, they don't have to wear a suit jacket to prove their authority.”

#### Reasons why people wear Fashion:

**To be Fashionable:** People may buy new clothing to make them feel that they are trendy or, at least, in the mainstream of fashion. They may discard clothing that is still wearable only because it is out of fashion.

**To be Attractive:** Consumers want clothes that are flattering, that make them look their best, or that show off their physical attributes.

**To Impress Others:** People may want to project a successful image or establish unique identities with fashion. They may want to exhibit their level of taste or income through clothing. Expensive brands have been served as status symbol

**To be accepted by Friends, Peer Groups, or Colleagues:** Average Americans have conservative tastes, and they do not want to differ from their peers. They may want to identify with certain lifestyle. Buying patterns suggest that consumers like some direction or guidance as a frame work for their choices

**To Fill an Emotional Need:** New clothes often help people feel better psychologically. Being secure in the feeling that they are wearing appropriate fashion helps them feel confident and self assured. This motivate, however, may often lead to impulse buying (Buying without careful consideration)

#### What people should and shouldn't wear in the work

**place:** Women are making strides in the workplace, and yet selecting what to wear to meetings and business dinners or just to the office remains a challenge. Designers, fashion stylists and other experts say executive women make an array of mistakes, from dressing too casually to not paying attention to fit. Truth is, most executive women won't be making it onto any best-dressed lists anytime soon. “Clothing is an overlooked component in many women's professional life,” says Mary Lou Andre, head of Organization by Design. In a world where first impressions count for everything and “people are sizing you up and sizing you down,” appearance and clothing are “so important.” Many women make the worst mistakes when dressing for work. It is important that women should pay attention to these points:

Paying attention to the audience  
Not to wear the same style again and again  
Fit is very important  
Going trendy instead of Timeless  
Not to dress for weekend during the week:

When it comes to dressing for work, there's no such thing as one size fits all. One should remember to dress for the company that is paying his or her salary, avoiding clothes that clash with the corporate culture. Investment banks still require conservative suits, usually in neutral colors, while individuality and creative flair are expected in fields such as advertising or film. One should make sure to be sensitive to the office culture. Women should convey professionalism. Ida Liu, a director in the fashion retail group at Citibank's private banking arm says: “I want to be a trusted adviser to my clients. When they are looking at me I want them to see me as intelligent.” Above all, remember that what flies in one office might not work so well in another. Don't be afraid to modify your clothing to fit the culture. Susan Magrino, who runs a New York-based public relations firm, alters her clothes to make them work for the office. She recently purchased a Pucci sweater and added extra hooks to make it less revealing. When shopping for the office, most women head straight for the same designer or store, while it's easy to stick with what has worked before, it is advisable to vary your designers and shop at different stores to create looks that are fresh and innovative and up-to-date. Another great way to update your office look is to try more cutting-edge brands and mix classic pieces with stylish ones. And of course adding accessories such as: scarves and earrings can work in dozens of combinations to liven up a classic look. Always start with the classic suit and add to it the Fad pieces. The correct Fit, plays a very important role in power dressing. Clothes that are too tight and too big should be avoided as well as clothing that are overly revealing, especially in the work place. A perfect fit will not only make someone look good, but it will give that extra boost of confidence as well. Take your store-bought clothes to a tailor. “Even movie stars get their clothes tailored,” Stylist Phillip Bloch, who has worked with celebrities such as: Salma Hayek and Halle Berry says: “Very few people can just go into a store and throw something on and look good.” Unless you work in the fashion field, wearing the latest trends to work is not a smart decision, as wearing overly trendy clothing can overshadow your work accomplishments. “You don't want to walk in wearing a purple fluorescent suit, even if it's beautiful,” says Citibank's Liu. Instead, “be a diva in the evenings.” While it's important to avoid looking too trendy, this shouldn't translate into wearing dowdy clothes. Rory Tahari, vice chairman and creative director of the fashion brand Elie Tahari says: Women tend not to give themselves the freedom to express their own personal style. Women shouldn't be afraid to take a risk now and then with color, prints and fabrics, explains Tahari. “You are a woman and you don't have to dress like a man.” A great example is: “Hillary Clinton who wore her black suit but she threw a pop of color under it. Dress codes have relaxed at many companies, and business casual is now the norm in many workplaces every day of the week. The problem is that many people have no idea what this means. It is important to keep the casual style dressing for the weekend. One never knows when a meeting might take place, so keep

the jeans and casual comfortable clothing for weekend and dress smart avoiding casual attires at work.

#### **Influence of appearance on work performance:**

Many studies were conducted to test the influence of appearance on work performance. One example is the Studies done by Dr. Albert Mehrabian at UCLA, which revealed that when we try to convey meaning through our communication with others, the majority of our message is communicated nonverbally and through voice and facial expression. Approximately seven percent of the message is communicated by words. His studies revealed that up to 37% of a first impression is based upon the speaker's tone of voice. On the telephone, that number rises to 80% or higher, according to many communication consultants, there are four areas that have a huge impact on one's image. Appearance is one of these categories that play an important role in representing one's self professionally:

appearance  
interpersonal interaction,  
written interaction, and  
Networking.

**Professional Appearance Counts:** The standard advice given by mentors and managers to people who want to advance their career has always been to dress for the job you want, not the job you have currently. Even in this day of more casual dressing for work, your professional image will serve you well when promotions, lateral moves, choice assignments and departmental visibility are available. A professional appearance sets you apart from coworkers who are less concerned about projecting a successful, professional image. The advancement of an employee from one job position to another job position that has a higher salary range and a higher level job responsibility is called a promotion. Sometimes a promotion results in an employee taking on responsibility for managing or overseeing the work of other employees. Decision making authority tends to rise with a promotion as well.

#### **Power Dressing and its influence on Business Performance:**

While modern power dressing isn't as concerned with looking haute-bourgeois as Eighties power dressing was, it's has shifted towards adding a touch of color to liven up the look. However, there is a big return to power dressing," agrees fashion buyer Sarah Davidson of Thistle Street's designer boutique Jane Davidson. "However, power dressing now is all about doing it in a softer way. It's more feminine. There are lots of structured dresses such as Roland Mouret's famous Galaxy, suits have strong shoulder lines and silhouettes are sleek." Thankfully, on the high street there are no big shoulders either and instead they've gone for a playful twist on power dressing, inspired by the catwalk". A report in 2007 stated that the structured jacket still plays a huge part in power dressing, and while the shoulder pads glimpsed in the Commons are not of the Dynasty proportions of the 1980's, padding in that area is still noticeable. Marks & Spencer is a shop that features heavily on the MPs' power shopping destination list. Other power shops chamber, observed Diana Johnson, Labour MP for Hull, herself an exponent of the powerful-but- approachable printed jacket, currently de rigueur in political circles. On the other hand, Hugh Holland, managing director of bespoke tailors Kilgour French Stanbury on Savile Row, agrees. He sees the traditional suit as the ultimate power uniform in a state of economic war. "The most obvious form of power dressing," says Holland, "is that people now think twice before dressing down." According to Holland, it's the details that count. "Watches, especially an antique Cartier or Rolex, will make the right impression," claims Flusser. But Holland advises caution: "Watches are extremely important but you need to take care. The city is very sophisticated and you'll be judged accordingly. Just like the car you choose, it's a very strong statement. Get it wrong and you might as well strap a huge wad of notes to your wrist."

#### **Conclusion:**

Power dressing means a stylish and expensive clothing style, intended to convey the impression of assertiveness and competence and predominantly worn by women. Power dressing is a term that was used in the late 1970s, which reflected the clothing styles favored in business and politics in the US and UK throughout the 1980s. The style was heavily influenced by influential women who were in the news at the time, for example: The cast of the television shows Dynasty and Dallas, the UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Princess of Wales. Men also had form of 'power dressing' too but this was less distinctive and innovative and often manifested itself in little more than an unusually expensive business suit. Even though there are many reasons for people to wear fashionable clothes such as: To fashionable and attractive, to impress others, and to be acceptable by peers, and friends, or to fill in an emotional need. All these reasons cannot eliminate the necessity for power dressing especially in the workplace. One never knows when is a meeting will take place, so casual attire at work is not recommended by stylists, or fashion directors, as it may give a bad impression about the person. First impression is a lasting impression. Dressing smart will indicate that the person is intelligent and that he or she is capable of making smart decisions. The suit with a Jacket with broad shoulder pads that was popular in the 80's is the symbol of power dressing, however with the change of fashion styles, the power dressing has shifted to a softer more feminine approach with a touch of color to liven up the classic look, but for men it is always the good quality fabric suits, that fit right, make the power dressing look. There is no doubt as many fashion experts agree, that power dressing with smart suits, and good quality fabrics with perfect fit can enhance the performance at work, and make room for promotion, as they indicate that the person is smart and can make intelligent choices, and powerful decisions. Sometimes the details are good indicators of power dressing such as the watch and accessories. Making the smart choice, can impress others, and enhance one's status at work. One can never go wrong by dressing for success. As Robb Young the author of the book (Power Dressing)"First ladies, women politicians & Fashion", says: "Every woman plotting her way to the top should read 'Power Dressing' to decide on her political armor of choice and to gauge the weight of what she wears." This is another proof that there is a big relation between power, success and fashion. However, the famous designer, Giorgio Armani has a different opinion, as he believes that women no longer need to wear powerful-looking clothes in order to earn respect from their peers in the workplace. He says: "[Women] have edged out their standing in the world. Today, they don't have to wear a suit jacket to prove their authority."



(Fig 1) White power suit by Birioni



Power Dressing in the 80's



Louis XIV as a symbol of Power



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