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The role of dress style for senior women in a corporate consulting firm

by

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Minor Dissertation submitted in part-fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Magister Philosophiae

in

Leadership in Performance and Change
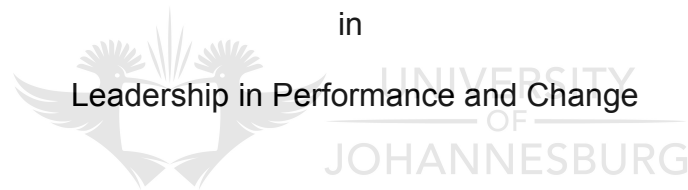
Faculty of Management

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

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2014

DECLARATION

DECLARATION

I certify that the minor dissertation submitted by me for the degree Magister Philosophiae (Leadership in Performance and Change) at the University of Johannesburg is my independent work and has not been submitted by me for a degree at another university.

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RUMBIDZAI CHARITY MAKINA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

Orientation: Studies by numerous authors such as Damhorst, Jondle, and Youngberg (2005), Damhorst (2005), Hymowitz (2005), Miller-Spillman (2005), Peluchette, Karl, and Rust (2006), Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, and Mackie-Lewis (1997), Rafaeli and Pratt (1993), and Schmalz (2000a) have corroborated the belief that appearance and dress style are important and significant factors in a person's career progression. This is because people are often judged on their outward appearance in the first four to 10 seconds of the first interaction. Additionally, the way women dress is scrutinised more than men because of pre-existing notions about what constitutes masculinity and femininity (Kalkowski & Fritz, 2004; Omair, 2009). Rarely are these first impressions changed, and often the decision for future interactions are made based on these first impressions. There may also be an impact on women's career progression due to the opinions of their co-workers, partly based on the women's dress style.

Research purpose: The aim of this study is to explore the role of dress style of senior ranking women in a corporate company by examining the importance, expression and significance of dress style for women. In studying the dress style of the participants, I establish how they maintain their dress style identity while maintaining the balance between their gender and corporate dress policy and also taking into consideration elements of their cultural heritage.

Motivation for the study: This study is important as it seeks to determine whether or not, senior women in a corporate South African workplace have consciously used dress style as a means to progress their careers. No similar study has been conducted in corporate South Africa, and this study seeks to gain better insight into the way dress style has been used by senior women to enable their career progression.

Research design, approach and method: A qualitative approach was adopted for this study. Data was collected from 10 senior executive women in one consulting firm by utilising interviews and photographs. Data analysis was conducted in a two-pronged approach, with thorough within-case and cross-case analysis for themes based on the research questions.

Main findings: The findings suggest that the women in this study have a strong sense of dress style identity, which is linked to their personal brand in the workplace. Participants expressed their individuality in ways that were authentic to them, which mostly consisted of accessories, and in a few cases artefacts of cultural heritage. The findings also highlighted the fact that the women in this study actively managed impressions, using their dress style in order to manage the opinions of others. From the findings, there was no tangible association that could be established by the participants regarding their dress style and career progression. The study also established that there were no significant changes to their dress style in the time that the participants have been working.

Practical/managerial implications: The results of this study highlighted the impact that dress style choices had on career progression and impressions in the workplace. This study may also enable professional women to consider the range of implications that their dress style has on their career and personal brand.

Contribution/value-add: This study contributes to the literature on impression management and personal branding. It also adds more depth to previous literature on dress style by examining both the professional and personal dimensions of dress style and establishing a link between the two. Furthermore, this study clarifies how dress style can be used to support career progression by complementing the total package that women present in a professional environment.

Keywords: Organisational dress; workplace attire; dress style; individual dress; organisational fashion; self-expression; personal brand.

THE ROLE OF DRESS STYLE FOR SENIOR WOMEN IN A CORPORATE CONSULTING FIRM

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1 BACKGROUND, PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 Introduction

The role of women in the workplace has changed radically over time, with more women occupying roles that were reserved for males. These roles, on the face of it, appear masculine. Amey and Twombly (1992, p. 476 cited in Lester 2008, p. 278), state that women who occupy leadership roles are expected to fit into the leadership images of "philosopher-kings and military heroes that render women invisible". As part of their role in the workplace women 'dress the part', which in corporate and typically masculine environments results in women wearing the 'corporate uniform', leaving little room for self-expression. The aim of this study is to explore the role of the dress style of senior ranking women in a corporate company by examining the importance, expression and significance of dress style for women. This will give the reader insight into the wider impact that one's daily choice of apparel may have on perceptions of the wearer within the workplace.
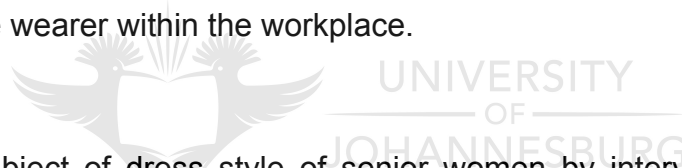
I explored the subject of dress style of senior women by interviewing a group of female leaders within the South African branch of a global management consulting corporate workplace. This study was undertaken in order to establish how dress style identity is maintained, while taking into account the balance between cultural heritages, gender and roles in a typically masculine environment. The study explores the role of dress style of senior ranking women in a corporate company by examining the importance, expression and significance of dress style for women and whether female corporate leaders utilise dress style to support and build their careers.

Legitimising the "I"

Although research is meant to be an entirely objective activity, it is also a product of the researcher and the context in which it is constituted. This study is my individual pursuit to understand the role that dress style plays in the South African branch of a global corporate company. This is a personal narrative of my engagement with senior women in the company that I am employed by, and an attempt to reconcile

my experiences in corporate South Africa with theirs. In this minor dissertation, I legitimise the living "I" (Mc Niff, 2008) because my participation in the research resulted in the "I" being representative of my experiences in corporate South Africa. "I" is a personal pronoun, which is opposite to the remote third person "the researcher", and will be used going forward in acknowledgment of my proximity in the research process.

1.2 Background to the problem

In the past three decades, the development of feminist methodologies and ideas has led to an increase in the understanding of women's issues. Most publications prior to the 1970s could be classified as male-dominated, that is written by men, for men, with few women as research participants (Haralambos, Holborn, & Heald, 2000). Furthermore, aspects of social life that were relevant to women such as crimes committed by females and housework were rarely studied. The description of the position that women were perceived to occupy in society was summarised into three broad categories by Haralambos et al. (2000) as:

- Domestic goddesses, for example, bearing children, in the roles of wives, mothers and caretakers, as well as washing, cooking and cleaning;
- Subordinate to their male partners; and
- Excluded from positions of power and senior positions in their occupations of choice.

In recent years, the roles that women occupy in society have shifted, with women occupying roles that were once seen as masculine. This has brought about a new set of challenges, despite their senior positions their role expression in organisations still remains typically masculine. Consequently, women are being defeminised and acting more masculine in order to achieve and retain success. The defeminisation of women is encouraged in modern literature, because it is believed that by having a woman 'stop acting like a girl' (Frankel, 2004), she will increase the likelihood of advancing her career. Supporting the viewpoint that women are being defeminised is Deutsch (2007, p. 114), who states that the positions that women occupy within the workplace may compound their behaviour, in other words; "women act like women

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because the positions they occupy require feminine behaviour". Likewise, men behave in a manner befitting their positions within an organisation, which typically require assertive leadership, physical strength, proficiency and autonomy. The conclusion reached is that when men enter typically female jobs, they are constrained to perform the role according gendered norms, thus reproducing gender within that job (Deutsch, 2007).

Dress style therefore becomes another extension of the fit between the incumbent and the role that they occupy within an organisation. In this study, dress style refers to clothing, for example skirts, trousers, jackets as well as artefacts and accessories such as shoes and jewellery. Dress in organisations is significant because it serves two key functions, it asserts control and it conveys identity (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). In an African context, dress style is of particular importance according to Suriano (2008, p. 110) "due to the adoption of recent fashions and the creative manipulation of well-established clothing styles contributing to the redefinition of both personal and social identities".

1.3   Gendered roles

Literature provides the view that there are differences in the way that women are treated, even if they occupy masculine roles (Deutsch, 2007; Gregory, 1990; Kalkowski & Fritz, 2004; Kirchmeyer, 2002; H. M. Levitt & Hiestand, 2004; Singh, Kumra, & Vinnicombe, 2012; Wiley & Eskilson, 1985). There are three theoretical perspectives that attempt to provide clarity on whether "an individual's sex, position, or both determine his/her behaviour and traits in an organisation and how she/he is treated" (Gregory, 1990, p. 257). The three perspectives are Marina Horner's person-centred view, Rosabeth Moss Kanter's organisation centred view and Joy Schneer's gender contest view. The three perspectives give solid insight into the historic issues experienced by women in leadership positions. This study adds to the body of literature in the field of women in management by questioning if the traditional business dress style is a requisite for success. In her study of office décor Elsbach, (2004, p. 100), made the case that "physical identity markers are widely interpreted as cues of employees' status and rank, as well as their distinctive abilities

and work ideals". Elsbach's findings can be applicable to dress style, especially within the workplace, as this is a type of physical identity marker.

There have been numerous studies conducted on the subject of workplace attire. One such study was conducted on Masters in Business Administration students in the Midwest and South-Eastern part of the Unites States of America by Peluchette, Karl and Rust (2006, p. 45), which focused on individual's beliefs on workplace attire, and on

> *"the value placed on workplace beliefs, attitudes and the impact of clothing and attire on workplace outcomes (e.g. promotions, raises), the effort and planning involved in dressing appropriately for work, how clothing made them feel, and whether they used their attire to manage the impression of others in the workplace".*

Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, and Mackie-Lewis (1997) yielded similar findings in a study that they conducted on administrative employees at a school of business administration in a large Midwestern university in the Unites States of America. The Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, and Mackie-Lewis's (1997) study concluded that dress can be a critical element in the role assumption and performance of an employee. The study found that females understand the role that dress plays in their work performance, and dress in a manner that is relevant to their role.

In effectively performing their gendered roles, individuals need to take cues from their peers and those around them as to what constitutes acceptable behaviours and symbols, including dress, which according to Peluchette et al. (2006, p. 47) is an "informative role symbol for engaging in their work and how they relate to others in the execution of their role." Organisational roles frame the expectations that govern behaviours. Therefore in order for an individual to fulfil their roles in relation to the expectations of others, they need to perform their role in a satisfactory manner (Rafaeli et al., 1997) by wearing the expected dress. While this may explain how individuals select their workplace attire and the correlation to their roles within the organisation, it does not give an indication of the importance individuals place on

their workplace attire and how they use dress style to express their individuality while simultaneously building their careers.

Studies conducted by Peluchette et al., (2006), Pratt and Rafaeli, (1997), and Schmalz, (2000) on the subject of dress style have found that compared to their male counterparts, females place greater importance on their attire as an enabler or disabler to fulfilling the mandate given to them by their roles within an organisation. Where individuals place high importance on dress style, this has translated into a method of managing impressions and has had a positive impact on their self-perceptions and workplace outcomes such as promotions and compensation (Peluchette et al., 2006). In a study done on African American women and their struggle for professional identity, Bell and Nkomo (2003, p. 13) found that in order to gain acceptance, "African-American women are expected to assimilate. They have to literally lose their blackness for white colleagues to feel comfortable with them." However, most of the African American research participants in the Bell and Nkomo (2003) study were unwilling to completely leave facets of themselves out of the workplace, and wore accessories that were atypical and allowed them to express their individuality.

Bell and Nkomo (2003) suggest that the struggles that women experience regarding assimilation in the workplace are in some ways a result of sexual tension. By entering the workplace in non-traditional roles, Bell and Nkomo (2003) assert that women have violated the original sexual contract, which dictates that women are best placed in the home rather than the boardroom:

> "I think there are men who are very easily intimidated by smart, strong women because in their experience women are not like that; plus, they're not attracted to women like that. So they don't know how to deal with them. Men who are used to thinking of women as sexual partners don't really know how to deal with situations when they're presented with an intelligent, opinionated, forceful woman. It is very awkward" (Bell & Nkomo, 2003, p.14).

As a result, women in the workplace who often occupy typically masculine roles are often faced with a paradox. Their roles dictate that they have masculine traits, and their positions within the organisation hint that they must dress in a manner that is defeminised in order to increase their perceived effectiveness. Yet at the same time, that very same characteristic of masculinity discredits women to their male peers because the subconscious expectation is that a woman dresses and acts like a woman. The contradictory nature of gendered expectations experienced by professional women in corporate leadership roles is referred to as the double bind, and is defined as:

1. "A psychological impasse created when contradictory demands are made of an individual...so that no matter which directive is followed, the response will be construed as incorrect.

2. A situation in which a person must choose between equally unsatisfactory alternatives; a punishing and inescapable dilemma" (Catalyst, 2007, p. 1).

Put succinctly, dress has multi-cultured meanings, and in an organisational it context can be used as a means of identification and unity. Women in the workplace have had to defeminise themselves in order to fit into the male norm by becoming asexual or masculine. Studies by several authors such as, Barsh, Cranston and Craske (2008), Denmark (1977), Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001), Kuppusamy, Ganesan and Rosada (2010), and Powell (2011a), have shown that so called masculine leadership styles are prevalent in many women who occupy senior positions. This leads to the hypothesis that women in senior positions shed most elements of their femininity, including those related to dress such as accessories, hairstyle, colourful blouses, shoes and even quirky handbags. This is because women in leadership positions are more believable if they shed feminine appearance and behavioural traits such as smiling frequently and touching.

To date, studies conducted on the subject of defeminisation of women in corporate organisations are evident in the research conducted on the leadership and dress styles of women who occupy senior positions (Denmark, 1977; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). While dress style is usually ascribed in corporate settings through

dress code policies, women have more leeway within these policies to be flexible, and are not restricted to wearing the standard the corporate uniform of a suit and tie. Women have long struggled to be treated as equals in the workplace, part of which may mean conforming to gendered roles in order to assimilate with their male counterparts and displaying more masculine traits. However the implications of the double bind to women's individuality and workplace identity have not been fully debunked. Pratt and Rafaeli (1997) state that while organisational dress has recently been relegated to conversations around dressing for success, there is a long and established history of studies on dress and its role in corporate social organisations.

1.4 Women and careers

There has been an evolution in research on women's issues over the years (Gregory, 1990; Nkomo, 2012). Within the business managements sciences, there has been a slant towards studying Miner's construct of 'motivation to manage' which "assesses the desire to satisfy the requirements of the managerial role that has traditionally existed in hierarchic organisational contexts, particularly within business firms" (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly, Karau, Miner, & Johnson, 1994; Miner & Crane, 1981), as a means of discussing leadership in the workplace as the number of women aspiring and attaining management positions increases. According to Kalkowski and Fritz (2004, p. 26-27), "feminists and other interested people were still noting that only a very disproportionately small number of women were reaching the goal of top management. Motivation continued to be considered a key to attaining management levels, and researchers were still studying whether there were gender differences in motivation".

There is a plethora of literature on the subject of women and labour and there is no shortage of literature that attempts to coach women on behaviours that will allow them to advance their careers by behaving more masculine. However, there have been few studies that focus on the role of dress style in South Africa, which is a melting pot of cultures. Literature provides the view that there are differences in the way that women are treated, even if they occupy masculine roles. This research focuses on the subject of women in management. The motivation behind women

ascending to management positions will therefore be a topic of interest for a long time (Nkomo, 2012). Either until such time as there is no distinct difference in the recorded statistics of male and female managers, or until such a time that dress style is not used as an indicator of leadership preparedness (Kalkowski & Fritz, 2004).

1.5 Motivation and rationale for the study

The purpose of this study is to explore what the role of dress style is in the working lives of senior ranking women in a corporate company by looking at the importance, expression and significance of dress style for women. This study also explores how successful female leaders in corporate workplaces express their individual dress style while working in male dominated environments. The intention of conducting the research is to learn more about the importance and significance of dress style in the careers of the research participants, as well as ways in which women in senior positions in a consulting firm express their individuality through dress style.

This study facilitates a deeper insight into how much influence and what role dress style plays in the working lives and career progression of senior women in a global corporate consulting company. This is turn may reveal that there are other elements apart from incumbents job ability that may contribute to career progression. This will be of particular benefit to corporate consulting because of the high visibility that results from corporate consulting having a bigger percentage of women in leading positions in South Africa, which is in line with Affirmative Action policies. Theoretically, by understanding how women express their individuality and embrace their femininity through dress style, the findings could assist in expanding the research base that uncovers the uses and strength of feminine dress style in a typically masculine environment.

1.6 Problem statement

For decades, women have fought for equal rights within the workplace, and this has led to more women occupying previously male dominated positions. Women who occupy senior positions in a company should be free to dress in whatever manner

they feel comfortable, providing that it is within the confines of the company's dress code policy. However, in a corporate environment senior women are often defeminised by dress code policies of standardisation and uniformity. Additionally, corporate workplaces have historically been male dominated, potentially resulting in negative career progression outcomes for women when they do not dress in a masculine manner and therefore do not look like men (Hopkins, 2005). This has led to the double bind that women experience in the workplace as they rise within the ranks in that they can neither be too masculine or too feminine.

Employees in their places of work should be able to express elements of individuality in their dress style, such as artefacts from their cultural heritage and elements of their personal style through their manner of dress. However, typical company dress code policies leave little room for expression and supress individuality (Joseph & Alex, 1972). The challenge that women face is how to express their individuality through dress style in a manner that does not hinder their careers in corporate consulting or detract from their work and the image they wish to construct, portray and maintain in the workplace. Additionally, it is important to establish what level of importance these women place on dress style, and whether any of the participants have a link between their career progression and the manner in which they dress. This leads us to the following research questions:

1.7 Research questions

- How do successful female leaders in a consulting firm express their individuality through dress style?
- What is the significance of dress style in the work lives and career advancement of senior women in a corporate consulting firm?
- What importance do senior women in a corporate consulting firm place on dress style?

1.8 Anticipated contributions of the study

The study will add to the body of literature that exists on the factors that contribute to the career progression of professional women. This study is unique to the South African context, because existing studies in South Africa on the role of dress are confined to the post-apartheid rhetoric (Tulloch, 2010) and traditional clothing is confined to the context of drag dressing (Spruill, 2004). This study is focussed on the female agenda, in particular on professional women and the contributing factors to their professional success. There have been significant studies conducted on the role of organisational dress, and this research will add to the body of literature from the perspective of successful women in corporate consulting. This may be of use to executive women and those aspiring to reach senior positions by enabling those women to make informed decisions as they go about the daily business of dressing for work. Policy makers and personal branding consultants may also find the study insightful as it may lead to less archaic rules and parameters around workplace dress styles for women.

1.9 An outline of the remaining chapters

The proposed chapter outline is as follows:

Chapter one will serve as a broad introduction to the study, giving the reader a background to the research problem and existing literature on the problem. Chapter two comprises a research design, whereby the reader will be introduced to the research approach and strategy employed in this study. The reader will also be introduced to the sampling strategies, data collection and recoding methods. Chapter three is a presentation of the research findings based on the evidence gathered through the data collection methods. Chapter four is a comprehensive literature review, which will strengthen the reader's understanding of the findings discussed in the previous chapter. Chapter five is a discussion of the findings and an interpretation of the data presented, based on the literature presented in the previous chapter. This dissertation concludes with chapter six with a review of the state of knowledge, research findings and a confirmation of the research contribution.

1.10 Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to explore what the role of dress style is in the careers of senior ranking women in a corporate company. This will be done by examining the importance, expression and significance of dress style for women. The study will also explore how successful female leaders in corporate workplaces express their individual dress style while working in male dominated work environments. One of the objectives in conducting the research is to learn more about the ways in which women express their individuality through dress style in leadership positions.

By deepening our understanding of female dress codes, we will be able to uncover deeper insight into women in leadership in a way that goes beyond masculine and feminine leadership traits. Specifically, the emphasis of this study is on understanding if dress style holds any significance in the lives of senior women in a corporate organisation in South Africa and whether it is an enabler or disabler to their career success. By discovering this, we may begin to uncover more elements that contribute to career progression. Theoretically, by understanding how women express their individuality and embrace their femininity through dress style, the research could assist in expanding the body of literature that uncovers the uses and strengths of feminine dress style in a typically masculine environment.

The next section of this dissertation will introduce the reader to the research design utilised in this study. This includes the research approach, methodology and sampling strategy.

2 RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 Introduction

This study is of an exploratory nature; therefore a qualitative research approach has been used. Qualitative research refers to studies that are conducted on a small scale using a select group of participants. The nature of the size of qualitative studies requires deeper probing into individual cases in order to elicit values and feelings, therefore interviews, focus groups and participant observation tend to be the most common means for data gathering (Okey, Bryman, & Burgess, 1994). Qualitative research is primarily focused on exploring and describing rather than explaining human behaviour and is viewed as the broad methodological approach to the study of social action. The advantage of qualitative research in the context of this study is that it is conducted in the natural setting of the social actors. It focuses on the viewpoint of the research participants, thereby gaining a thorough understanding of the events being researched from the perspective of the participants.

The nature of qualitative reasoning is such that generalisations can be deduced from the findings, thereby leading to new theories and hypotheses being created. This is of particular importance to this study, which aims to understand the role of dress style of senior ranking women in a corporate company by exploring the importance, expression and significance of dress style for women and by examining if there are other elements that contribute to the career progression of women in a South African corporate workplace (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Qualitative research explores social situations through direct observation and interviews, resulting in data obtained through themes and patterns. By making sense of the data gathered from the viewpoint of the research participant, qualitative research is thus able to give detailed descriptions of socio-cultural phenomena which are difficult to convey in a quantitative manner (Bryman, 2005; Curtis & Curtis, 2011).

The research strategy of this study follows an inductive approach in line with the research questions of this study. An inductive approach "begins with an immersion in the natural setting, describing events as accurately as possible as they occur or have

occurred, and slowly but surely building second-order constructs, a hypothesis and ultimately a theory that will make sense of the observations" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 273).

2.2 Research approach

2.2.1 Ontological and epistemological considerations

All qualitative research is based on a philosophy, which is guided by highly abstract principles. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011) these principles result from a combination of three things, namely ontological beliefs, epistemology and methodology. Bryman (2005, p. 631) describes ontological issues as ones whereby the social world is deemed as an external element to the actors, or "as something that is in the process of being formed" by the social actors into their own experiences. Simply put, ontology speaks to "the nature of reality" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 12). Constructivist ontology postulates that a situation where researchers believe that social phenomena are not constructed through governing laws, but are rather determined by human interactions with participants and are in a constant state of revision and negotiation (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Neuman, 2003). Constructivist ontology needs to be examined in order to understand the nature of qualitative research and to enable us to develop, articulate and understand the context in which the qualitative methodology is being conceptualised.

Constructivist ontology research is grounded in the theory that individuals create their own social world through interactions (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Neuman, 2003). "Constructivist ontology allows us to understand how a social phenomenon is created through interaction and inter-subjective meaning. This is contrary to the view held by objectivists who believe that social structures determine an individual's actions and behaviour" (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 12-13). I believe that social interactions are not static or predetermined, but are the result of the intersection between time, place, people and events. In an order to avoid the research results being forced to fit into predetermined criteria, it will be approached without a pre-existing hypothesis.

The study adopts an interpretivist epistemology, which maintains that social sciences research must respect the differences between the individuals and objects studied. Epistemology speaks to "what the relationship is between the enquirer and the unknown" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Epistemological issues are described by Bryman (2005, p. 2) as "whether or not a natural science model of the research process, like the one used in chemistry or biology, is suitable for the study of the social world". The main tenets of this argument are that social situations are fundamentally different from natural sciences, and the study of social interactions require a different logic of research procedure, and interpretation of the individual's world from their perspective (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Bryman, 2005; Neuman, 2003).

Following on the epistemological and ontological considerations, the qualitative research paradigm which outlines the criteria for evaluating research and type of narration have been used in this study:
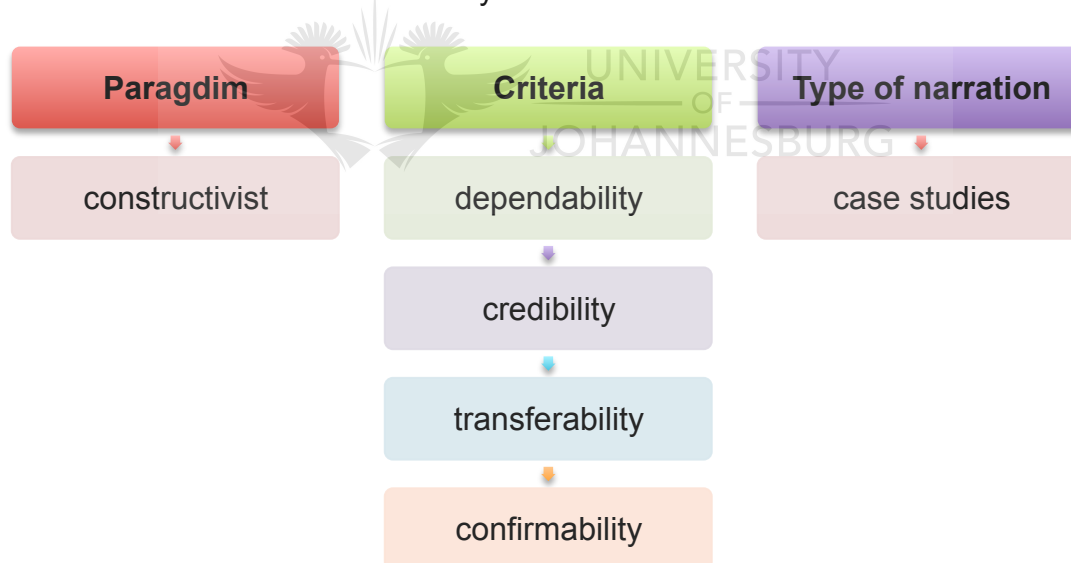
Figure 1. Research paradigm. Adapted from "Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited." By Y. S. Lincoln, S. A. Lynham, and E. G. Guba, 2011, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. London: SAGE Publications.

2.2.2 Feminist research methodology

For the main purpose of this research, which focuses on women, constructivist ontology was chosen in conjunction with an interpretivist epistemology in order to better understand the phenomena under investigation. This is because feminist

research "is based on the heightened awareness that the subjective experience of women differs from ordinary interpretative perspective" (Neuman, 2003, p. 88). The aim of feminism is to give women a voice and to uncover power relations between men and women. Feminist research is based to two key tenets; its focus on the station of women in society and on the overarching belief that women are discriminated against. Such research is motivated by the desire to break social myths and empower society while advancing values of social equity. The underlying social realities to feminist approaches are the power relations that so often oppress many women. Feminist researchers believe that this type of research advocates the value of females by looking at the research through a female lens and seeking to eradicate the power imbalance between the researcher and the research participants (Deem, 2002; Neuman, 2003).

The main aim of feminist research is to facilitate personal and social change while simultaneously advancing female values and women's rights. The research strategy including epistemology, ontology, questions, data collection and analysis will be influenced by feminist philosophy. Epistemology, from a feminist perspective, views the social world as a network of interrelated human relations. The research questions and methods harness the emotions and experiences of the research subjects and my empathy as the researcher in order to relay the research participants' social world as they experience it. Feminist researchers are inclined to understand and commiserate with their research participants while also being process oriented and inclusive of all facets of social life (Deem, 2002; Neuman, 2003).

Neuman (2003) states that the qualities of qualitative research, are that it is used as a means to construct social reality and cultural meaning by focusing on interactive processes and events, and relying on authenticity, in other words, it relays genuine experiences of the subjects of the research. It is conducted in situational and controlled settings with small groups of participants. The research is conducted in a thematic way, whereby I observe and participate in the social settings at the time. By doing so, I will allow the experiences of the research participants to unfold and for

them and then tell their story, rather than creating artificial research settings, which could possibly alter the results. This is in line with the selected ontological and epistemological approach.

2.3 Research strategy

In order to understand the phenomenon being researched, this study utilised a multi case study approach, more specifically, embedded subcases (Yin, 2013). To gain a better understanding of the subject of dress style, 10 senior women in the same organisational environment were selected. The research was conducted through the examination of 10 cases using interviews and photographic data in order to gain a holistic understanding of the cases. A case is defined as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" whether it is in an individual instance, a role, in a small group, an organisation or a community, as well as within processes, decisions and policies (Punch, 2006, p. 144). Following on the main tenants of case study research, the study was conducted in the natural setting of the organisation, which has a strict dress code. Also, there was a holistic focus on case study research with the intention to "preserve and understand the wholeness and unity of the case", thereby making the case studies used more of a strategy than a research method (Punch, 2006, p. 144).

The unit of analysis was the individual woman, and therefore each case was analysed to identify the specific themes and similarities that emerged. Major differences across cases were also highlighted (Fitzgerald & Dopson, 2009; Punch, 2006). According to Neuman (2003), qualitative data is expressed in text form, which is, written words, phrases, or symbols that may represent people, actions and events. I chose to use interviews as the main method of sampling, because according to Neuman (2003, p. 290), they have the highest response rate of all the types of surveys available. Additionally, interviews afforded me the opportunity to ask in depth questions and probe deeper into issues of interest during each interview.

2.3.1 Research setting

Although the unit of analysis in this study is the individual woman, it is important to understand the context in which these women work. A description of the women in this study is in Table 3. No further details other than those in Table 3 are provided in order to protect the anonymity of the participants. The research was conducted in the South African branch of a global corporate management consulting company that has a reputation for its standardised and masculine dress code, governed by their dress code policy. The dress code policy is outlined in a dress code booklet, which each employee receives upon accepting an offer of employment from the company. The dress code booklet outlines what is deemed as acceptable workplace apparel, and was first created in 1993 after the company's Human Resources practitioners noticed that the employees of the company were not abiding by the dress code policy. The booklet was then refreshed in 2013 in order to keep the contents relevant. Excerpts from the two booklets are in Table 1 for reference.

2.3.2 Gaining access to the participants

I gained access to the research participants by way of seeking written permission from the relevant senior executive. Additionally, I gained the support of the executive sponsor for the *Women in the Workplace* by partnering in workplace initiatives including the creation of the updated company dress code booklet. This enabled me to cultivate crucial relationships, which in turn facilitated my being granted access to the women within the company.

THE ROLE OF DRESS STYLE FOR SENIOR WOMEN IN A CORPORATE CONSULTING FIRM

Table 1

Dress Code Booklet

	1993 Dress Code Booklet	**2013 Dress Code Booklet**
Tailord Suits		
Business Casual		
Traditional Dress		

Business Casual		
Shoes		

Source: Company dress code booklet (1993; 2013)

2.3.3 Purposive Sampling

The cases in this study were deliberately and purposefully selected, because "sometimes it is appropriate to select a sample on the basis of knowledge of a population, its elements, and the purpose of the study" (E. R. Babbie, 2006, p. 184). Purposive sampling was employed as the study focuses on senior women in one organisation in order to "build in variety and acknowledge opportunities for intensive study" (Stake, 2007, p. 129).

The purposive sampling had a two-fold sequence, which allowed me to select the research participants (D. R. Cooper & Schindler, 2004). The primary sampling criteria started with a selection based on the level of seniority of the participants, and secondly it narrowed down the number of participants. The ranking system of Elliot Jaques was used as one of the criteria for secondary sampling, as it is also the ranking system within the consulting company. The Stratified Systems Theory, first introduced by Elliot Jaques, identifies seven levels of work in an organisation (Jaques, 2006). Rather than being hierarchy based, the Stratified Systems Theory proposes that the work assigned to jobs and roles is structured in levels of increasing complexity. Therefore the cognitive and integrative skills required to operate successfully at higher levels of work are greater than those required at lower levels (Jaques 2006; Grobler 2005). A further criterion was a selection of women between levels 4 and 6, referenced in Table 2 below.

Table 2

The stratified systems theory levels of work

Level	Responsibility	Span of Control
Level 4	Strategic Development	Is responsible for overseeing large-scale implementations, with the additional mandate of managing client relationships. This involves conducting a needs analysis, assessing costs, planning, risks and then directing the resulting restructuring of roles and services.
Level 5	Strategic Intent	Deals with the fulfilment of needs by restructuring services and shaping future solutions to mitigate projected risks.
Level 6	Corporate Citizenship	Deals with the development of strategy in order to give direction to the coordination of large-scale projects.

Source: Adapted from "Levels of work: New applications to management in large organisations" by W. Kinston, W. Killston, and R. Rowbottom, 1989, *Journal of Applied Systems Analysis*, 16, p. 19-34.

This primary sampling strategy resulted in a potential sample group of 122 women within managing consulting. The next step was to reduce the potential participants order to gather richer data within the population frame thereby increasing confidence in the results. The sampling technique, as illustrated in Figure 2, was chosen because it contained both conforming and non-confirming (extreme, deviant and typical) cases with the intent of "elaborating the initial analysis, seeking exceptions and looking for variations" in the cases and data collected (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p 28) as part of the secondary sampling strategy. Due to the nature of the consulting business, it was a simple exercise for the potential participants to be observed prior to selection. It was imperative that the selected cases be in line with the secondary sampling strategy, therefore each potential participant was assessed according to the criteria in Figure 2, prior to being invited to participate in the study.
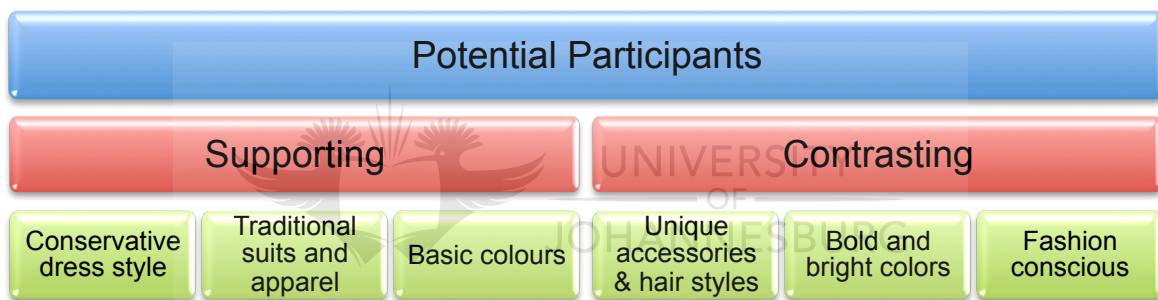
Figure 2. Secondary sampling strategy

The selection of the cases in this study was guided by Yin (2013, p. 7-8), who stated that a "multiple-case design might call for two or more cases that deliberately tried to test the conditions under which the same finding might be replicated. Alternately, multiple cases might include deliberate contrasting cases". The cumulative result of the sampling strategy was a selection of 10 diverse senior women and based on the criteria of the secondary sampling strategy, all of them are in various stages of their career, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

The participant profiles

Name	Level	Descent	Have children?
Participant 1	Senior Manager	African	No
Participant 2	Managing Executive	African	Yes
Participant 3	Senior Manager	Indian	No
Participant 4	Senior Manager	Caucasian	Yes
Participant 5	Senior Manger	Indian	Yes
Participant 6	Managing Executive	Caucasian	Yes
Participant 7	Senior Manager	Caucasian	Yes
Participant 8	Senior Manager	African	Yes
Participant 9	Manager	African	Yes
Participant 10	Manger	Caucasian	Yes

In line with the constructivist ontology underpinning this research, there was no pre-screening of potential participants according to demographics relating to age, race and background.

2.3.4 Data collection methods

Field research in a qualitative context requires the direct involvement of the researcher and good organisation, because the steps in the research are not necessarily predetermined. According to Neuman (2003), flexibility is a key advantage in this research method because it gives the researcher leeway to change direction and to follow leads. The main protagonist and the only constant in qualitative research is the researcher themself. This research will employ a two-method research approach using interviews and photographs as a method to document the different aspects of corporate dress style. The paths that this research will follow are illustrated in Figure 3.
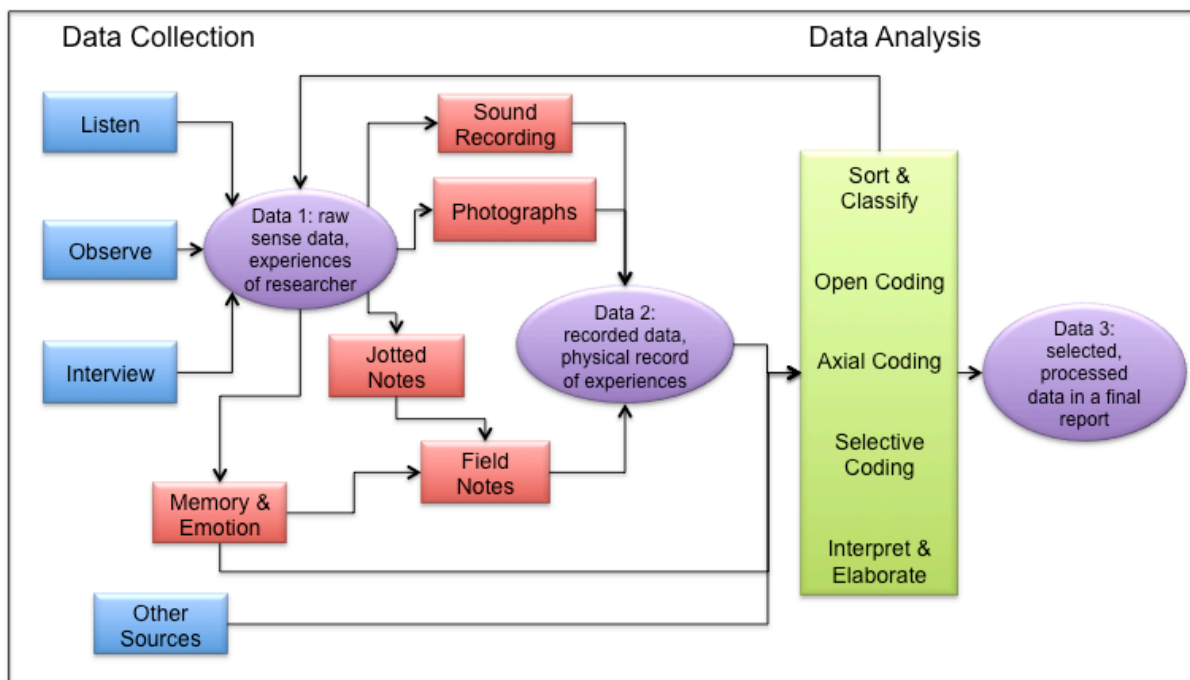
Figure 3. Data in field research. Adapted from **"**Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches" (5th ed.) by L.W. Neuman, 2003, p, 448. Copyright Pearson Education: New York, NY.

According to Trochim (2006) the process of data collection is extensive, and it draws on multiple sources of information. In this study, the data was elicited during semi-structured interviews whereby the participants responded to the questions presented in Table 4. The data was recorded through note taking, which was then supplemented by recordings. Furthermore, each respondent was requested to bring a photograph taken in the early stages of their career to the interview in order to conduct an analysis of the type of clothes that they wore at the time. This was done in an attempt to establish if there were significant changes in the participants dress style from the time they started working, up until now, the point where they occupy positions of seniority.

This method of photographic analysis is called photo elicitation, where one combines photographs with participant interviews, it is widely utilised in organisational research (Buchanan, 2001; Epstein, Stevens, Mckeever, & Baruchel, 2006; Harper, 2002; Ray & Smith, 2012). The photographic data in this research was used to enhance and confirm findings from the interviews based on the research question which explores the significance of dress style on the work lives and career advancements of the

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research participants. The photographs were used to capture the dress styles of the research participants and to find significant patterns across the photographs (Buchanan, 2001; Ray & Smith, 2011a).

Table 4

Interview Questions

1. Establishing a baseline,
 	
    a. Tell me about your (cultural) background.
 	
    b. Describe what you are wearing today
 	
    c. How did you reach the decision to wear this outfit this morning?

2. General clothing interest, What importance does dress style have in your life?
3. Appearance labour, How much effort and time do you put into to planning and maintaining an appropriate wardrobe or outfit for work or work-related events?

4. Expression of individuality,
 	
    a. (How) do you bring elements of your personality/individuality through the way you dress at work?
 	
    b. How does your cultural background play itself out on your dress style / clothing artefacts?

5. Value of workplace attire, What importance do you place on the opinions of others regarding your workplace attire?
6. When you reflect on your career up to this point. What pattern has developed over time between your dress style and the positions that you have held?
7. What is the significance of your dress style on your career advancement?
8. To what extent do you use your attire to influence other's impressions of

yourself in the workplace?
9. How do you use attire to accomplish certain workplace objectives in your relationships with others (e.g. establishing rapport, authority)?
10. Complete this sentence: "When I am dressed for work, I feel..."
Discussion of Photo   Background information: Date, location, employer, position   11. Describe what you were wearing (why? Dress code etc.)   12. What are the main differences in the way you dress now compared to then?

13. Role that the following played in changes in dress style during career:
     a. Your economic standing;
     b. The economic purchasing power of people/ SA economy;
     c. Control over personal choice;
     d. Variety of alternative clothing styles available;
     e. The existence of the notion of conspicuous consumption;
     f. The ability to experience satisfaction from one's choice.

14. What are the key changes that have taken place in your career since the photo was taken?

Photographs, as a method of organisational research are beneficial because photographs provide another accurate lens through which the researcher can further understand the research subjects. An inherent assumption with photographs is that they provide a glimpse of reality because images can have multiple meanings, which are socially constructed (Ray & Smith, 2011b). The photographs proved to be an effective way to supplement interviews because they provided a means of data collection that was less restrictive. As authors Bignante (2010), Epstein, Stevens, Mckeever and Baruchel (2006), and Harper (2002) argue, photographs are more accurate than any other conventional means of data collection because they allow

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the researcher to capture aspects of organisational reality without unintentionally misrepresenting findings through recall bias (Ray & Smith, 2011a).

2.3.5 Recording of data

The data documented in this study included both verbal and photographic elements from the interviews.

2.3.5.1 Interview data

The interviews were recorded through a digital recording device and were backed up on a secondary device. The data files were labelled immediately after the interviews and stored on multiple laptops. These files were then sent for transcribing and the returned files were quality-checked in terms of the actual recorded data and the naming conventions on the files. These files were then loaded onto Atlas.ti in preparation for the data analysis.

2.3.5.2 Photographic data

The participants were requested to bring to their interviews, a photo of themselves taken early in their careers for discussion during the interview. The intention of using the photographs in this manner was to capture the evolution of the dress styles of the research participants (Ray & Smith, 2011a). Copies of these photos were taken, and labelled in the same manner as the corresponding interview transcript. The photographic data was stored on multiple password-protected devices, and was then loaded onto a laptop for analysis.

2.3.6 Data analyses

2.3.6.1 Interview data

Qualitative data manifests in the form of written text, phrases or symbols, all of which describe people in social settings (Neuman, 2003). From the data collected, a detailed description of each case was done through the explanation of the information collected. This was done by first classifying the data using codes that were based on the research questions. These codes were then grouped together

into themes. Furthermore, any relationships that emerged through the coding process were marked and grouped into code families. Themes or issues were formulated and then interpretations and assertions were made about each case by organising the data in such a way that it revealed aspects of interest and relevance. After the initial coding was concluded, I rechecked the codes to ensure that the correct associations and assignments had been made, and that the code names and definitions were logical.

Trochim (2006, para. 4) states that when there are multiple cases being chosen for study, a typical format is to provide a "detailed description of each case and the themes within the case, called within-case analysis", which relate each case to the others. This process was then followed by a thematic analysis across the cases, called a cross-case analysis. The cross-case analysis served as an interpretation of the meaning of each case and a comparison of each case in relation to the other cases used in the study. I observed and participated in the social settings in real-time, and in doing so, I allowed the experiences of the research participants to tell a story, rather than creating artificial research settings, and thereby possibly altering the results. This study made use of 10 cases in order to give insight into the significance of dress style of successful women in a consulting firm. The sample size was sufficient as data saturation occurred after the seventh interview.

2.3.6.2 *Photographic data*

The data was analysed in a thematic manner, with the data being categorised by recognisable patterns between the historic photograph and the present photograph. The final step in the data analysis was to interpret and elaborate on the research results. Data analysis refers to a search for patterns within data for repetitive patterns and objects. Once a pattern has emerged, it is interpreted in terms of the social setting that it was studied in. In this instance it is a corporate consulting South African workplace, thereby shifting from describing an event to generalising the interpretation of its meaning (Neuman, 2003). Due to the nature of the research and the small sample group used, it was not necessary to arrange the data into text segments. I did however conduct a within-case analysis by theme in order to provide

detailed descriptions of each case for the purpose of extending the themes across all the cases. A cross-case analysis of the data was then conducted using themes that were common throughout the cases.

2.4   Reporting

2.4.1   Structure of the minor dissertation

The chapters in this minor dissertation follow an unconventional format. I first did a basic literature study to identify any gaps in the literature. I then went through the data analysis process before going back to the literature. The decision to not use theory to design methodological steps of this minor dissertation was based on Yin's (2013, p. 9-10) assertion that not using literature to determine methodological steps "can be highly rewarding, because you might be able to produce a "break the mould" case study". The literature chapter is therefore placed after the findings to reflect this process.

2.4.2   Reporting of the data

The data will be reported in two formats. Firstly, the within-case analysis, whereby each individual case is coded in-line with the themes identified. One within-case analysis is presented in the addendum in the format that it was analysed in for reference. The second reporting format is found in Chapter 3 and contains the findings from the cross-case analysis where all the participant cases were analysed according to the main themes identified during the data analysis process. Within the themes, the data was arranged by code with quotes from the participants to validate the findings. The next chapter contains more information about the detail of the reporting undertaken in this study. Chapter 5 is structured by the main themes identified in Chapter 3. The discussion is written in a realist style (Van Maanen, 1988), whereby the findings are compared to the literature in order to corroborate or dispute what is known about the subject of dress style for senior women.

2.5   Strategies to ensure research quality research

Qualitative research methods have been criticised for being unrepresentative, thereby making the findings impossible to generalise. However, as Bryman (2005, p. 228) states, "concerns about external validity and ability to generalise often do not loom large within a qualitative research strategy", because the researcher has to adapt the meanings of reliability and validity, and make them relevant in a qualitative context. In this study, the question of reliability and validity were addressed through the criteria identified by Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 114), namely "trustworthiness and authenticity". Trustworthiness in this study, as previously indicated in Figure 1, is measured by credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

This study can be declared dependable and conformable, should the field notes and methodological steps be followed in the exact same way. It is important to note that dependability and conformability are difficult in qualitative research because even if the exact steps are followed, it may be difficult to replicate the exact social, political, cultural and emotional state of the research setting. The credibility of this study is "judged by the extent of respondent congruence whereby you take your findings to those who participated in your research for confirmation, congruence, validation and approval" (W. M. K. Trochim & Donnelly, 2008, p. 149). The first draft of the findings was individually shared via email with each participant in order to allow for feedback and approval. As there were no objections raised by any of the participants, I took this to mean that the findings were credible. This research employed a multiple case study approach; therefore the transferability or generalisability of the results were not the intent of the study, as the sample size was small. However, some of the findings may be useful in other organisational contexts, to policy makers and to women who may be considering how to leverage their dress style to their advantage.

For the purposes of this study, I took rigour to mean how we demonstrate integrity and competence by relying on the ethics of the study; and validity to refer to the level of generalisation that will directly result from this study (Bryman, 2005; Tobin & Begley, 2004). I relied on a qualitative research method described by Seale and Silverman (1997) where a systematic coding system was used, in this instance it

was in Atlas.ti., and this was supplemented by reading through the transcripts in search of deviant and confirming cases. The findings presented in the next chapter are representative of the reality faced by women in a South African consulting company.

2.6 Research ethics

Research ethics are of particular importance, especially in intimate settings such as those in case studies where there is one on one interaction between the researcher and the participant.

> *"Quality is seen as a precondition for ethically sound research. Good research is more ethically legitimate as it is worth people investing their time for taking part in it and revealing their own situation or giving insight into their privacy. Ensuring and promoting quality of research becomes a precondition of ethical research"* (Flick, 2008, p. 8)*.*

The focus on personal opinions and intimate details of the participant's lives in this study makes ethics of considerable importance (Stake, 2007).

Curtis and Curtis (2011) refer to one of the main reasons for the decline in research in social sciences as being the issue of ethics, particularly voluntary informed consent, which is the most important element of ethically appropriate research. The process of obtaining informed consent usually requires that the research participants be given all the information that is necessary prior to commencing the study, in order for them to make an informed decision about their participation. Such information included data privacy information, what the research will be used for, how long the research process will take and how to contact me after the research has been conducted. Additionally, at the beginning of each interview and engagement, I will again need to restate key information, in order to ensure that the participant fully understands what she is consenting to. Consent is given when the participant signs the release and indemnity forms, thereby acknowledging understanding (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). In this study, close attention was also paid to ethics when using

photographs to ensure full compliance with the data and privacy policies of the organisation (Ray & Smith, 2011a, 2011b).

In this study, I paid special attention to maintaining professional integrity, as well as the anonymity, the privacy and confidentiality of the research participants. I had a responsibility to ensure as much as possible that the participants come to no harm due to their participation. This required that the confidentiality and anonymity of participants be very closely guarded. The study was conducted in my place of employment; therefore a level of professional detachment was necessary to make sure that participants did not feel spied upon. I also obtained the consent of the organisation prior to commencing the research to make certain that there was transparency between me and the participants as well as with the executive sponsor, and that the participants were not deceived nor were they required to deceive management.

2.7   Research risks and mitigation

The proposed research raises ethical concerns for the research participants in terms of maintaining their anonymity throughout the process. The questions raised will pertain to company policies, management's interpretation of the policies, and the application of such processes. In organisations, the use of photographs is associated with heightened ethical considerations due to data privacy issues relating to the sensitivity of the images of people. The confidentiality of the interviews was paramount to maintaining the ethics of the study. The names of the participants and other identifying features that will result in their identities being revealed was not and will not be disclosed in the notes or in any other form, and I have ensured that all transcripts and data are stored on secure devices which are kept in a secure environment. The participants were informed both verbally and in writing as to when, how and why the data was used (Neuman 2003). Additionally, there were no hard copies made of any of the transcripts and photographs.

2.8   Conclusion

This section described the research design. The study will be underpinned by a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology. This will enable me to allow the research participants to create their social world, and allow me to maintain a feminist outlook throughout the process. Data was gathered by dual means of interviews and photographs, and analysed in a thematic manner. The next section will give a detailed overview of the research findings, drawing from the themes identified during the analysis process.

3 FINDINGS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the findings from the data collected. The setting is that of female leaders within the South African branch of a global management consulting corporate workplace. These findings aim to explore the role of dress style of senior ranking women in a corporate company by examining the importance of and expression in their dress style; as well as to unpack the significance of dress style for women in order to determine whether female corporate leaders leverage dress style to advance their career progression and how these women express their individuality. The findings are based on a sample group of 10 women within the Stratified Systems Theory levels of between 4 and 6, who can then be categorised into conforming and non-conforming cases.

This chapter contains the cross-case findings only; however, an example of the within-case findings is provided in the annexure to this minor-dissertation. The data is two-pronged: firstly via network diagrams based on the data as it appears in the analysis tool Atlas.ti, and secondarily by categorising the data under the different codes. The network diagrams are used to illustrate the links between the codes used in the data analysis process. These network diagrams are:

- Figure 3: Importance and significance of dress
- Figure 4: Expression of individuality

Secondly, the data is arranged by codes. Under the header of each code, there are quotations that can be linked back to the data source in Atlas.ti by the denotation of participant [P] and line item e.g. (234:256). In order to preserve the integrity of the responses, all quotations are verbatim.

3.2   Importance and significance of dress style

Figure 4 reflects the codes from Atlas.ti on the importance and significance of dress style.
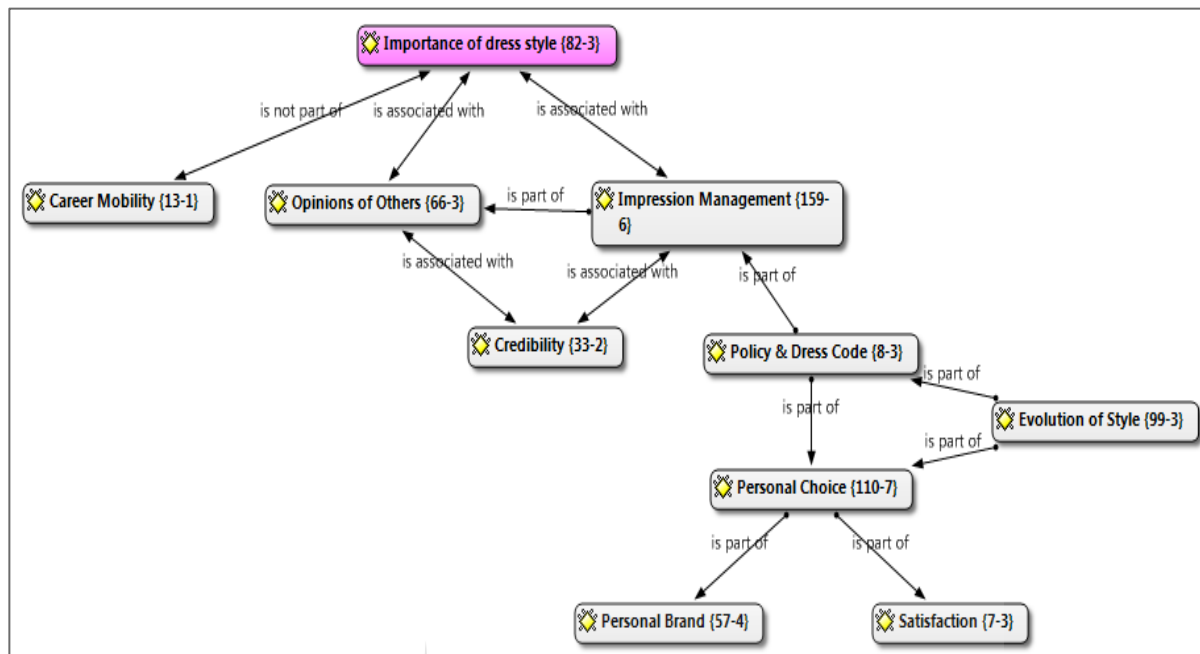
Figure 4. Importance and significance of dress style - network view

The primary code 'importance and significance of dress style' is represented in the network view in Figure 4. The theme presented in Figure 4 attempts to establish the commonality that exists between the choice of apparel and impression management. Therefore, during the data analysis under 'Importance and significance of dress style' the focus was on establishing how the respondents use their dress style to influence relationships, confidence levels and to manage the opinions of others.

3.2.1 Parent Code: "Importance and significance of dress style"

Code Name: Importance and significance of dress style

Number of quotations linked to this code: 82

Code Comment: This code is used to denote whether the research participants use their dress style to assert control or to convey status.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding the importance and significance of dress.

P 3: (58:58)

The more senior you get, its more male-dominated meetings so you need to also make sure you're taken seriously.

P 1: (48:48)

For me, it's about how are you received and perceived in a context so looking your best, I think, is a good thing, in terms of people taking you seriously and around you making an effort around how you look and feel.

P 2: (58:60)

For me it's more a personal thing when I'm dressed up usually in a formal manner and in a way that makes me feel good. It impacts on my day. The way I dress impacts the way I feel throughout the day. So if I'm in a place where I'm really made up; hair down, make up, high heels, I feel like a real professional. So that impacts how I go through the day.

P 5: (107:107)

For me dress style is what helps me to boost my confidence levels in order to perform well.

P 3: (56:212)

Professionally, I think if you've got big client meetings, people judge us a lot by what they see. In initial meetings I always think 'look professional. Keep neat. Be on time'. Also look in terms of decorum, like when you bring papers to a meeting, have them stapled together, not like you're coming all dishevelled. Just look professional and look organised.

P 7: (50:50)

It's so important. Growing up, I thought that clothes were a very superficial thing. But people judge, whether I like it or not. People judge you based on your appearance.

In their responses to questions on the importance of dress style in the participants working lives, eight agreed that it was important. Of those eight, three participants made specific mention to using dress style to influence other people's impressions and opinions of them as well as a means to express their seniority in a male dominated environment. Additionally, two participants spoke about their confidence levels rising when they are dressed in a specific manner. The general consensus was that people do judge you based on your appearance; however participants articulated that outputs need to match appearance because career advancement is not only about appearance.

3.2.1.1 Code: "Career mobility"

Code Name: Career mobility

Number of quotations linked to this code: 13

Code Comment: This code is used for quotations that refer to the use of dress and clothing to increase career mobility in the leadership ranks. Career mobility in the context of this study refers to the upward mobility of the respondents within an organisation, including promotions.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding career mobility.

P 6: (212:214)

I think it does not… In the company that we are in now, there will never be a discussion saying that because this person doesn't dress appropriately, they can't be promoted.

P 5: (259:259)

I don't know of anyone who's been held back because of a lack of good dress style.

P 4: (188:188)

…And the package is work performance, it's the way they carry themselves, their emotional maturity. It's their ability to deliver, it's their connection with their team and I'm sure that if they didn't have an iota of dress sense it would probably be a deterrent. For a person who dresses well and extra well, will that make a difference to performance? Probably not.

P 6: (214:224)

…But I think it does play a huge difference in unconscious bias. How you are perceived, you are perceived as being professional, as being senior, as being competent and part of that is how you come across and part of how you come across is how you look… I can't say that they definitely didn't promote me because I changed my dress, but it could certainly have been a factor, yeah.

The significance of this code in this study was to ascertain whether the participants actively used their dress style to pursue and achieve their career objectives. There is no direct correlation between career mobility in this context to the career development and personal satisfaction of the participants. None of the respondents interviewed could tangibly link career mobility within the consulting company to dress style. Nine of the participants acknowledge the role that dress style plays in perception management, and the indirect relationship that dress style has to their credibility. Dress for these participants is used to bring attention to their ability to deliver, and enable them to look the part of a senior woman in consulting. No participants could say with absolute certainty that their promotions have been as a result of their dress style. However, all participants acknowledged the 'unspoken' role that dress could play in building them up as a total package.

3.2.1.2 Code: "Credibility"

Code Name: Credibility

Number of quotations linked to this code: 33

Code Comment: This code is used for responses that elude to dress style being used to establish rapport with colleagues and clients, as well as to establish oneself as a senior member of the company.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding credibility.

P 2: (302:302)

You sit around the table you have a conversation with someone, such as your peer or you have to present to someone superior or to the client, the way you dress makes communication clearer.

P 1: (84:84)

I don't wake up in the morning and think, "Let me dress up so that people will take me seriously in a meeting". I think there's a big element around what you do and what you say and the content that you bring to a meeting rather than what you look like. But I do definitely know that if you are looking sloppy you will raise an eyebrow, not in the right direction, you know.

P 3: (216:216

 I think wardrobe in my career plays a very small role I think the role of wardrobe in my career is very small

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P 7: (40:42)

I think one of the challenges that I have is I typically get told that I look very young. And for somebody who's in an extreme lead position like I am, it is important for me to choose my clothes properly. Today we had a stage gate meeting. It's normally a meeting where I do need to be quite assertive and so I do choose my clothes to be a bit more serious compared to a Friday, for example which is a bit more business casual. So I had to go into that meeting looking like this is serious and we mean business.

All 10 of the participants have used dress style to influence perceptions of themselves in the workplace. However, some participants acknowledge that the way you dress is only one factor that can be used to establish credibility. Not all participants agreed with the common findings about establishing credibility by leveraging dress style. One participant uses dress style to enhance her maturity, therefore giving observers the impression of increased seriousness and a high level of formality, in order to augment her credibility.

3.2.1.3 Code: "Evolution of style"

Code Name: Evolution of style

Number of quotations linked to this code: 99

Code Comment: This code is used for quotations in which the participants refer to how much their dress style has changed over the years. This was used to establish if there has been any significant wardrobe changes since the participants began working, and attempts to establish causation to their career progression.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding evolution of style.

P 1: (072:072)

I think I am more comfortable and more experimental and more expressive of who I am. When I was younger there was a view of what a professional look is like so it would be your suit, pants and a jacket. I actually don't like to wear pants. So I've kind of like let that go in terms of power dressing as that was seen as relevant in the day. I am now more expressive around what I like and what I enjoy and less about how I'm supposed to look.

P 5: (091:093)

I think when I first started working it was very toned down, kind of colours. You know, like blacks and greys and those kinds of things. I think in recent years I've started exploring the full spectrum of the rainbow. So I'm comfortable with most colours.

P 6: (089:089)

I tried to dress very formally but in the process of trying to dress very appropriate and very formal I also dressed very boring.

Most participants began their careers dressing in a manner that they perceived as expected in a professional context, which is the traditional suits and shirts. In the past, sometimes the choice of dress style was driven by dress code policies, however it was largely perception driven for the majority of the participants. The most prominent trend to emerge is that once the participants started to understand what

their personal style was, in relation to their personal brand they began to dress in a manner that better suited them.

3.2.1.3.1 Photo elicitation

The participants were requested to bring a photo of themselves taken early on in their careers. This was used to establish a baseline of their dress style when they first started working. Participants were then asked to describe the main differences in the way they dressed then as compared to now. By looking at a photo of themselves which was taken early in their careers, the participants answered part of the first research question: What is the significance of dress style in the work lives and career advancement of senior women in a corporate consulting firm? The participants were asked to comment on the photos and highlight what they thought were the key changes in the way they dressed. The data in Table 5 is a snapshot of four of the participants. The analysis of the photos included only elements visible in the photograph.

Table 5

Photo elicitation

Then	Now	Comment
		P 3: (289:289) I think there's as much a range and variety as when I started working. I just don't have the time to shop anymore, so I like shops that have wardrobe staples.

		P 7: (101:159) I think hair, shoes, and make-up. I was introduced to the world of GHD*, which sorted, out a lot of my hair issues I think. It sounds silly but I think you know the big poofy kind of hair just doesn't look professional.
		P 5: (91:93:289) I think when I first started working it was very toned down, kind of colours. You know, like blacks and greys and those kinds of things. I think in recent years I've started exploring the full spectrum of the rainbow. So I'm comfortable with most colours. I think my style hasn't changed that much. I'm still into like you know the V-necks, the complimenting your features kind of thing.

---

* A GHD (Good Hair Day) is a hair straightening iron

		P 2: (254:254) Mine has been fairly consistent actually. The only thing that I would say that has changed maybe the heel size has gone down a bit. Its medium heel instead of very really high stiletto heels and so that element could have decreased. I used to wear my nails very long and, I mean, every week was spent going to do my nails. That one I've since stopped. Make up, I used to wear much more make up.

None of the photographs discussed by the participants yielded any significant findings. While there have been subtle changes in the way the participants dress, theses can easily be attributed to changing styles and changing personal preferences.

3.2.1.4 Code: "Impression management"

Code Name: Impression management

Number of quotations linked to this code: 159

Code Comment: This code is used to reference statements made by the participants with regards to how they use dress style to distinguish themselves and set themselves apart from their peers.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding impression management.

P 6: (95:95)

At work I do, I would definitely say I do use dress to distinguish myself as being a senior member of the team.

P 2: (226:230)

I know it's important because when you get into a situation where you need to look like you know your subject matter, people tend to make judgement calls about you on the way you look. Because I know they are going to make the judgement call, I go in knowing how I want to come across.

P 5: (111:111)

So, if I feel like I'm meeting a client for the first time and I want to make a really good impression then I'll dress it up a bit, put the jacket on. You know, have more of a business kind of look to it. If I'm meeting with my teams I'll come in dressed down a little bit because I want them to relax around me and I don't want it to be too formal

Dress style is the most visible aspect that can be manipulated by a person to call attention to oneself; likewise it can also be used to enhance certain opinions of oneself and used to denote seniority. The participants all used dress style to manage impressions and by extension, perceptions of themselves in the workplace. As senior women in a male dominated workplace, eight out of 10 participants used dress style to convey their position of seniority within the organisation and also within their project teams. They all agreed that impression management was critical, especially during the initial meeting phases, and more especially with their clients.

3.2.1.5 Code: "Opinions of others"

Code Name: Opinions of others

Number of quotations linked to this code: 66

Code Comment: This code refers to how much weight the participants place on the opinions of other people regarding the manner in which they dress.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding the opinions of others.

P 4: (139:139)

I believe that I'm a role model. So I have to make sure that what I'm wearing, I think is appropriate. I do care about what other people think but I think more; am I representing the right image for the company, the right woman as a senior woman to kind of director and the right woman as a mother.

P 1: (84:84)

I just know is that it matters to look appropriate. Not necessarily good. So I'm not into, "I'm going to look smashing at work." No, it is really about looking appropriate and feeling comfortable with who you are, in your skin, for you to do whatever is necessary.

P 6: (232:232)

I want to consciously make sure that I am perceived as a leader from the company and a senior person in our organisation. So even if the pervasive culture with the client and in our team I'm working with right now is to dress a bit down, you will see that myself and the three other senior managers on the team, we all still dress quite formally where the rest of the team dresses down. And we never discussed how we would dress as senior members of the team.

P 10: (77:77)

I think it's important but I don't think you should base your personality and how you dress on what people think. But I still think what people think is a reflection of how they might approach you and how much respect they might have for you.
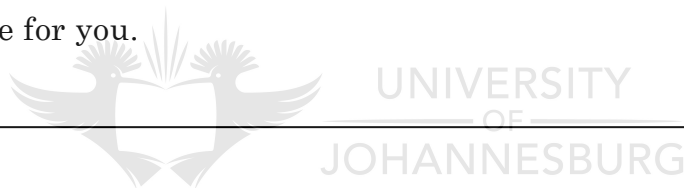
The most common theme that emerged with regards to the opinions of others was using appearance-established credibility to communicate this. Participant six sees herself as a role model and dresses accordingly. By not wearing traditional suits, she also dresses in a manner that allows her to fit in with the people she works with and her team whereby the other female executives wear suits. None of the women were particularly concerned about the opinions of others, though some stated that they were open to constructive feedback.

3.2.1.6 Code: "Policy and dress code"

Code Name: Policy and dress code

Number of quotations linked to this code: 8

Code Comment: This code was used when the participants spoke about past and existing dress codes, awareness of the policies and how much they abide or deviate from the current policies.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding policy and dress code.

P 2: (332:332)

In the old days you were told what to wear. Women, you had to wear stockings, and something below the knee, and men, you had to wear a suit and tie. They would even give you an allowance. So, when you started a job, they would give you some money to go and buy a belt and acceptable stockings.

P 6: (236:236)

It does change my perception of junior team members when they come to work in denim and I do notice which ones don't ever come in denim. These observations tell me something about the person; either they don't personally think that's appropriate work wear or they've actually gone to the trouble of reading our dress code which is no denims.

P 1: (82:82)

I think if I was way out of policy somebody would have tapped me on the shoulder.

P 4: (214:214)

So we knew that we were only allowed to wear skirts and we were told what colours to wear and we weren't allowed to wear flashy jewelry and there were lots of things we weren't allowed to do.

All the participants agree that within consulting, navigating dress code policies when they are present at client sites can be murky waters because they constantly need to balance the policies of their company with that of the client. The company dress policies have evolved over time however that evolution has not deviated much from the standard 'business professional' uniform. One participant was able to make a tangible link to impression management and how closely a person abides by the dress code of the company.

3.3   Expression of individuality

Figure 5 reflects the codes from Atlas.ti on how the participants express their individuality through dress style.
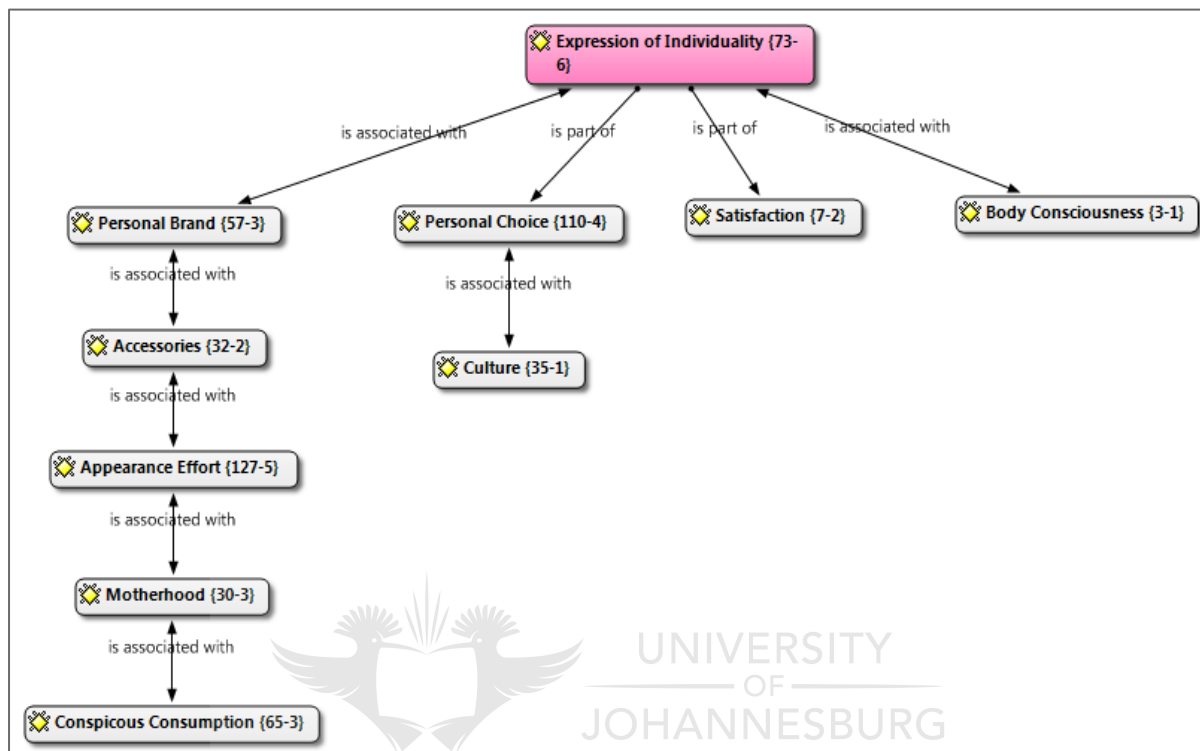
Figure 5. Expression of individuality – network view

3.3.1   Parent Code: "Expression of individuality"

Code Name: Expression of individuality

Number of quotations linked to this code: 73

Code Comment: This code is used when participants refer to the distinct elements of their dress style. Closely linked to the notion of authenticity, this parent code denotes the elements that each participant brings into their everyday professional and office wear that are true to their character and personality, which may be in contrast to popular beliefs about workplace apparel as well as popular dress codes.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding expression of individuality.

P 3: (132:132)

But what I do is colourful tops, and shoes, nails and hair.

P 1: (146:146

Yes, a tuxedo jacket which I wore with a black tutu-skirt with a bow in front and bright yellow shoes.

P 6: (131:404:406)

So like most women do, I love shoes and so I still go for beautiful shoes. The line of the shoe must just be stunning and even if it's a black shoe it will have some detail on it that I like and I'll also sometimes wear a red shoe with flowers on.

I do wear quite bright nail polish which I acknowledge isn't always appropriate but I guess that's another thing I add to way I express myself. I wear like blue nail polish or purple or something like that.

All of the individuals interviewed for this minor dissertation choose to express themselves in a manner that is meaningful to them, from wearing jewellery that holds sentimental value, to wearing bright colours, bold feminine tops and quirky shoes. Although most participants favoured the classic wardrobe – primarily black or grey trousers, elements of individuality were expressed through exciting hairstyles, colourful and feminine tops, shoes and nails. A variation to the expression of individuality that emerged in two of the interviews was that in one instance, a woman used an exclusive brand of leather goods, i.e. branded wallets and passport cases, and in the other instance, it was the type of car that was driven – a convertible BMW. In both these cases, the women kept a fairly simple professional wardrobe that

conformed to company standards, and where aligned to their clients' standards. Further than that, there was no real interest is personalising their professional dress style.

3.3.1.1 Code: "Accessories"

Code Name: Accessories

Number of quotations linked to this code: 32

Code Comment: This code is used to mark quotations in which the participants refer to items used to garnish their wardrobe and complete their overall look by contributing to their overall ensemble.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding accessories.

P 10: (63:63)

For a woman, jewellery is important. If you can accessorise; you can wear a cute bracelet with cute earrings. Sometimes it is the small things that make a whole lot of difference. A little bit of lip-gloss - I think those small things make a difference, you know, getting your nails done - small things.

P 3: (134:140)

So I accessorise with the glasses, nails and hair. I think people have always known me for having funky hair.

P 4: (99: 83: 85)

In terms of accessories I would say, like I said it depends on the audience and the meetings of the day that I tend to make it more personal with accessories, necklaces and probably wraps and stuff. I tend not to wear my very expensive jewellery to the bank. I think it's off putting for people to see nice big diamonds. At the client you don't want to be flashing diamonds around and looking prosperous. You want to be selling work. You want to look kind of normal

Nine out of 10 participants in this study acknowledge the importance of accessories to varying degrees. For some participants, the use of accessories was a requisite for their dress style. A few of the participants preferred to keep their accessories to a minimum, but realise their importance in complementing an outfit and the subliminal message that can be sent by the wrong type of accessorises.

3.3.1.2 Code: "Appearance effort"

Code Name: Appearance effort

Number of quotations linked to this code: 127

Code Comment: This code is used for quotations whereby participants refer to the amount of planning that they put into purchasing and maintaining their work wardrobes. This code also refers to the amount to time and effort that is exerted when getting ready for work.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding appearance effort.

P 9: (071:071)

…if I have an important meeting with my boss or something like that then definitely I would put more effort into it than I would do on a normal day.

P 4: (153:153)

I put quite a bit of planning into my wardrobe especially if I go away on a business trip. Like I will spend quite a lot of time planning what I'll wear each day especially if we take clients on a five day client trip we're hosting. We're going to the client meetings every day. We're entertaining every evening and then I also love running so I'm always taking gym stuff wherever I go. So I put quite a bit of effort into that.

P 2: (158:158)

Look I pick my clothes quite carefully hey. I do think about them and usually if I do some travelling or go into the office I actually mentally on put what I'm going to put on every day of that week. Wear ahead and then Monday I'm going to do this so Tuesday I'm going to wear, so I don't just wake up and open the wardrobe and decide what I'm going to do.

P 7: (364:384)

Because I've realised that even as a professional, like say for example you get called into a meeting across the road and I'm the team lead. I'm the change management lead and I walk across the road for an emergency meeting on a Friday in my All Stars. No, that student look just races to the surface. It's about client value, it's about a trusted work relationship and especially on a trusted work relationship, you know, are you going to trust a 31 year old female, me with your 60 team member change management team when you're coming across the road for a meeting in your jeans and All Stars. I don't think so.

P 4: (101:101)

I wear the same earrings every day because that's what my husband gave me for my wedding and I don't really like changing them. You have to unscrew them and I guess I'm just so used to wearing them.

P 8: (50:50)

Funnily enough the effort and maintenance is done in keeping it simple, yet acceptable.

The trend that emerged was that the women interviewed did not plan their wardrobes prior to getting dressed with any significant amount of effort. This is because much effort has gone into purchasing clothes that are consistent with their style and brand, such that most pieces in their wardrobe match. For participant eight, the effort goes into keeping her wardrobe simple, whereas participant four initially exerted an enormous amount of effort with an image consultant into defining the parameters

around her wardrobe. Now, she exerts a significant amount of time and energy into maintaining the wardrobe by purchasing items that are consistent with her defined style. Participant two, like most of the participants, expends a fair amount of energy in her wardrobe planning the day before. This is especially true for business trips, which include daytime outfits for meetings and evening outfits to entertain clients. According to her, it is important to look smart, and to dress in a manner that suits whatever you are doing, be it in internal meetings, walking the floor or meeting with top-level executives. The constant exception to the amount of appearance effort exerted by the participants was when the women prepared the day before for an important client meeting or workshop. In the instances where it appeared that some women did not exert much effort, the women dressed with purpose and therefore put extra thought into their dress style in general by keeping it simple.

3.3.1.3 Code: "Body consciousness"

> **Code Name**: Body consciousness
>
> **Number of quotations linked to this code**: 9
>
> **Code Comment**: The participants use this code to denote references to the type, shape and size of their bodies.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding body consciousness.

> **P 3: (124:124)**
> I've never wear light pants because I'm curvaceous and I think they just attract...they make you look bigger.

P 2: (342:344)

I feel some styles don't fit my kind of personality, I would say. I wouldn't wear jeans down my hips, showing part of my butt out. I would not. I know it's in fashion, I know it's liked, I wouldn't. I totally don't like it. They look good on people, but not me. I have never felt comfortable with them. So they are quite a number of styles I don't wear. I've never been comfortable wearing miniskirts and I still don't wear them.

P 5: (212:280)

So I'll invest money in good quality pants and the dresses that I have but when it comes to things like shirts and blouses I actually buy them at the China mall. If it's functional, looks neat and professional and if it costs a R100 then I will spend a R100 instead of spending a R1, 000.

While all the participants were aware of the impact of dressing inappropriately, only two made specific mention of their level of body consciousness in relation to the way in which they dress for work.

3.3.1.4 Code: "Conspicuous consumption"

Code Name: Conspicuous consumption

Number of quotations linked to this code: 65

Code Comment: This code is used for quotations in which the participants refer to their consumer habits of the purchasing luxury goods.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding conspicuous consumption.

P 4: (110:112)

I have friends who only shop at specific shops. I rather shop where the style suits me, so if it happens to be Burberry for a beautiful coat then I buy it. But if it's not, that's not the reason I'm buying it.

P 10: (123:123)

I think economic standing matters a lot, in two ways. It matters in your purchasing powers, so being able to buy quality clothes, being able to have a certain variety but I think economic standing sometimes, not all the time, sometimes reflects your background. So, if your parents were professionals I think it helps because you know automatically. You don't have to learn that behaviour. I think for people that don't have parents who were like white-collared professional, I think it is a much harder exercise to determine what is appropriate and what is not appropriate.

P 10: (163:163)

I wouldn't buy cheap stuff. I definitely wouldn't buy cheap shoes. I, yes, I mean I would buy certain things; I would buy into like a bigger hype. For example, bags. I have Gucci bags, Louis Vuitton bags... you name it.

P 8: (186:218)

It's exclusive and it's not expensive. So financial bargains - I like a bargain and I like exclusivity, but it's still all got to be efficient.

The only brand that I buy and I pay full the amount for regardless, is Mont Blanc.

The predominant theme was that the participants would not intentionally spend a lot of money on clothes. In one instance, a participant would spend more money on wardrobe staple items that would not go out of fashion, for instance trousers and suits, however, when it came to shoes and blouses, she would buy them as cheaply as could be found. This individual also did not buy branded clothes because she had other priorities for her money. This participant was brought up in financially strained circumstances, therefore, despite her improved financial standing; she does not spend a lot of money on clothes as a matter of principle. Another participant preferred to purchase branded apparel, but would only purchase them at a discounted rate. The emergent trend amongst most of the participants, all of whom have access to the overseas retail market through business trips, is that they buy their clothes when travelling. While most participants enjoy wearing and prefer buying brand name clothing, few were willing to purchase those exclusively.

3.3.1.5 Code: "Culture"

Code Name: Culture

Number of quotations linked to this code: 35

Code Comment: This code is used for quotations in which the participants refer to how their cultural backgrounds are expressed through their dress style.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding culture.

P 2: (080:096)

It's easier to wear suits when it's winter and easier to dress up African attire, which I absolutely love in the summer times. I get compliments on how smart I look and people say they want to see more of that because we don't see it. So I do that often. When our colleagues from Europe come and they find me dressed that way they say wow, you know. Because the outfits really, really look nice.

P 10: (069:069)

I don't wear African attire as much here or in the U.S. as I would in Mali or in Senegal because, for example, I never wear any traditional clothes to work whereas if I were there I would. For example, on Fridays or anything like that. I think also that goes with consulting so I dress in a way that I think my client might not react in a certain way. So, I feel like if I wore a traditional outfit I might get so much attention around that, that I might not be able to focus on the right things. So I dress appropriately for the culture of the client.

P 3: (158:158)

I don't wear anything traditional to work and I don't think culturally, from a cultural point of view there's anything I feel influences the way I dress.

The expression of cultural background was a conscious decision for one participant who is very senior in the company. Due to her upbringing in West Africa, this was the attire that she felt the most comfortable with, especially in the warmer months. She also uses the African attire as an attention grabber in order to stand out from her peers. This is a contrast to another less senior participant from the same region, whose personal choice is to dress in a manner that she feels is appropriate for her clients and will allow her to blend in with her peers. None of the participants were wearing anything of cultural significance during the interviews. When asked about their cultural heritage, eight participants stated that they did not bring elements of their culture into the workplace. The photographs that were taken after the interviews reinforced this view, with none of the participants wearing anything of cultural significance.

3.3.1.6 Code: "Motherhood"

Code Name: Motherhood

Number of quotations linked to this code: 30

Code Comment: This code is used for quotations in which the participants refer to the impact of motherhood on their wardrobe, spending habits and appearance effort.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding motherhood.

P 3: (106:106)

I used to spend a lot of time doing makeup in the mornings, because no one else had to get ready. So I could invest in putting on makeup, doing my hair…but now because I've got these two people that I have to take to school, I'm more or less running late, so I've said it's either get to work on time or get to work pretty, so I've chosen to get to work on time.

P 10: (067:067)

I now have two kids so I don't have a lot of time to get my hair done so now my hair is short - short and easy to manage.

P 4: (139:145)

I do care about what other people think but I think more, am I representing the right image of our company, as a woman in general, as a senior woman in our organisation, and as a mother. I want to communicate and as a working mom and a female it's about looking good so I suppose it's always been important for me to look good as a mom because a lot of the stereotypes are that moms are predictably more weightier and heavier.

Of the eight participants who had children, six of those made the most significant changes to the amount of effort, time and money used for dress style after becoming mothers. Where having children was a factor in the manner in which the participants chose to dress, it was more in relation to how they have adapted in order to accommodate their children financially, or in terms of appearance labour. For some of the participants, it was important that their role as a mother not be viewed as something that detracts from their position in the workplace, and their overall image is a well put together, competent senior woman in the company.

3.3.2 Overlapping codes

The three codes in this section were used in the within-case analysis for both the importance and significance of dress style, and the expression of individuality parent codes. The three codes are discussed in a separate subsection section because relate to all three research questions, and both parent codes.

3.3.2.1 Code: "Personal brand"

Code Name: Personal brand

Number of quotations linked to this code: 57

Code Comment: This code is used to reference statements made by the participants in relation to how they wish to portray and market themselves in the workplace.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding personal brand.

P 2: (234:234

I want to come across as a formal, competent, professional person who is credible.

P 8: (60:62)

I'm a driver, output-focused and I don't like fluffiness in general. Let's just get on with the point; so my outfit reflects that. It's simple. It's neat. It's straightforward.

Personal branding is of very high importance to all 10 participants. Personal brands tend to evolve over time as people become more comfortable with their own strengths and are able to better express themselves. All 10 participants have a well thought out personal brand, which is reflected in the way they dress.

3.3.2.2 Code: "Personal choice"

Code Name: Personal choice

Number of quotations linked to this code: 110

Code Comment: This code is used to denote where participants made reference to how much control and freedom of choice they have and exercise regarding the type of clothes they wear at work.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding personal choice.

P 3: (172:172)
If I were slimmer, probably I'd wear tighter clothes. But I just...I like to dress my body.

P 4: (022:022)
The policy was that women were not allowed to wear pants and I had to go out and buy a whole lot of skirts and jackets and proper suits, and all the men had to wear full suits and ties.

P 2: (338:338)
It was a mix, a mix of formal and informal; I used to wear quite a lot of suits even that time. And they were quite colourful, red. And then I mix that with the African blend.

> **P 10: (133:133)**
>
> No, I always felt that I can make that choice and my choice was falling in line, I think, with the career I've chosen so it worked out well.

Personal choice is an unconscious factor for most participants, as most of the participants have never had to subscribe to a company's dress code. Participant three dresses for her body type in order to avoid looking inappropriate. She chooses black wide leg trousers rather than form fitted clothes in an effort to detract attention from her physical appearance, and rather to bring attention to the quality of her work. What came through consistently, in all of the interviews the participants stated that you should not attract attention for all the wrong reasons, and no matter their choice of wardrobe, individuals should always look appropriate and fit their role at clients.

3.3.2.3 Code: "Satisfaction"

> **Code Name**: Satisfaction
>
> **Number of quotations linked to this code**: 7
>
> **Code Comment**: This code refers to references made by the participants about the amount of pleasure they derive from the way in which they dress at and for work.

The following quotations reflect the participants' views regarding satisfaction.

> **P 10: (133:133)**
>
> No, I always felt that I can make that choice and my choice was falling in line, I think, with the career I've chosen so it worked out well.

P 7: (354:354)

Think, who wouldn't have satisfaction from expressing your choice. You'd definitely be satisfied by being able to express your choice, but there's also a limit to which you can express your choice in a working environment because of the consequences or potential consequences.

P 8: (248:248)

I know I have the opportunity, let's say, if I travel overseas, to go to labelled clothes/shops, but still buy on bargain - so I'm happy.

P 2: (338:338)

It was a mix, a mix of formal; I used to wear quite a lot of suits even that time. And they were quite colourful, red. And then I mix that with the African blend.

All of the participants found pleasure in a range of activities relating to their dress style at work, be it the shopping experience, bargain hunting, assembling an outfit to the reactions that they received from certain outfit choices. From the responses during the interviews, it can be concluded that the research participants felt that being satisfied with your workplace wardrobe through being able to choose what you wear, is a foregone conclusion for them.

3.4 Conclusion

The data that has been presented in this chapter reflects the discussions that took place between the participants and I. The findings reflect the current status quo of the way senior women dress in a South African consulting firm. These findings will be discussed further in Chapter 5. The following chapter will sensitise the reader to

prevailing literature on the research topic, and will enable me to underpin the findings with pre-existing theory where appropriate.

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Introduction

As the number of women in leadership positions increases, so does the need to understand the nuances that these women have incorporated into their dress style. These nuances could range from what they consider to be power dressing, the amount of appropriate accessories, to the ideal height of their heels. The main interest of the research is to gain a deeper understanding on the role that dress style plays in the careers of successful women in corporate consulting. The roles that women occupy in society have shifted, with women occupying roles that were once seen as masculine, this has brought about a new set of challenges in that while women's roles have transformed, senior roles in organisations are still typically held by men and are thereby deemed as 'masculine'. This has resulted in women needing to take on defeminised workplace personas, and acting more like men in order to achieve and retain success. This chapter gives insight into the prevailing trends from literature, as well as the impression management theory underpinning this research.

4.2 Impression management theory

Impression management (IM) refers to the conscious or unconscious behavioural strategies and processes by which people control or influence the impressions and perceptions of others by creating desired social images or identities (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 2013; Leary & Kowalski, 1986; Tetlock & Manstead, 1985). IM theory according to Goffman's (1999) seminal work, states that it is in their own best interests that individuals construct and maintain a favourable identity which will enable their success. Synonymous with self-presentation, IM is a central tenant of role theory, which describes how individuals interact with one another, focusing on role behaviours and expectations appropriate for the positions and social identities of the individuals (Dillard, Browning, Sitkin, & Sutcliffe, 2000; Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 1980). This includes the use of props in order to create, maintain and defend each role identity (Robbins, Judge, Odendaal, & Roodt, 2003). In the context of this research, these props include all artefacts of dress style, such as all clothing items and accessories.

IM is comprises of three components, which according to Leary and Kowalski (1986) are the smallest possible set of theoretically meaningful factors. The three factors, are illustrated in Figure 6 and describe different principles in line with three distinct situations, namely impression monitoring, impression motivation and impression construction. Impression monitoring "occurs when individuals are conscious of the impressions they are making, either because of the particular situation they are in, or because they are the type of people who often are aware of the impressions they make" (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 2002, p. 187).

Impression motivation is a process that is associated with the desire of individuals to control how others perceive them, although this may not manifest in blatant IM actions. Impression motivation identifies the conditions under which individuals may be motivated to manage their self-presentation and visual image. The third component of IM is how the impressions are created, because once individuals have the motivation to manage their public impression, they may begin to alter the way they behave in public settings and towards others. The impression construction process involves an individual choosing the impression that they want to create, and deciding how they will execute the desired impression (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 2013; Leary & Kowalski, 1986; Rosenfeld et al., 2002; Singh et al., 2012). The three components of IM are depicted in Figure 6.
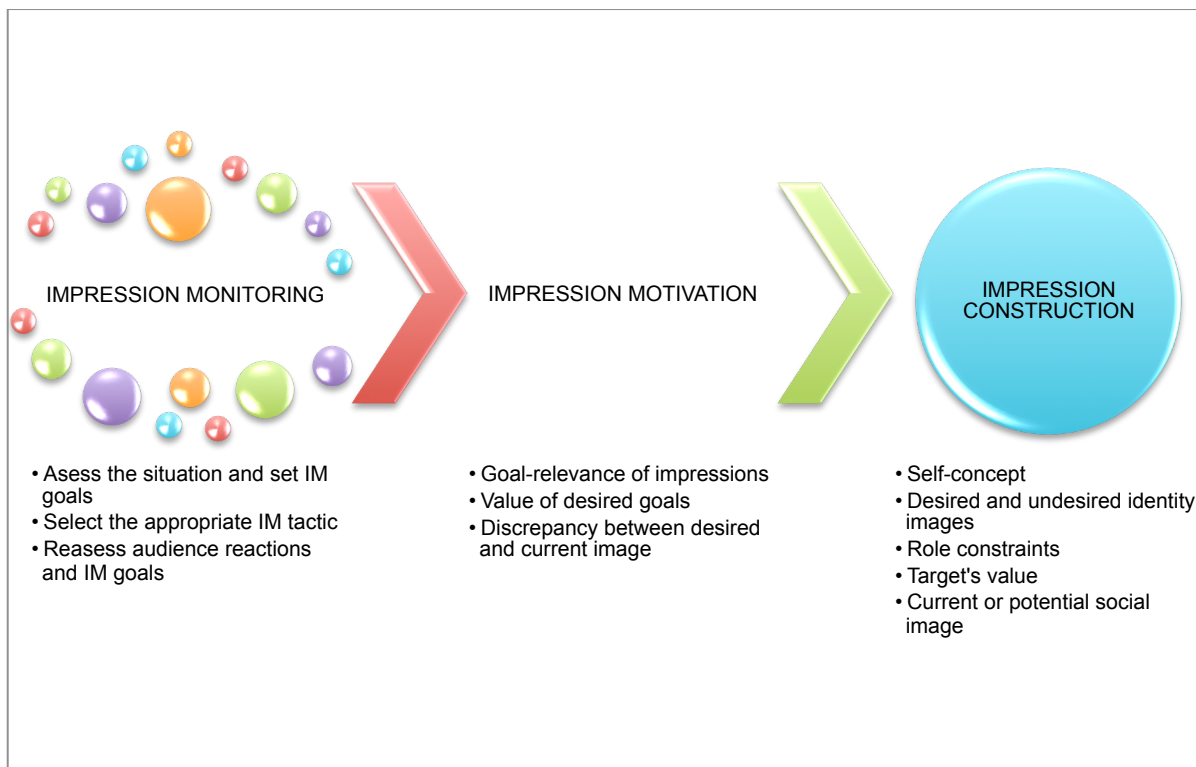
Figure 6. The three components of impression management. Adapted from "Impression management : A literature review and two-component model" by M.R. Leary and R.M. Kowalski, 1986, *Psychological Bulletin*, 107(1), p.36. And "*Impression management: Building and enhancing reputations at work* " by P. Rosenfeld, R. A, Giacalone, and C. A. Riordan, 2002, p. 187. Copyright 2002 by Thomson Learning.

The model presented by Leary and Kowalski (1986) accounts for three significant factors in IM, specifically: why an individual would be concerned with the opinions of others in specific social settings such as the workplaces, and also why individuals opt to utilise one IM tactic versus another. In the context of this research, the Leary and Kowalski's model will be tested by the responses of the participants in order to determine if the three components of impression monitoring, impression motivation and impression construction exist.

4.3 Key trends from the research literature

4.3.1 The significance of dress in career progression

Recently, organisational dress has been relegated to conversations centred around dressing for success. However, there is a long and established history of studies on dressing for the workplace and its role in corporate and social organisations. The

topic of workplace attire gained notoriety in 1988 when John T. Molloy's seminal book: *New Dress for Success* was published. This gave rise to an entire genre of books that were in essence a style guide on how to dress for success and how to leverage dress style for an advantage, especially within the corporate environment. Titles such as *The New Professional Image: From Business Casual to the Ultimate Power Look* (Bixler & Nix-Rice, 1997)*, Your Executive Image: The Art of Self packaging for Men and Women* (Seitz, 2000)*, and more recently the titles *How to gain the professional Edge: Achieve the professional image you want* (Morem, 2005)*, Beyond Business Causal: What to Wear to Work if you want to Get Ahead* (Sabath, 2004)*, The Well-Spoken Woman: Your Guide to Looking and Sounding Your Best* (Jahnke, 2011), and *The Style Bible* (Rademan, 2013) are some of the books that go into immense detail about unlocking the key to success that lies in a professional's work attire.

Within any social setting, the role that an individual plays is always gendered; this then determines the type of behaviour the individual needs to display. Deutsch (2007, p. 106) states that "gender is not something we are, but something we do". In other words, gender is a social construct that has to be constantly updated in light of the evolving idea of what is 'normal' behaviour for men and women in a particular society or organisation. Peoples' behaviours are modelled on what they perceive they will be judged upon and what is considered to be suitable masculine or feminine behaviour. The notion of 'normal' varies across time, geographical regions, culture, religion and economic standing; thus gender constructs are a constantly evolving aspect of social interaction. Within the context of the workplace,

> *"Dress and appearance codes are often seen as trivial, both because they seem to fit within our notions of how people ought to behave... But they are not constructed in a vacuum. They reflect and enshrine societal stereotypes and expectations of women as well as men about how they look – including assumptions about gender, sexuality and majoritarian norms. As such, they punish anyone who is an outlier by reason of gender, sexuality, race, religion, or culture"* (Brower, 2013, p. 491)*.*

More recently, another key author in this field, Elsbach (2004), found in her study of workplace identity that conclusions were drawn based on impressions of an individual's physical markers. In the context of her research, office décor was used to determine the individual's career advancement expectations and level of professionalism - "This office was entirely filled with Winnie the Pooh memorabilia. And right away, I thought this must be a secretary... and probably someone who's not that important or worried about getting promoted" (Elsbach, 2004, p. 113).

Peluchette, Karl and Rust (2006) conducted a study on Masters in Business Administration students in the Midwest of North America to determine the significance of attire in their working lives, and found that attire was of importance to people in senior and executive positions, and that those who dress for success believed that this had a positive impact on their careers. A study conducted by Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane and Truss (2008) makes reference to surveys conducted on how executives, both male and female, perceive female managerial candidates in interviews based solely on their dress style. The Kular et al. (2008) study concluded that there was an increased perception of the competence of candidates based on their apparel during interviews, with the traditional skirt being favoured more than trousers. The main theme found in all these books and studies is that the manner in which a person dresses ultimately has an impact on the way in which they are perceived and the impression they make, and in some instances, has a bearing on the rewards received.

Professional dress can be defined as "dressing in such a manner as to enhance your authority, promote your respect, aid your promotion, and promote your advancement opportunities in the workplace" Cooper, (2003, p.3). Professional dress involves individuals making appropriate clothing selections and takes into consideration their profession, "the company policies, the level of customer and client interaction, geographic location, clothing care and maintenance, appropriate styles for their individual body", types of functions they must attend, and their budget and purchasing techniques (Cooper, 2003, p. 3).

Studies done on the role of dress in organisations have indicated that dress attire is a concept rooted in cognitive schemata, that in turn determines the way an individual understands and embodies behaviour in the workplace, thereby allowing individuals to increase their emotional and physical preparedness for jobs and improve interpersonal relations (Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, & Mackie-Lewis, 1997). Corporate dress code can be viewed as a form of organisational uniform, which Joseph and Alex (1972) in their seminal work describe as a means by which boundaries are determined and other complex organisational dilemmas are resolved, thereby ensuring that all members of the organisation align to its goals and understand the status sets of their counterparts.

4.3.2 The importance of dress

The result from first impression, more than a person's education, performance or effort exerted, and could lead to future association. While this may not seem as significant to individuals at the lower levels of the organisation, the power image becomes especially important as one rises within the ranks of the workplace (M. Levitt, 1907; Thourlby, 1995). Cooper (2003) states that professional image consists of two major perspectives namely, apperance which includes dress style and personal presentation; and personal behavior which includes communication skills and finesse. Professional image is the image that one projects in the professional or business world, and consists of a composite of various aspects of ones appearance, including "clothing, grooming, manners, etiquette, personal behavior, and communication effectiveness" (Cooper, 2003, p. 3). When people first meet you, they immediately make a decision about you based on their first impression, and this decision is rarely changed. "You know what happens to a General's image when he slips from his uniform into a flowered sports shirt – the power image evaporates" (Levitt, 1907, p. 11).

Levitt, (1907) states that an executive who projects the image of power makes an immediate impression of quality and credibility for themselves and for their organisation. This results in a feeling of security, because dress is the outward signal by which people often judge the state of mind of a person. "The clothing you wear,

which covers up 90% of your body, dominates your business and social relationships… the way you dress can determine how far you go in life" (Thourlby, 1995, p. III), therefore it is important to package yourself in an manner that will elicit the desired response from others. By controlling the impressions we project to others, we can, to a certain extent control their behaviour towards us. This is called Impression Management (IM), which refers to "all those strategies and techniques used by individuals to control the images and impressions that others form of them during social interaction" (Thourlby, 1995, p. 21).

Part of IM is the amount of time and effort that is expended in acquiring and maintaining a work wardrobe. This can be described as appearance or aesthetic labour. Caven, Lawley and Baker (2013, p. 476) state that "aesthetic labour is concerned with appearance and deeper bodily aspects of workplace performance, and thus encompasses dress and appearance codes, albeit going beyond mere surface appearances to suggest control over an overall 'look'. It is this 'look' that is at the heart of aesthetic labour, which is not just about the performance of emotion in the workplace, but also about the performance of a set of 'embodied dispositions'".

4.3.2.1 Clothing as communication

Dress is one of the most powerful mediums of communication and expression as it serves as a reflection of the individual's inner consciousness. Dress affects the wearers and the observers by sending visual messages, or symbols to every person interacted with, resulting in ideas and expectations being formed that may influence the nature and extent to which the relationship will go forward. These clothing symbols are a language of sorts, which, like verbal and written language also send various complex messages.

In order for the symbols to be effective, there needs to be a common understanding between the sender and the receiver, but due to the somewhat unconscious nature of clothing, participants may be unaware of any inaccuracies (Storm, 1987). The context in which the clothing messages are communicated adds further complexity to the framework of daily work life, especially for women, because more attention is

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generally paid to what women are wearing compared to their male counterparts (Stidder, 2011). Context not only includes attributes of the wearer and perceiver, but also the relationship history and the setting of the interaction which also incorporates culture and the historical association of the clothes, according to Kaiser, (1990); Marshall, Jackson, Stanley, Kefgen, and Touchie-Specht, (2000). Because dress remains unchanged for the duration in which the clothes are worn, Damhorst (2005) concluded that dress communicates stable characteristics of the wearer for the duration of that particular interaction.

Clothing serves a dual means in the workplace; enabling people to advertise themselves, and as a means of gaining approval. Power dressing is also used as a means of gaining approval, as a way for an individual to differentiate oneself and as a means to stand out from one's peers in order to not be viewed as mediocre. Because individuals are judged on their appearance and behaviour, rather than exclusively on their key performance indicators, the significance of a professional image cannot be overlooked. Nothing exceeds success in the business world like the appearance of success, therefore one needs to look the part in order to get a chance to fill it (A. A. Cooper, 2003). Despite standards of professionalism in relation to dress having changed over time, there are certain expectations that remain constant pertaining to appropriateness and professionalism in the business environment. It's only by fully understanding the significance of professional image, and how one interacts with colleagues that one can make a difference to their career mobility.

Multiple authors all agree that the significance and importance of a professional image on an individual's career mobility should not be underestimated (Cooper, 2003; Hurlock, 1929; Marshall, Jackson, Stanley, Kefgen, & Touchie-Specht, 2000; Peluchette et al., 2006; Rafaeli et al.,1997; Schmalz 2000; and Thourlby 1995). Appearance gives a competitive edge, and while it may not make up for poor performance, its effects on a person's career can include selection for "participation on project teams, inclusion in social settings with customers or clients, selection for presentations, promotions to positions of greater responsibility", and performance rating and overall competitiveness in numerous situations (Cooper, 2003, p. 6).

Perceptions formed solely from personal appearance include professionalism, one's level of sophistication, and a person's intelligence and credibility (Sebastian & Bristow, 2008; Shao, Baker, & Wagner, 2004). Clothing has been referred to as a silent language, formed by signs, icons and cues and used by individuals in their social interaction. While language cannot be retracted, the advantage of clothes is that they are fluid and one usually gets an opportunity to rectify and clarify the messages. Marshall et al., (2000) state that in order for the clothing symbol to be fully understood, the sender and the observer need to have the same clothing language. The person communication model, illustrated in Figure 7 gives a pictorial view of the process.
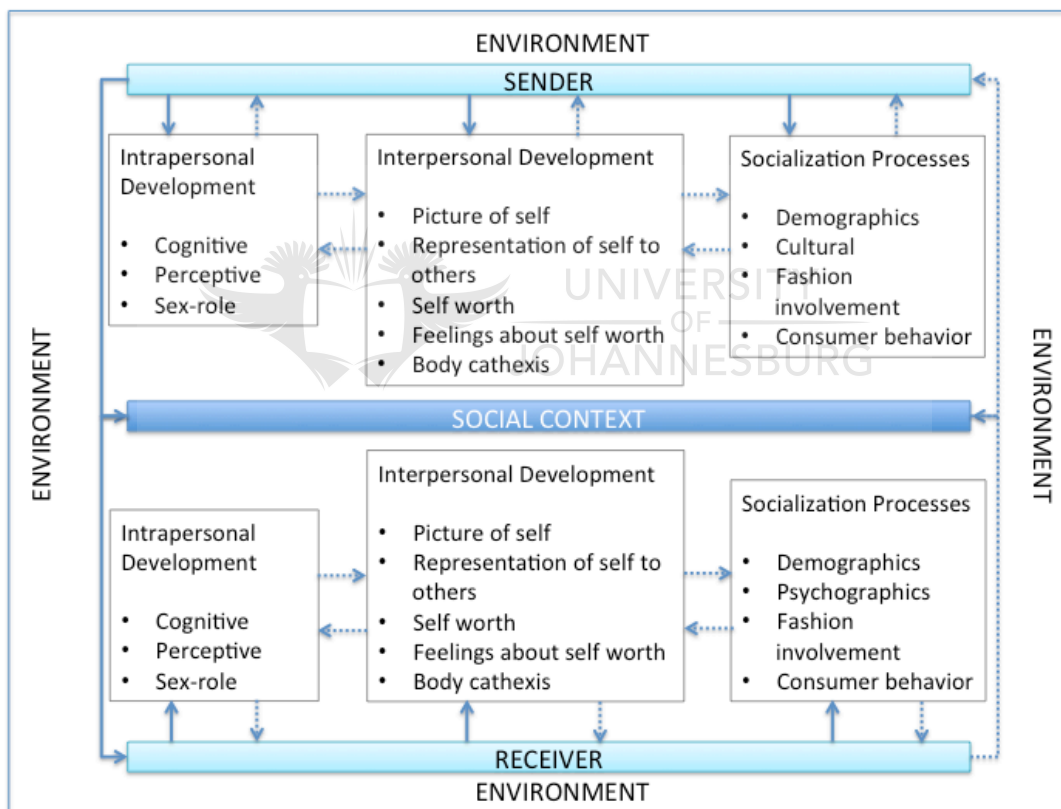
Figure 7. The person communication model. Adapted from "Individuality in Clothing Selection and Personal Appearance" (5th ed.) by S.G. Marshall, H.O. Jackson, M.S. Stanley, M. Kefgen, and P. Touchie-Specht, 2000, p. 8. Copyright Prentice Hall: New Jersey.

The model consists of four components, namely the environment which refers to the physical, the technological, aesthetic, and cultural domains that influence the individual; the sender who is the person who develops the message; the receiver

who is the person who reads and interprets the message; and the social context which refers to the situations and motives involved in nonverbal communication together with the sending and receiving of clothing messages (Marshall et al., 2000. p 6-9). Both the sender and the receiver are key players in the model, with each person involved in the communication having three aspects of self that influence how messages are sent and received, namely their intrapersonal development, their interpersonal development, and the socialisation process they have experienced.

Researchers Behling and Williams (1991), Bell (1991), Nisbett and Johnson (1992), Pradheepram and Littrell (1993), Dellinger (2002), Sebastian and Bristow (2008) Shao et al., (2004) and Singh, Kumra, and Vinnicombe (2012) have found that clothing affects impressions. The resulting impression formed or rather, judgment made by the observer is based on the observable characteristics of the sender. During every day brief encounters, messages received for assessment use a limited number of cues sent out by the message sender, and it is on these assessments that decisions, which have an impact on an individual's career advancement, are made.

Research conducted in business management in the field of dress and dress style indicates that the way people present themselves ultimately determines the way in which they are perceived. The daily choice of apparel has multiple implications for the individual (Peluchette et al., 2006; Rafaeli et al., 1997; Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993; and Schmalz, 2000). Business dress forms part of the daily act of ones performance in the workplace, and ultimately becomes a means by which one conveys information about themselves and their competence to others. Individuals need to be aware of the messages they are communicating through their clothing, as authors Damhorst, Miller-Spillman and Michelman (2005); Shao et al., (2004); Johnson and Foster (1990); Levitt (1907); Schmalz (2000); Storm (1987); and Thourlby (1995) have stated. Within the first four to 10 seconds of interacting with another person, decisions are made about the message sender's "economic level, education level, trustworthiness, social position, level of sophistication, economic heritage, social heritage, educational heritage, success and moral character" (Thourlby 1995, p. 1).

4.3.3 Expression of individuality

Although economic factors and the rise of the feminist movement have led to changes in gender roles and stratification, women are still expected to play their gender roles in the households as per their cultural norms (Bell & Nkomo, 2003). These very specific cultural gender roles might be in conflict with the roles that a woman is expected to play in her position in the workplace. Consequently, women have to constantly adjust and adapt depending on their social setting. The purpose of career dress is to diminish any personal differences in order to bring attention to the aspects that are most important in the workplace: authority, credibility and responsibility. This is the reason why tailored clothes tend to be favoured as business dress by women, because they do not look dainty, but instead exude authority and proficiency (Johnson & Foster, 1990).

Hymowitz, (2005, p. 238) states that "you don't have to look like a man, but you have to look serious if you want to be taken seriously. Furthermore, a survey conducted on male CEO's revealed that their opinions of the qualities of strong female leaders were a firm handshake and the ability to walk in stilettos without wobbling (Hymowitz, 2005). Similarly, a study by Wiley and Eskilson (1985, p. 1003) conducted on perceptions of male and female managerial job applicants found that "applicants using powerful speech patterns are rated more positively on situation-related traits regardless of their gender". The findings of the study also concluded that the "perceptions of an applicant's situation-appropriate characteristics as well as expectations for successful job performance and acceptance in the position are partially determined by verbal behaviour".

Several authors, including K. P. Johnson, Crustinger, and Workman (1995), and Schmalz (2000) have stated that the closer a woman's professional attire resembles a man's business suit; the better they will be perceived. This is because the perception associated with a man's business suit is that the wearer has the requisite characteristics to succeed in their chosen profession (Johnson, Crustinger, & Workman, 1995). However there have been cases where women have been denied

career advancement opportunities because they appear too masculine, as illustrated in the Price Waterhouse example below:

> *Price Waterhouse was a landmark case in the United States, and even though it was not a dress or appearance case, they both played a significant role in the matter. Despite acknowledging her professional and business development abilities, Price Waterhouse denied Ann Hopkins a promotion to Partner due to her lack of interpersonal office skills, expressed in the form of Hopkins' gender atypical (masculine) characteristics. She was described as having possibly "overcompensated for being a woman" and as needing to enrol in a "course at charm school;" she was advised to "walk more femininely, talk more femininely, dress more femininely, wear make-up, have her hair styled, and wear jewellery". The court found that Price Waterhouse denied Hopkins a promotion in part because her gendered behaviour and characteristics were inappropriate for her sex* (Hopkins, 2005; "Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins, 490 U.S. 228" 1989, p. 1112-1120).

It is therefore important to strike a balance as illustrated above. This was also discovered in a study conducted on the use of neckties by K. P. Johnson et al., (1995). In their study, neckties were chosen because the necktie is "a salient feature in impression formation and is associated with respectability, intelligence and status" while also lending credibility to the wearer (Johnson et al., 1995, p. 133). Research findings stated that the necktie increased the impression of competency in female managers than when they wore open collared shirts, just as males are perceived as competent when they wear neckties (Johnson et al., 1995).

Yet another study supports Hymowitz (2005) statement. This was a study conducted by Damhorst, Jondle, and Youngberg (2005) to determine the perception of female candidates during a job interview, based solely on their clothes. This study was initially conducted in 1991 where the appropriateness of skirted suits was evaluated. In the 2002 update, pantsuits were also evaluated due to their increased popularity since the initial study was conducted. Damhorst, Jondle, et al., (2005) state that up

to 70% of judgments in an employment interview are based on appearance, more so than physical attractiveness. The eight suits ranked the most appropriate out of more than the 38. The suits were characterised by their classic tailoring, echoing the style characteristics of men's business suits.

The study also revealed that men were more conservative in their ranking of appropriateness than women. The men were also leaned more positively towards traditionally tailored suits, supporting a more conservative look rather than a feminised one that incorporated more colour, aesthetic design and more modern styling. Despite more women entering the workplace and occupying an increasing number of managerial positions, masculine symbols continue to communicate the preferred image for an executive. Additionally, current research indicates that females who wear feminine adaptations of masculine symbols, rather than the masculine symbol itself are more likely to be given career advancement preference (Johnson et al., 1995).

This study examined how the participants expressed their individuality. This is closely linked to authenticity, which in this minor dissertation refers to an "expression of the genuine self in the community" (Cranton, 2006, p. 83). The basis of authenticity is rooted in the development of a deep sense of self, how individuals differentiate themselves from the collective, while simultaneously finding their place in the collective. Authenticity involves a level of genuineness and a person speaking their truth consistently through words and actions (Cranton, 2006). The concept of authenticity, as it relates to an individual's workplace identity, is defined by (Cranton, 2006, p. 25) as "an individual's central and enduring status and distinctiveness categorisations in the workplace". This can take the form of physical identity markers, which in corporate settings may be material artefacts that signal an individual's distinctiveness (Elsbach & Kramer, 2012).

Personal style has evolved over time, and in a South African corporate workplace, it has evolved to become westernised such that it is common practice for 'traditional'

attire to be worn in the workplace only for occasions commemorating heritage such as Heritage day. Bahl (2005, p. 87) states that

> *"In postcolonial times, dress as a symbol of establishing so-called "authenticity", identity, and freedom is getting more complicated. This trend is a product of another global historical process – which is also created through the interactions between societies – that is changing the organisation of work and labour globally leading to the large-scale migration of both labour and capital. Such a large-scale mobility of people has complicated the meaning of identity, subjectivity and has also increased the importance of the role of larger forces in shaping individual identities and freedom of choices".*

In a study conducted in corporate America, on the barriers and obstacles that are experienced by both white and black women, it was found that black women experience different types of obstacles in corporate America, and therefore need to navigate their careers differently. "As black women, they were subjected to a particular form of sexism shaped by racism and racial stereotyping. The theoretical concept of *racialised sexism* also captures the idea that the experience of gender discrimination in the workplace depends on a woman's race" (Bell & Nkomo, 2003, p. 11). Authors Johnson and Foster further articulated this finding:

> *"Black women who become executives have found that their image is very important. They have learned to say 'I am competent' through their appearance. Emphasising their ethnic background through their clothing or hairstyle can backfire in a white dominated business world – at least until they have proved their worth"* (Johnson & Foster, 1990, p. 17).

4.4 Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the role of dress style of senior ranking women in a corporate company by examining the importance, expression and significance of dress style to them and by examining if and how their dress style has influenced their

career progression. By understanding the importance of, expression and significance of dress style, the research gave insight into the wider impact of the daily choices of apparel on career progression, self-esteem and perceptions for senior women in corporate consulting. One of the purposes of this research is to determine how dress style individuality helps or hinders the corporate careers of senior women in corporate consulting. Women who occupy senior positions in a South African corporate environment should ideally be able to express elements of their cultural identities and elements of their personal style in their places of work. The study uncovered how these women reconcile their dress style individuality with their roles within a masculine working environment that has dress policies of standardisation and uniformity that restrict the way their employees dress and present themselves.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The main objective of this research is to explore the role of dress style of senior ranking women in a corporate company by examining the importance, expression and significance of dress style for women. This chapter serves as a discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 3. It will also serve as a synthesis of the literature and the impression management (IM) theory underpinning the study. As with Chapter 3, this chapter will be structured in two ways to respond to the research questions stated in Chapter 1 which are repeated below:

- How do successful female leaders in a consulting firm express their individuality through dress style?
- What is the significance of dress style in the work lives and career advancement of senior women in a corporate consulting firm?
- What importance do senior women in a corporate consulting firm place on dress style?

Firstly the discussion will link the prevailing literature on the subject, as described in Chapter 4 to the findings presented by theme in Chapter 3. The network diagrams that were displayed in Chapter 3 will also be discussed in order to explain the link between the codes and their associated findings to the literature reviewed. Further rigour is provided by stating quotations from participants in the footnotes of this chapter.

5.2 The importance of dress style

The literature discussed in the previous chapters relating to the importance of dress is a reflection of popular opinion on the subject. All the authors cited can agree that the way one outwardly express oneself through dress is critical in determining the level of success a person will experience from the result of face to face interactions (A. A. Cooper, 2003; Kular et al., 2008; M. Levitt, 1907; Peluchette et al., 2006; Shao et al., 2004; Thourlby, 1995). The literature, supported by statements made by the participants, states that outward appearance is important. However, once those first few seconds are over, it is important to be able to follow through the impression

made with the delivery of what was implied by your dress. The views of all the participants acknowledged that the way a person dresses has an impact on how they are perceived, and how quickly they can establish trust or convey seniority[2]. However, they add that a person's delivery is equally important.

On the face of it, dress style may not seem like an important element in impression management, and if viewed at in a vacuum that may well be true. However, as illustrated by the person communication model (Chapter 4, Figure 7), the way a person dresses forms part of a package. Based on the situation, societal norms, stereotypes and people's own experiences, judgements are made based on what can be seen (A. A. Cooper, 2003; Damhorst, Miller-Spillman, et al., 2005; Kaiser, 1990; Marshall et al., 2000; Stidder, 2011; Storm, 1987). This occurs within the first four to 10 seconds of interacting with someone. This is supported by the findings discussed in Chapter 3 where the participants agreed that even though clothing is what first impressions are primarily based on, a person's delivery is equally as important[3] if not more important.

The link between career mobility and dress style has been implied rather than proven in the literature discussed. It has been stated by Cooper (2003), that looking the part gives a person the chance to play the part. However, cases where a lag in career mobility can be directly attributed solely to dress style have not been documented, especially in a corporate setting. Dress style is seen as part of a total package, which the participants stated was important in eliciting the correct response from others, whether it is respect or camaraderie[4]. The participants dress

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[2] P 1: [48:48] For me, it's about how are you received and perceived in a context so looking your best, I think, is a good thing, in terms of people taking you seriously and around you, making an effort around how you look and feel.

[3] P 4: [188:188] And the package is work performance, it's the way they carry themselves, their emotional maturity. It's their ability to deliver, it's their connection with their team and I'm sure that if they didn't have an iota of dress sense it would probably be a deterrent. For a person who dresses well and extra well, will that make a difference to performance? Probably not.

[4] P 6: [95:95] So I consciously try to make sure I dress as a senior team member and it is recognisable for me in my client environment also that it is that you will see the top level executives wearing suits to work on a in reference to… Friday, even when all of the teams are wearing denim to work on a Friday. So that's the kind of thing I also do, is I even if it's a casual Friday I will still not wear a denim.

purposefully in order to manage the opinions of others[5]. This is in line with the IM theory introduced in Chapter 4, where the transition from impression motivation to impression construction is clearly stated with some of the participants. The pitfalls of not dressing the part were referred to by several of the participants where they had observed others doing so. Despite some remedial actions being taken, the resulting impact of their poor clothing choices did not limit their careers[6].

In Chapter 1, reference was made to the double bind that women experience, especially in male dominated industries where leadership traits are typically masculine. Earlier in this study, reference was made to Hymowitz (2005) who stated that the expectation from male CEOs of their female counterparts is that they have a firm handshake while being able to walk well in stilettos without wobbling. This was reinforced by the Price Waterhouse case discussed in Chapter 4, which illustrates how clothing choices impacted on the way that a senior female executive was perceived.

Furthermore, to add complexity to the issue, it is not that women should dress like men but they need to express some measure of femininity in their dress style. These views are reflected in the responses from the participants when speaking about their dress style. Some participants explicitly stated that wearing flashy jewellery, incredibly high heels and bright makeup were features of the early stages of their career wardrobe and in some instances these trends stuck until a more senior member of the organisation advised them against the pitfalls of such flashy business attire. The participants evolved their dress styles for three reasons: to suit their business context[7]; to remain in line with the changing times[8]; and because their

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[5] P 7: [94:94] In terms of my output and my behaviour and the way I carry myself and her advice to me at the time is that I should give a serious look to myself checking whether the person I see in the mirror and the person that people see physically is consistent with who I am.

[6] P 10: [87:87] If you are dressed professionally or nice it is going to make an impact. If you are wearing, for example, for a woman in that case, something too short, too much make-up - it might give a different impression so the person might, they might not say anything but the look or how they react or even what topics they cover might change

[7] P 3: [58:60] The more senior you get, it's more male-dominated meetings and you need to also make sure you're taken seriously. You don't look like you're a fashionista too much, but then you can also still be yourself.

[8] P 4: [214:214] So we knew that we were only allowed to wear skirts and we were told what colours to wear and we weren't allowed to wear flash jewellery and there were lots of things we weren't allowed to do.

personal brand and styles had evolved[9]. Likewise, the participants who had no character in their wardrobe, that is, wore box suits and bland colours have since added more feminine aspects to their wardrobe[10].

However, despite the double bind that these women experience, there is still an awareness of sexuality and sensuality amongst them; there is also a very clear idea of what is inappropriate for the workplace, along with a heightened sense of self awareness. For example, several participants made specific mention to body type, and dressing in a manner that is appropriate for your body[11] and to presenting themselves in the best way possible[12]. While this has been associated by some of the participants with levels of comfort, there was mention of dressing in a manner that does not take attention away from the work being done. This leads me to conclude that women, either in small ways, or in big ways, manipulate the way that they dress[13] in order to reduce the amount of sexual attention that they receive, and to be perceived as feminine professionals and counterparts rather than female objects.

These statements by the participants reinforce the view of Bell and Nkomo (2003), who have attributed some of the challenges experienced by women in the workplace to the violation of the 'original sexual contract' which placed the domain of the household and children squarely on the shoulders of women, and that of earning money on the shoulders of men (Haralambos et al., 2000). As backward and dated

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[9] P 2: [272:272] So, I think, it's a part of growing up. When I was much younger, my earrings would be dripping from here to the shoulder. I would never put on an earring unless it touches my shoulder.

[10] P 1: [140:146] I've gone from wearing a lot of pants to none, more dresses, more feminine, in terms of what I dress. And my shoes are crazy. I think crazy in a sense and that I'll wear, like on Friday, I was wearing like a cocktail jacket, it is white and it's got black tuxedo jacket and I wore a black tutu-skirt with a bow in front and bright yellow shoes. You know, so my shoes have changed significantly, from your typical just work shoes, they are more; my shoes I wear in the work context and in my social life so I play around with those.

[11] P 3: [80:100] I'm also conscious of my shape. I'm very voluptuous. I try and dress for my shape and in the workspace I pay particular attention to it.

[12] P 7: [415:415] Quite a few years back and I had a clip in my hair to just hold my hair back and somebody also said to me that I looked very young when I do that. Because it's very student like or very childlike almost. So I've stopped putting clips in my hair to hold my hair back or to hold a fringe back. So now I just keep my hair a bit longer

[13] P 4: [154:154] I think as you get older you become, if you're interested you become more kind of in tune with what suits you, what doesn't suit you. I think your shape of your body and your weight plays a huge role.

as it may appear for women in this day and age to 'dress down' their bodies to appear less sexual in the workplace[14], from the responses of the participants, it seems that this is a present and all too real reality[15]. This idea is supported by Omair (2009, p. 412), who stats that "scholars studying women in organisations have argued that dress and appearance are more sensitive issues for women than men, as women in male-oriented organisations have a greater need for credibility, acceptance and legitimacy". The participants in the study support this view; they dress in more masculine clothing when they anticipate meetings in which there will be very senior people, especially males present[16].

One of the key findings of this study in line with the IM theory was the correlation between the participants' personal brands and the way they dressed, or rather, the link between impression motivation and impression construction. The literature on dress style in the workplace is focussed on dressing for success; dressing for your body type, dressing or your skin tone and other practical dressing tips. Little attention seems to have been paid to the 'why' aspects of it. The participants in this study spent a fair amount of time planning and maintaining their work wardrobes, some of the participants also stressed that they engage in meticulous pre-planning for important meetings. However, when it came to how they bought their outfits and chose to assemble them, it became clear that there was a significant level of intent behind those actions. Participants would not dress in a manner that was contrary to the company's brand and to the visage they wanted to display of themselves in the workplace[17]. Each participant exerted a significant measure of control over her clothing choices as to elicit specific responses from people, such as disarming them in meetings anticipated to be difficult, or soothing frayed nerves of junior team

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[14] P 3: [124:124] I've never worn light pants because I'm curvaceous and I think they just attract…

[15] P 2: [136:136] I definitely don't seek attention. So I don't want to look like a Christmas tree or something where, you know, you are looking like you are so decorated. It's just nice formal, tone down so it's the cut more that is more outstanding.

[16] P 3: [164:164] If you've got a running workshop you need to perhaps wear heels and you know, like the certain executive female look. And you can't wear tights or the very tight tops without something on top when you're riding a meeting because you need guys to focus…

[17] P 7: [384:384] I think the company's brand is professional, it's not always serious but it's like professional, it's committed, it's serious about work. It's about client value, it's about a trusted work relationship and especially on a trusted work relationship, you know, are you going to trust a 31 year old female, me with your 60 team member change management team when you're coming across the road for a meeting in your jeans and All Stars. I don't think so.

members, appearing more approachable or setting themselves apart as more senior members of the team[18].

In conclusion, the importance of dress style was emphasised by all the research participants. All participants acknowledged the role that dress style plays in the way that they manage impressions. The participants in this study have been known to use dress to set the tone in meetings, distinguish themselves as more senior members of the team and to enhance their credibility by looking professional and polished. Several participants were also able to make reference to cases where they have observed the fallout of colleagues who do not dress in a manner that reflects their intentions[19]. While the observed fallouts have not led to a stall in career[20], it takes more time to rebuild relationships and establish credibility once a wrong first impression has been set. In a business setting such as a management consulting firm where its people and their skills are on display, it is important to display yourself in a manner that projects your competency and the company's values[21]. Doing anything other than that can have a potentially negative impact on the clients' perceptions of the individual in question, and by extension, the capability of the firm.

5.3 The significance of dress in career progression

In order to ascertain the significance of dress style of the research participants, I took a historical view in order to establish a baseline of how the participants dressed when they first started working. This was done by photo elicitation, whereby the participants were requested to bring to their interviews a photo of themselves taken in the early stages of their careers. This photograph was then discussed with the relevant participant, who was asked to state any major changes observed between

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[18] P 9: [109:109] I think my clothes reflects my personality, which is, as a professional, I am quite creative. I am very in-tuned with customers' needs and wants. I am bubbly and outgoing but everybody, obviously, in the working environment wants to be perceived as a professional. They want to be perceived as someone that their colleagues or peers get some information from, that can contribute to the project or to create value to the clients. So, yes, it is a whole part of your sort of overall package and overall performance as well.

[19] P 10: [105:105] She can take you in a meeting with the CEO and not have to think about, "Oh, I wonder what she's going to wear tomorrow. I have a big meeting. I might need to tell her in advance."

[20] P 5: [109:109] You can be wearing anything at the end of the day and your capability shouldn't be affected. So it often can be used to influence perceptions.

[21] P 10: [87:87] Being liked is very important in consulting because being liked leads to trust, leads to building a relationship with the client so those 5 first minutes are really important.

the ways she dressed now and then. The findings section documented that there were no significant changes in the way the participants dressed then and now. There were some subtle changes, such as less make up, less flashy jewellery – all of which are associated with the participants becoming more aware of what they liked to wear and what best suited them[22]. Some of the changes were as a result of a more updated dress code policy[23]. As reflected in Table 1, the dress code policy has shifted subtly over the last few decades. Some of the more senior participants can recall a time when women were not allowed to wear trousers, and their dress code was much stricter. However, none of the participants could attribute any aspect of their career progression to their dress style evolution over the years[24]. Figure 8 reflects the codes from Atlas.ti on the importance and significance of dress style.
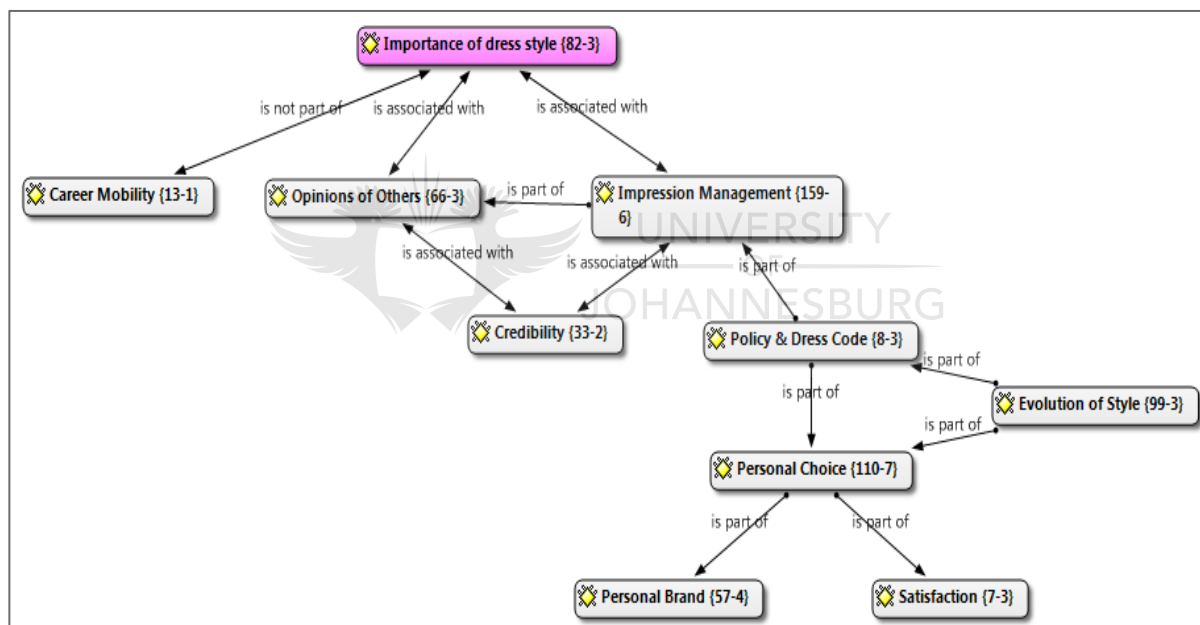

Figure 8. Importance and significance of dress style – network-view

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[22] P 1: [72:72] I think I am more comfortable and more experimental and more expressive of who I am. When I was younger there was a view of what a professional look is like so it would be your suit, pants and a jacket. I actually don't like to wear pants. So I've kind of like let that go in terms of power dressing as that was seen relevant in the day. I am more now expressive around what I like and what I enjoy and less about how I'm supposed to look.

[23] P 2: [332:332] In the old days you were told what to wear. Women, you had to wear stockings, and something below the knee, and men, you had to wear a suit and tie. They would even give you an allowance. So, we had, when you started a job, they would give you some money to go and buy a belt and acceptable stockings.

[24] P 9: [121:121] I don't think that the way you dress has, especially here South Africa, has a huge impact on your career advancement. I don't think so. I think it is that you are being perceived again as a professional of what you can contribute from the dollar or whatever, the rand value perspective - how you or what your contribution to the project is, more than the way you look.

In conclusion, the discussion of the first theme, namely the importance and significance of dress style in the career progression of the participants is linked by nine codes. Career mobility is not part of the importance of dress as none of the participants dressed with mobility in mind. Furthermore, none of the participants were able to tangibly link their career progression to their dress style. Causality in this study can be established for two codes using qualitative inferences, or "whether an event X is or is not a cause of Y" (Pacer & Ahn, 2011, p. 1412).

The establishment of causality in this qualitative study was done through the rich data method, which is one where "data that are detailed and varied enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on" are used in the analysis and to draw conclusions (Maxwell, 2004, p. 254). As per the IM theory, the reason that people dress in a certain manner is to manage impressions and to direct the focus and the opinions of other people to the more positive and favourable aspects of their performance. Both the opinions of others and impression management can be associated with aiming to establish credibility based on work, with appearance serving to reinforce this. Impression management is part of the dress code policy and the personal choice of the participant, of which the evolution of dress style also forms a part. Another part of a personal choice is the satisfaction experienced by the participants and their personal brand.

5.4 Expression of individuality

Expression of individuality in this study refers to the manner in which the participants distinguish themselves and dress in a manner that reflects the image that they wish to convey in the workplace. This includes the use of colour, accessories and cultural embellishments. The use of physical identity markers has become commonplace in the workplace amongst women, as they have learnt to express their femininity in ways that are not sexual[25]. In a typical office environment, physical markers also extend to desk and wall accessories; however, these were not mentioned by any of the participants during the interviews. This can likely be attributed to the fact that the

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[25] P 3: [172;250:254] If I were slimmer, probably I'd wear tighter clothes. But I just…I like to dress my body. I actually wear a lot of colour. I've got lots of like colourful tops that I wear. I can go with very colourful shoes; but the problem with colourful shoes - they're high.

nature of management consulting is client-based; therefore the participants are not based from a single office or desk continuously. The participants in this study use accessories to express their individuality. Of the 10 women interviewed, nine of them use colourful jewellery, scarves, shoes and hair to express elements of themselves[26]. These elements range from creativity to love of colour. By using accessories, the participants are also able to bring into their dress style some feminine elements without appearing too feminine, 'pink and fluffy'[27].

Prevailing literature leads us to believe that the defeminisation of women in the workplace, especially for women in senior positions or in male dominated workplaces is commonplace. Authors such as Deutsch (2007) and Frankel (2004) have stated their positions, that women need to behave in a defeminised manner in order to gain and retain success in the workplace. As stated previously, this extends to dress style because it echoes the same dynamic between the individual and the role that they play in the workplace.

When it comes to individual beliefs of workplace attire "evidence shows that there are implicit codes regarding appearance and behaviour imposed not only by employers but by colleagues and co-workers which serve to be equally, or in some cases more powerful than those which are formalised" (Caven et al., 2013, p. 476). This is clearly illustrated by the person communication model, and also through the responses of the participants. All the participants agreed that the opinions of others were important. This is important in the discussion of the expression of individuality because we can infer that the participants will express themselves in a manner that is seen as acceptable by others[28]. For instance, the use of nail polish, shoes, funky

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[26] P 9: [97:97] I don't have a lot of conservative shoes. I like different colours. I like pink shoes, I like purple, red.

[27] P 4: [77:99] Accessories and wraps will depend on the seriousness of the meeting. In terms of accessories I would say, like I said it depends on the audience and the meetings of the day that I tend to make it more personal with accessories, necklaces and probably wraps and stuff.

[28] P 7: [52:82] And first appearances do count. And in a work environment I think it is important that people look at you and their first impression. For me what I want is that the first impression that people get about me is that I'm serious about my work and I'm professional about it. So, I'm not here to play games. I'm not here to make friends, it's work. I have definitely judged people on their appearance where, for example, and I'm not judging people on their style and I'm not judging people on brand but I do judge people on attention to detail, neatness, cleanliness. To me somebody who doesn't take pride in the way they dress in terms of being neat, not shabby

glasses and different hairstyles is an acceptable means of self-expression, while low cut tops and mini-skirts are not[29].

We can therefore conclude that senior females interviewed will express themselves to the extent that the said expression lies within the confines of what others deem acceptable in the workplace. The same can be said about cultural adaptation for assimilation purposes. While eight of the respondents did not include elements of cultural wear in their work wardrobe, two respondents did. One participant wore her African attire fairly frequently in the workplace, especially in the warmer months and she found such clothes comfortable, feminine and sensual[30]. This participant also wore African attire because it made a visual statement, especially when there were visiting executives from Europe or America[31]. The other participant did not wear her African attire because it was too much of an attention grabber[32].

The only inference that can be made in this regard is linked to the seniority of the respondents, and this is; the more senior a woman is in the organisation, the more credibility she has or is supposed to have. With that credibility comes the ability to deviate from the traditional suits and work wardrobes, without attracting comments about the frivolity of one's wardrobe, as Participant one does[33]. These findings support that of Bell and Nkomo (2003) to the extent that the majority of Black women in this study do not want to stick out for their Africaness, nor do the majority of Black women in this study dress or use speech patterns similar to their white work colleagues to make them feel more comfortable around them (Brower, 2013). Figure

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[29] P 10: [57:57] I just think it's appropriate to not show any cleavage or wear short-short skirts.

[30] P 2: [250:252] I like the femininity of how I dress. It's all that plus what will make me come across as a feminine, sensual human being.

[31] P 2: [80:88] It's easier to wear suits when it's winter and easier to dress, up African attire which I absolutely love in the summer times. So I still want to keep, I keep that as a part of my… I grew up dressing that way. I feel comfortable. It's a dress code that I feel is neglected and so it's long. I can put on the short African ones and the flowing robes that go all the way to the floor.

[32] P 10: [69;73:75] I've never gone to a client with any traditional attire.

INTERVIEWER: Okay; ever?

P 10: In Mali I have but not in the U.S. or not in South Africa. I think also that goes to consulting so I dress in a way that I think my client might not react in a certain way. So, if I feel like if I wore a traditional outfit I might get so much attention around that that I might not be able to focus on the right things. So, yes, I think my cultural; I dress appropriately for the culture of the client.

[33] P 1: [232:232] Sometimes though like I mean comments that irritate me, it's like, "Do you have a dress for everyday?" Like that irritates me. It's like; what do you think I spend my time thinking about my wardrobe?

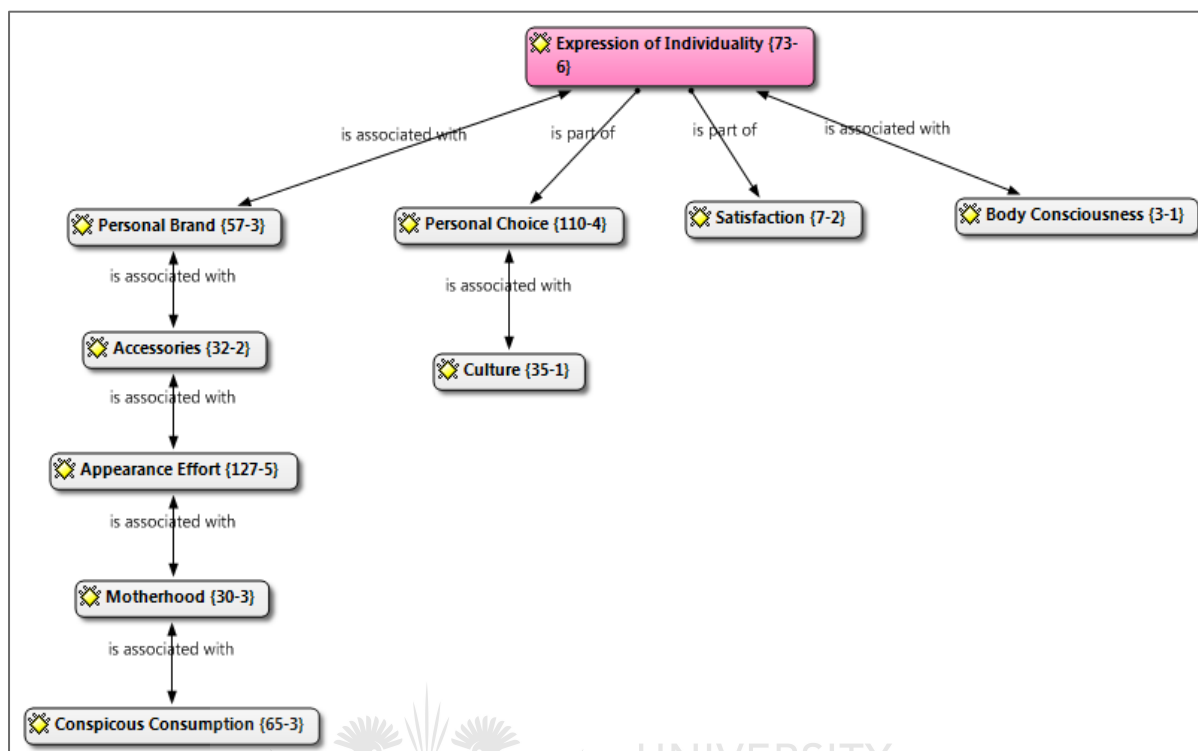9 reflects the codes from Atlas.ti on how the participants express their individuality through dress style.

Figure 9. Expression of individuality – network-view

In conclusion, the theme of expression of individuality is comprised of nine codes, two of which are part of the main theme; these are personal choice and satisfaction. Expression of cultural heritage is associated with personal choice; however, there is no established causality. The main theme is also associated with body consciousness, which is seen through the women defeminising themselves to reduce the possibility of sexual tension in the workplace. This is seen through the participants dressing in a manner that complements their bodies and does not detract from their work. Personal brand is also strongly associated with the expression of individuality, with the participants using accessories to express themselves. Associated with the use of accessories and personal brand is appearance labour, which is the amount of time and effort, expended by the women in planning and maintaining their work wardrobe. According to the interview responses, appearance effort is greatly compromised by motherhood. Therefore the conclusion can be reached that making effort on appearance is also associated with

the aspect of motherhood. The participants who have children stated explicitly that their time to get ready for work, or shop and their conspicuous consumption had reduced since having children as the women spend less because their priorities shifted once they had children.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter served as a discussion of the findings gathered through the interviews by comparing them to the literature in the previous chapter. The discussion was structured in line with the three research questions on the importance and significance of dress style and how the research participants express their individuality through dress style. As a result of the discussion, I can conclude that the literature is an accurate reflection of the findings as it pertains to establishing credibility, impression management, and opinions of others. The findings were also in line with the IM theory in that the participants carefully constructed their personal brands in order to achieve certain objectives such as showing seniority. A finding consistent across all the participants was a full commitment to their personal brand, displayed in the way they dressed on a daily basis and in their use of artefacts and accessories.

In as far as the remaining codes; policy and dress code, evolution of style, accessories, appearance effort, body consciousness, conspicuous consumption, culture, motherhood – are concerned there are certain aspects of the codes that correlate to the literature while some of the aspects mentioned by the participants have not featured in the literature at all. Three codes overlap between the two parent codes, namely, personal brand, and personal choice and satisfaction. While the responses from the participants' results in the conclusion that the three elements play a critical role in how the women choose their daily apparel, there is no literature to juxtapose the responses. The next section of this minor dissertation is the conclusion in which an overview of the research will be given. The final chapter also gives a summary of major findings, research limitations and recommendations for future studies are made.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This study aimed at establishing what the role of dress style of senior ranking women in a corporate company is by examining the importance, expression and significance of dress style for women, as well as establishing how women in a South African corporate workplace maintain their dress style identity, while maintaining the balance between their cultures, gender, and corporate dress policy. By understanding more, we might be able to uncover deeper insight into women in leadership and understand if dress style really holds any significance in the lives of senior women in corporate South Africa and whether it is an enabler or disabler to their career success.

6.2 Overview of the research design

This research employed a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews and photographs. By making sense of the data through the lens of the research participant, this research gave detailed descriptions of the role of dress within the research setting. The research was based on the premise that social interactions are not static or predetermined, but rather are a result of an intersection of the time, place, people and events. Therefore, the research was approached with a blank slate, rather than an attempt to force the research to fit into predetermined criteria. The data analysis was done through a within-case and a cross-case analysis of the data gathered from 10 senior women.

6.3 Summary of major findings and contribution to knowledge

The two themes identified, namely the importance and significance of dress style and the how the participants express their individuality through dress style, give insight into the role that dress style has played in the work lives of the participants. The findings of the research indicate that the way in which one presents oneself ultimately sets one up for success and also contributes to the personal brand that one wishes to express in the workplace. There appeared to be an unwritten standard that wardrobe staples consisted of black trousers and some form of suit or jacket for

higher levels of formality. None of the women dressed below the company benchmark, which is determined by the dress code policy, but instead found ways to 'dress up' in more feminine and personal ways and stay within the confines of the expected company's dress standard. This was done in order to feel comfortable, and was achieved by dressing in a manner consistent with their professional brand, as well as to distinguish themselves as individuals.

All the participants, some after a period of trial and error, have found a style that is effective and professional while being consistent with each of their respective professional brands, which range from being confident, neat, and energetic to being professional. It is clear that all the women in this study have taken the time and exerted the effort into thinking about how they look, which relates to how they will be perceived. This finding is in line with the IM theory, in that the participants desire to control how others in the workplace perceive them, and as a result they have carefully constructed their workplace image to suit their personal brand. They all dress the part of senior women, and distinguish themselves from the younger consultants in that way.

From the findings, there was no tangible link that could be established by the participants regarding their dress style and career progression. While all the participants acknowledged the importance of dress in impression management, none of them could directly credit dress style to their rise up the leadership ranks. Furthermore, the photo elicitation showed that there was no significant change in the way that the participants dressed early in their careers till now.

Unexpectedly for a South African firm, culture did not emerge as a key trend, as wearing African cultural attire is not commonplace within the company. This links back to the literature on African American women, in that we can clearly see that the participants do not emphasise their cultures until they are certain that they have gained credibility. The only other exception is religion were several participants wore Lakshmi strings, which are customary Hindu red strings tied around the wrist for

protection and success. In one instance, the participant had a red bindi on her forehead to denote that she was married.

Also, there was no real emphasis on hairstyles even though participants included Caucasians, Indians and Africans. From the data collected, one could take this further and state that only the participants at Stratified Systems Theory level 6 (refer to Chapter 2, Table 2) had gained enough credibility to wear African attire, or very feminine clothes without the fear of losing that credibility. The results showed that at Stratified Systems Theory levels 4 and 5, the participants experienced some loss of credibility from their peers and clients when they deviated too much from the expected 'standard business uniform' because they were deemed as too feminine, too fashion conscious or deviant from the norm.

Having children made a significant impact to the appearance effort that most participants exerted. The implications of motherhood appeared twofold – either a time implication or a cost implication. In most cases, the women needed to juggle the demands of motherhood with making themselves pretty. Accordingly, they found creative ways to manage their time constraints by outsourcing what they could, or adapting their own style for instance, wearing shorter hair that is easier to manage. The implications of motherhood have not been seen in any previous literature, likely due to the serration between motherhood and careers. In the past, due to their gendered roles, women have kept the two separate however the trend seen in this study was that women spoke openly about their 'other lives'.

6.4 Research limitations

The research was conducted in a corporate setting, specifically the South African branch of a global corporate management consulting company. The company has strict dress policies, as well as very comprehensive Diversity and Inclusion policies, and has been awarded an independent top employer award every year since 2010. There are limitations regarding the generalisability of the study to other contexts and geographic locations because the data can strictly represent only the participants of

this study. However, the topic of the research may be broad enough to extend to any corporate environment, as the dress code policies are applicable in all corporate and professional settings in South Africa, and most professional environments enforce a strict dress code.

Another limitation experienced was that the contrasting perceptions regarding cultural dress elements were not that extreme when looked at across all the participants. This can be attributed to two reasons; firstly, the dress code policy is fairly prescriptive and limits what individuals can wear to express their individuality. The second reason is personal preference. Of the contrasting cases selected, only one wore African attire in the workplace and the other two wore red Lakshmi strings. The majority of the participants who were labelled in the sampling process as contrasting cases, preferred not to draw attention to their wardrobe by wearing cultural attire in the workplace.

6.5 Recommendations for future research

If similar research is to be conducted, future researchers should consider exploring the person communication model as it relates to male counterparts within the same organisation. This may enable us to understand if women dress for their own satisfaction, or they dress based on popular opinion. This may also give some clarity as to whether there is the perception that deviating from what is deemed 'normal business attire' will make women stand out in more feminised way. Another facet worth researching is when women feel that they have the credibility to dress freely. We have seen that in this study it is only at certain Stratified Systems Theory levels that this credibility is actually gained; however it would be useful to counter that with the women's own opinions on when they feel they have reached that level. This can be complemented by the opinions of others on when they perceive that someone has gained that credibility.

Another potential study could centre around asking men about their views on women's dress style, and how they think a woman's style influences a woman's

credibility and opportunities for career advancement. This study could give further insight to women's interpretation by looking at it from the view of the outsider – a man's view of women's dress style. A further aspect that could garner interest would be examining how iconic women dress, for instance by looking at how political leaders such as Helen Zille and Mamphela Ramphele use dress style to motivate and establish credibility.

6.6 Conclusion

This study had three specific questions, which it sought to answer. The data in this study indicated that appearance does matter. While none of the participants could directly link their career advancement to the way in which they dressed, they all acknowledged that judgements on competence are made based on physical first impressions. The participants put in a little extra thought into their dress before interactions with clients, teams and peers in order to not have to waste time at a later stage trying to rectify misaligned perceptions.

It is clear that even though women are now modernising and feminising their dress style in order to align their personality to their dress and personal brand in the workplace, there is a clear definition of what is acceptable in the workplace. Anything that is below the standard set by the corporate dress code policy will attract negative attention, while dressing on-par with the average company employee is expected and enforced through unspoken norms. However, dressing above the average is not a differentiator. We can conclude that the objectives of this study have been met, and that senior women in a consulting firm use dress as one of the baselines on which they further build their professional brand. It is not the most important factor for a professional individual, but as participant four stated: "…it's an invitation to the game".
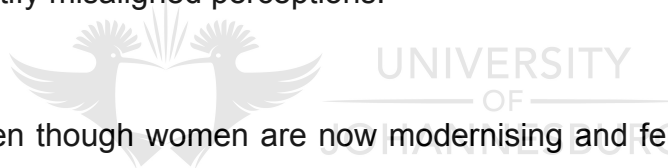
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8 ADDENDUM – WITHIN-CASE ANALYSIS

8.1 Introduction

In Chapters 3, 4 and 5 mention was made of the two types of data analyses that were conducted in this study. Chapter 3 was based on the results of the cross-case analysis, which was a result of themes being drawn out from the case by case (within-case) analysis. The result of the cross-case analysis is an interpretation of the meaning of each case by comparing of the themes across all 10 participants and retaining themes that only occurred across all participants. This addendum is an example of the within-case analysis that was done as part of the data analysis process. The network diagram below, illustrates the links within the codes for this particular case example.
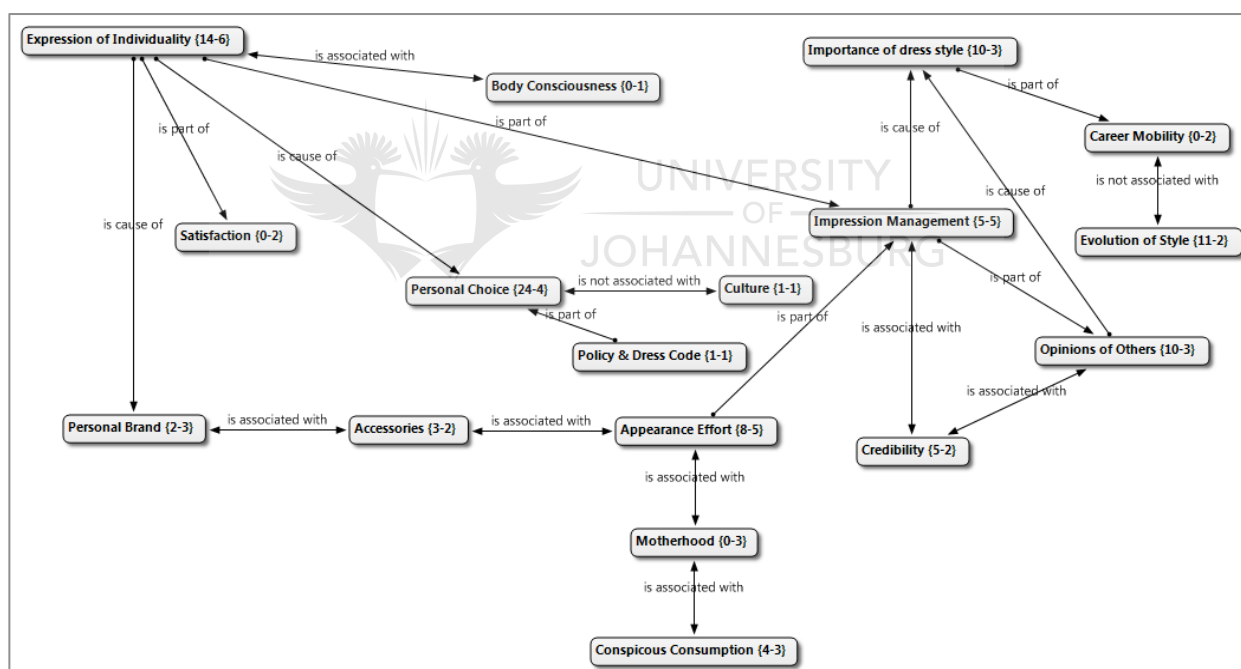

Figure 10. P 1 Within-case analysis (example)

8.2 Quotations from primary document: P 1: Interview

8.2.1 Parent Code: Importance and significance of dress style

P 1: (44:44)

I enjoy dressing up or whatever it means. Or maybe, let me say, I enjoy looking a certain way and I really think it is important to make sure that you look your best.

P 1: (46:46)

So I think it is quite important.

P 1: (226:226)

I think it is really important to just remain who you are in how you dress but look around to see, okay; you will always get feedback, you know. People look at you in a certain way and you can catch that glimpse where you think, "Okay, I shouldn't have done that."

P 1: (84:84)

You always hear people say communication, you know, 7% is tone and then I have a huge significant amount of percentages around how you look

P 1: (104:105)

You know because you want to take the attention off you.

INTERVIEWER: And put that onto your working product and your delivery.

8.2.1.1 Code: Credibility

P 1: (232:232)

Sometimes though like I mean comments that irritate me, it's like, "Do you have a dress for everyday?" Like that irritates me. Its like, "What do you think I spend my time thinking about my wardrobe?" But, I mean, that's people with their own issues. But I get great feedback at the bank and then here as well.

P 1: (84:84)

I don't wake up in the morning and think, "Let me dress up so that people will take me seriously in a meeting." I think there's a big element around what you do and what you say in the content that you bring to a meeting rather than what you look. But I do definitely know that if you are looking sloppy you will raise an eyebrow, not in the right direction, you know.

P 1: (84:84)

I usually get told that, you know, "Jeepers, do you have an outfit for each day of the week?"

P 1: (84:84)

I just know is that it matters to look appropriate. Not necessarily good. So I'm not into, "I'm going to look smashing at work." No, it is really about looking

appropriate and feeling comfortable with who you are, in your skin, for you to do whatever it is necessary.

8.2.1.2 Code: Evolution of style

P 1: (290:290)

I think so. I think it is going to evolve with my age, definitely. I don't know, sometimes I dress; I think, yeah, it will definitely evolve but it will still remain quite me. I don't think maturing will mean more boring but I think it will be more interesting.

P 1: (176:176)

I think it's changed as I matured, as I define my personal style. Before I don't think I had one, you know, I was just going with what is in the store and that is what I would buy.

P 1: (72:72)

I think I more comfortable and more experimental and more expressive of who I am. When I was younger there was a view of what a professional look is like so it would be your suit, pants and a jacket. I actually don't like to wear pants. So I've kind of like let that go in terms of power dressing as that was seen relevant in the day. I am more now expressive around what I like and what I enjoy and less about how I'm supposed to look.

P 1: (76:76)

So I've completely, in my view, I've left what was supposed to be the look, you know, a girl wears her suit, she wears it. I don't have suits.

P 1: (128:128)

The shoes were a black pair of shoes; very boring.

P 1: (140:140)

I've gone from wearing a lot of pants to none, more dresses, more feminine, in terms of what I dress. And my shoes are crazy. I think crazy in a sense and that I'll wear, like on Friday, I was wearing like a cocktail jacket, it is white and it's got black...

P 1: (126:126)

It was a suit; it was a pinstriped suit. It was grey and it had thin white lines and I wore a white shirt.

P 1: (116:116)

We've seen the evolution of really-really formal to a bit more individualised, in terms of how people present themselves and how they communicate with their superiors: how they dress and just their general approach.

8.2.1.3 Code: Impression management

P 1: (48:48)

For me, it's about how are you received and perceived in a context so looking your best, I think, is a good thing, in terms of people taking you seriously and around you making an effort around how you look and feel.

8.2.1.4 Code: Opinions of others

P 1: (136:136)

In my mind there was a mental model around what being professional is and what it looks like and that is what I followed; very boring, you know, a suit.

P 1: (92:92)

You can't wear, to work, tight-tight pants especially if your body cannot handle that, you know. So there are people who've got fabulous frames that can wear tight pants and not look sloppy but somebody; just being appropriate for your body, in terms of what you choose, mini-skirts are completely inappropriate.

8.2.1.5 Code: Policy and dress code

P 1: (82:82)

I think if I was way out of policy somebody would have tapped me on the shoulder.

8.2.2 Parent Code: Expression of individuality

P 1: (54:54)

I buy stuff I like. I like things that are not necessarily off the scale but things that are interesting. So, I feel that, you know, there has to be something interesting about what you are wearing and, you know, so I think that's how I'm wired. So when I look for things I look for things that are interesting.

P 1: (56:56)

I buy from Oriental Plaza to when I'm somewhere in Spain, you know, Zara, Mango or anywhere where I find something that inspires me. So, for me, I think

the individuality really comes from the fact that I look for things that interest me and not following a trend, per say.

P 1: (268:268)

Sometimes I don't but I mean because my colours are always so dull I feel that I can get away with colouring my hands.

P 1: (234:234)

I just don't want to be boring. A bank can be boring; a black dress, a black jacket and stockings and...

P 1: (230:230)

I just enjoy how I look. I really do and be it at the bank or be it at our headquarters; I always just pick what's really exciting to me and I always get great feedback, all the time.

P 1: (146:146)

Yes, a tuxedo jacket and I wore a black tutu-skirt with a bow in front and bright yellow shoes. You know, so my shoes have changed significantly, from your typical just work shoes, they are more; my shoes I wear in the work context and in my social life so I play around with those.

P 1: (148:148)

More playing around with my hair as well.

8.2.2.1 Code: Accessories

P 1: (34:34)

And a little broach

P 1: (36:36)

I'm wearing pearl earrings today and my broach has a bit of a pearl, so I thought to include that, just to break the navy.

P 1: (130:130)

Earrings.

8.2.2.2 Code: Appearance effort

P 1: (38:38)

After I shower I have to find something to wear and I look in my wardrobe and I put whatever comes to mind. It's sort of a long decision, you know, a whole process. It is just a, "What do I need to wear," look. I look at the weather and then choose something relevant.

P 1: (44:44)

I think you need to make an effort in how you present yourself, both in the work context and even in your everyday life.

P 1: (50:50)

So like zero planning. I don't put a lot of planning into my look. I buy, I just buy things I like and I don't ever know how it is going to pan out in my wardrobe so if I see like a pink jacket. I won't think, "Oh my gosh, I don't have a pink; I don't have anything to go with this." I buy items I like. I don't buy items because I think it is going to go with anything and it comes together because I like everything that I buy and I just put it together differently. I just enjoy putting things together.

P 1: (64:64)

My hair, I change my hair a lot. People always say they can't recognise me because I'll be with this hair then I'll be just rocking my natural hair. Then I'll have a wig or I just play around. I'm not fixated on any particular look.

P 1: (98:98)

Sloppy is just like looking like you didn't pay attention, be it from ironing, be it from your collar being straight or just not looking right.

8.2.2.3 Code: Conspicuous consumption

P 1: (188:188)

Conspicuous consumption; myself, personally, I'm not 'blinging' although my ring looks like I'm 'blinging', that's my wedding ring that my husband got me, but, no.

P 1: (184:184)

I'm quite price conscious and I really want value for what I put down. I do splurge but I splurge more on my bags than on clothing.

P 1: (188:188)

I spend a lot of money or what would be seen as a lot of money on my house and my furniture.

P 1: (154:154)

Although like when I did start shopping my wardrobe, when I started working, and I'd like to think that I had less money, I shopped at Jenni Button.

P 1: (160:160)

I mean I liked Jenni Button so I shopped at Jenni Button. But I mean, how much was I earning? Like R7.000 or something like that and I don't know how I was able to buy those things but now I buy more things that, I mean, like the dress that I'm wearing cost me R200. This jacket I got on sale so I spend less.

P 1: (172:172)

And I do have a tendency of just thinking that the things are overpriced. So, I think that there is no value in the clothes that we have on offer here, in the country. And also there is just no creativity. Everything is just the same.

8.2.2.4 Code: Culture

P 1: (62:62)

So I'm Tswana and I must say like, you know, unlike the Ndebele, where they've got lots of colour and lots of vibrant outfits; we really don't. It is navy blue, brown or red and it is usually that print, that Dutch print, and it's really not, I think, relevant for work.

8.2.3   Overlapping codes

8.2.3.1 Code: Personal brand

P 1: (118:118)

Comfortable.

P 1: (263:264)

Nail polish colours, generally?

P 1: Yes, I'm always bright.

P 1: (266:266)

I generally like these colours, the whole full range. I sometimes do a French manicure.

8.2.3.2 Code: Personal choice

P 1: (60:60)

I've started to introduce prints. I've got prints in my wardrobe but even the prints are quite subdued, in terms of colour. I don't bring that much colour, especially to work.

P 1: (274:274)

And then prints; I'll go with the basic colour.

P 1: (272:272)

It is blacks, greys, whites, browns and navies.

P 1: (269:270)

Do you buy dark colours on purpose or it just happens to be what you gravitate to?

P 1: It just happens and what I gravitate to, honestly.

P 1: (252:252)

Like even weekends I'm in high heels. My husband is always like, "Love, are you okay?" I'm like, "I'm perfectly fine, thanks." I like high heels. I'm comfortable in them.

P 1: (252:252)

I do flat shoes, sometimes, like even weekends I'm in high heels.

P 1: (174:174)

I have a huge control over personal choice. I mean, I choose what I like. I don't care much for trends.

P 1: (138:138)

Yeah, and what I'm comfortable in and what I enjoy and what I think is nice.

8.3 Conclusion

This addendum is an example of the level of detail that went into the first step of the data analysis. The approach to the data analysis in this study was robust, comprising interviews and photographic elicitation. The data was gathered through voice recordings and photographs. The within-case analysis proved useful in creating solid code families and themes that were utilised in the cross-case analysis.