

Clothing Makes The Woman

by John T. Malloy

WOMEN: If you want to wear the pants in your office -don't.

My researchers and I put the question "Would a woman in a pantsuit fit into your executive office?" to 500 executives in a cross-section of American corporations. Of those 500, 402 said no.

Then we administered a "twin test," a technique developed to measure the reaction of large numbers of respondents to a specific item of clothing. THE TEST included two pictures of the same women, wearing two versions of the same blazer suit. In one photo the suit had slacks and in the other it had a skirt. We asked the people taking the test to guess which "twin" was successful and had a better job.

From 80 to 94 percent of the time, the positive attributes were assigned to the picture of the woman in the skirt. Male executives assigned the positive attributes to the skirted woman 94 percent of the time while female executives made the positive association with the skirted look 88 percent of the time. This was one of the rare occasions when the reaction of the general public mirrored that of the executives. The skirted woman got the nod from the general public 84 percent of the time.

I considered the results sufficient to conclude that a woman wearing a skirt will command more respect than the same woman in pants.

TO FURTHER TEST that conclusion, we went to 50 women who agreed to wear identical outfits with the one variable (slacks or a skirt) about a week apart. They further agreed that for two years they would rate their authority at the end of each test day on a scale of 1 to 10. In every case, the women reported a higher score for the skirt than the pants.

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