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Dressed for Work: The Sartorial Representations of Working Women in Early 21st-Century American Primetime Dramas

Abstract. The present study is theoretically located in the field of critical feminist studies of the representation of women in the mass media. It discusses the ways in which working women characters construct and express their occupational identity in selected American primetime TV dramas of the early 21st century. The observed strategies, which range from highly restricted self-expression to unbridled sartorial liberty, appear to be heavily correlated with the prestige of the presented occupations and their levels of masculinization/feminization. Moreover, the self-limiting sartorial choices of high-achieving professional women, frequently containing their femininity, result from the competitive nature of prestigious yet traditionally male-gendered occupations. However, it is also pointed out that working women are generally depicted as determined to accentuate the physical aspects of their femininity regardless of the established dress code or traditional gendering of their occupations. Thus, the sartorial choices made by the female characters at the workplace serve in the analyzed TV shows as symbolic manifestations of women's growing confidence as players on the job market in their own right.

Keywords: working women, women's clothing, occupational identity, primetime drama, American popular culture

1. Introduction

Critical assessment of gender performances in patriarchal workplace environments has become a popular theme in the context of gendered behavior and performativity theory (Foucault 1995, Butler 2005), examining, among other things, the role of clothes and

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related paraphernalia in constructing ideas about gendered appearance. Both scholars and practitioners have expressed research interest regarding attire in various occupational groups, e.g. physicians (Jenkins 2014, Gherardi et al. 2009, Petrilli et al. 2014), nurses (Clavelle et al. 2013, Hatfield et al. 2013, Lehna et al. 1999), dentists (Furnham et al. 2014), lawyers (Furnham et al. 2014, McNamara), teachers (Rutherford et al, Weber and Mitchell 2002), academic teachers (Green 2001, Kaiser et al. 2001), or banking sector employees (Barnes and Newton 2020). While some researchers examined the relationship between the clothes worn by medical professionals and patient perceptions (Clavelle et al. 2013, Gherardi et al. 2009, Lehna et al. 1999, Petrilli et al. 2014), investigated how uniforms project authority and power (Bickman), or the ways corporate uniforms contribute to an organization's success (Barnes and Newton 2020), others explored how women's gender identities are experienced and maintained through sartorial practices (Entwistle 1997, Green 2001, Goodman et al. 2007, Guy and Banim 2000, Kaiser et al. 2001). However, despite the well-documented examination of prime-time portrayals of working women (Atkin et al. 1991, Byars and Meehan 1994, Vande Berg and Streckfuss 1992), the relationship between the clothes worn by such characters in prime-time dramas and their occupational identities has been significantly neglected. The aim of this paper is not only to examine what clothing practices are used and how, but also determine whether female characters performing traditional and non-traditional occupations are shown as manifesting or suppressing their femininity through sartorial choices available to them.

The research material consists of 51 prime-time TV dramas that originally aired on both national and cable networks between 1999–2010. The shows included in the sample meet three major criteria: (1) at least two consecutive seasons within the 1999–2010 time frame, (2) at least one female character in a starring role, either as a central character or a meaningful member of the ensemble cast, with an identifiable, pronounced occupation, (3) generically pure dramas, with minimal interference of alien components lifted from other successful television genres, such as fantasy, comedy, or science fiction. The selection process produced 216 major or significant to the plot female characters in a variety of occupational roles, mainly shown in hospitals, clinics, law practices, courts of law, police stations, crime labs, and government offices.

For the purpose of this paper, I subscribe to the notion that gender is a cultural construct that includes norms, behaviors, and roles associated with being a man or a woman, whereas gender identity is one's internal sense or experience of one's gender. The latter may or may not correspond to the biological sex determined by such physiological aspects as reproductive organs, chromosomes and hormones. It is, however, communicated through personal appearance, clothing, and behavior. Also, traditional and non-traditional occupations refer to jobs and professions that have been historically dominated by the representatives of one sex and conventionally associated with either feminine (traditional) or masculine (non-traditional) stereotypical attributes ("What Are Nontraditional Occupations?").

2. Sartorial identity markers

Sartorial identity markers are often self-explanatory, as they are deeply embedded in the work environment. The identity kits may consist of clothes, name tags or badges and any other paraphernalia that are signs or symbols of a particular occupation. In the *Introduction to the Sociology of Work* (2001), Rudi Volti emphasizes the importance of a distinctive uniform as a marker of occupational identity. He mentions, among other things, police uniforms "meant to convey authority," white outfits worn by nurses and doctors and connoting "strict attention to cleanliness and hygiene," or pocket protectors characteristically used by engineers and computer programmers (138). Volti points out that jackets and ties may also be construed as a uniform, as the set expresses a "fairly high-level status," setting the wearer apart from the lower-level employees toiling at mundane everyday tasks their non-corporate jobs involve. Overall, uniforms serve to express corporate identity over personal identity. They eliminate the possibility of personal choice of clothes and allegedly level out the differences between men and women performing the same tasks, becoming "totemic emblems" (Joseph and Alex 1972, 720).

The analysis of clothing in various types of film fiction goes beyond the mere concept of outfit and must always recognize its role of the costume along with its artistic and ideological purposes. The creative work of the costume designer and members of the costume department, who must acknowledge and balance fashion trends, physical reality, and budget constraints, has an immense bearing on the visual aspect of contemporary TV characters and may affect the reception and success of the series. However, as the audiences rarely understand and reflect on the complexities of costume creation, average viewers perceive the appearance of the characters as their autonomous decisions that reflect their attitudes, ambitions and values. Contrary to such popular assumptions, the sartorial choices of the female characters discussed throughout the paper always refer to the costumes selected for them by the people behind the scenes, i.e. costume designers, actors who portray the characters, show runners, writers, directors, and other individuals involved in the production of the show (Daniel Lawson 2017).

The subsequent analysis concerns the depictions of the creative use of sartorial elements by female employees for self-expression in three situations: when they are obliged to wear professional uniforms, when they have to obey quasi uniform rules, and when they enjoy total sartorial freedom at the workplace. The ultimate goal is to assess the importance of clothes as tools of constructing women's femininity in job-related contexts in the analyzed dramas.

3. Professional uniforms

In the examined sample, professional uniforms are chiefly worn by police officers, paramedics, a military lawyer, and a firefighter. Apart from the representatives of law enforcement and emergency services, uniforms are also worn by female members of the

medical profession, namely doctors and nurses. Crime Scene Investigators (CSIs), the majority of women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) jobs and a chef also don uniforms as they perform their work-related tasks.

Although police officers have a significant representation in the sample, only those who work as regular beat officers are regularly shown wearing a uniform. An example in question is Faith Yokas (*Third Watch*) who wears a season-appropriate dark uniform, virtually identical for police officers of both sexes. In the warm period, the uniform consists of a short-sleeved shirt, belted trousers, and black plain-toe boots. Characteristically, while male colleagues on her team usually wear neckties, Yokas is seen with the shirt collar casually open, exposing bare skin. In cooler periods the shirt gets replaced by a black, mock turtleneck shirt and a winter jacket. Different distinctions are clearly visible, such as her city affiliation patch as well as the rank insignia. Another important element of the identity kit is the police badge, dubbed as the shield, which she usually wears in the designated area above the left chest pocket. Her patrol officer status is signaled by a police radio strapped to her left shoulder. Finally, Yokas is often seen with two unmistakable, powerful symbols of the law enforcement profession and actual instruments of coercion or defense: a baton and a gun. She usually carries the former on her left side, whereas the latter rests in the holster on her right hip.

Another representative of the uniformed services is Kimberly Zambrano, a paramedic in *Third Watch.* Zambrano wears a navy-blue uniform that consists of a jacket and trousers, with the sign "Paramedic" in white capital letters above the right chest pocket and "FDNY" over the left one. Moreover, the right sleeve has a paramedic certification patch, whereas the left shoulder patch bears the sizable emblem of the New York City Fire Department. When on call, Zambrano also wears a stethoscope around her neck. Her uniform is unisex in type, consisting of a jacket-like shirt and belted trousers. Although the unisex uniform allegedly underplays her gender, her feminine curves are accentuated through tight-fitting pants and the tucked-in shirt. Zambrano's occupation is clearly stated by the word "paramedic" on the front and back of her jacket, as is her New York City affiliation. However, her personal identity is de-emphasized as no name badge is visible.

The only firefighter in the sample is Alexandra Taylor (*Third Watch*), who happens to double as a paramedic. Taylor can be seen wearing different types of uniforms depending on whether she waits for a call, performs her duties as a paramedic, or extinguishes fire in emergency conditions. One variety of the uniform she appears in consists of a short-sleeved shirt and trousers; her surname is printed in red capital letters over her right breast, whereas "FDNY" runs above the left. Another uniform she is frequently seen in is a fireproof and waterproof suit consisting of a coat and trousers with suspenders, accompanied by heavy boots, protective gloves, and a helmet fitted with a face shield. It is only her blonde hair, blue eyes and angelic face visible under the helmet that mark her out as a female. As Taylor is a small-framed woman, the uniform looks oversized and suggests her fragility.

The homogenizing function of the uniform originally meant for men makes female police officers, paramedics, and firefighters blend into a squad, virtually erasing their

femininity and turning them into "one of the boys" in their teams. The prominent source of the shared identity in these occupations is the city or unit affiliation and the performed tasks, whereas the exposed rank insignia enhance professional credibility, emphasizing meritocracy irrespective of gender. Both personal and gender identity are repressed in the process, as the outfits of female professionals are not visibly modified in order to enhance the femininity of the wearers.

Women serving in the US army are represented by Sarah MacKenzie (*JAG*), the sole female Marine Corps lawyer in the sample. She is usually featured wearing either of the two varieties of navy uniforms: khaki or navy-blue. They both come with pencil skirts and peaked hats, or, alternatively, a garrison cap. Wearing a dress uniform, MacKenzie also has her orders' ribbons and awards pinned above her left breast. Also, when appearing in the military court, she is often seen carrying a briefcase. Unlike the uniforms discussed above, the army uniforms differentiate heavily between the sexes, maintaining credibility in relation to the lived sartorial reality as stipulated by *Army Regulation 670-1. Uniforms and Insignia. Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia* (2005). The fact that a skirt rather than pants is the default component of the woman's uniform in this highly masculinized profession immediately marks out MacKenzie and other female army officers on the show. Moreover, although the skirts the colonel gets to wear are knee-length, they tend to expose half her thighs when she is seated. Thus, even though MacKenzie's professional merits are well-advertised by the ribbons on her chest, the lower part of the uniform highlights her physical femininity.

Among the medical doctors, scrubs and coats create a high level of professional uniformity irrespective of gender. Although the white coat symbolically denoted medical authority and respect throughout the last two centuries (Hochberg 2007, 311), doctors' garments differ now in colors and patterns. This change has also been observed in the analyzed material, where medical scrubs in different colors serve as indicators of the TV doctors' area of specialization, or the ward or unit where they perform their chores. For example, on *Grey's Anatomy*, neurosurgeons on duty wear various shades of blue short-sleeved V-neck scrubs with matching drawstring pants and a white lab coat on top, whereas neonatal surgeons are dressed in dark green. On the same show, the colleagues from the dermatology unit wear pastel, pink blush scrubs, believed to correspond to the serenity enjoyed by the medical staff of their ward (Episode 5, Season 4). The shoes of the female doctors are mostly comfortable sports shoes or sneakers sustaining their mobility during a busy hospital workday. A common piece of the doctor's equipment is a stethoscope typically hanging around the neck to communicate the on-duty status. On close examination, stethoscopes, like uniforms, come in different colors, which makes them yet another element distinguishing one from other similarly clad medical professionals.

The uniformed identity of surgeons becomes even more pronounced when they enter the operating theater to perform surgeries. While operating, they must wear gowns and surgical gloves, cover their mouths and noses with masks, and hide their hair under surgical caps. Although their individuality becomes lost under the garments, it is partly

reclaimed through small variations within the limits of sanitary-hygenic regimen of the operating theater. In the analyzed medical dramas, doctors display a variety of scrub hats to communicate their identity and express their personality when other sartorial means of distinguishing themselves from others are unavailable. At times, this piece of garment becomes an important symbol of the character's trials and tribulations. For example, Meredith Grey wears her deceased husband's lucky surgical cap upon returning to work after extended absence following his tragic death. The cap becomes a symbolic link between their shared past experience as surgeons and spouses and the new reality within which she needs to reinvent and reestablish herself as a surgeon. The episode in which Grey wears an ordinary cap marks the moment when she moves on and becomes more focused on her work and career than on grieving. A designer Hyakkaryouran bouffant surgical cap selected for the guest star surgeon Margaret Campbell (played by Faye Dunaway in Episode 16, Season 5) emphasizes her reputation and prestige as the first female surgeon in Seattle Grace Hospital. The brown and gold hues coupled with a pattern of chrysanthemums traditionally representing the fall season appear to correspond well with the character's status and age, but also symbolically convey an imminent end of her career. Indeed as the episode closes, Dr. Campbell decides that the failed surgery she has just performed is her last one before retirement.

The other group of scrub-clad female medical professionals are nurses. Their uniforms may also come in different colors depending on the ward, and this fact is sometimes used in the shows to signal important aspects of the character's professional identity. Zoey Barkow of *Nurse Jackie* is especially discernible by her various colorful, printed scrubs which emphasize her immaturity and inexperience in contrast to the other medical professionals in the emergency department. In fact, these playful scrubs are so definitive of Barkow's nursing student status that when she accidentally causes a patient to overdose and puts him in a coma, they are exchanged for plain grey ones to emphasize the grief she expresses over the situation. Similarly, Kelly Epson, a pediatric nurse working at the children's ward on *HawthoRNe*, is shown wearing colorful printed scrubs, e.g. with ducklings, the choice most likely motivated by an attempt to prevent the 'white coat syndrome' (Hochberg 2007, 312). Moreover, nurses are regularly shown sporting two important attributes, that is a pair of rubber gloves and a stethoscope. The former, usually tucked into one of the many scrub pockets, are meant to ensure protection against the patients' bodily fluids and save the patients from infection during administration of various procedures or medicines. In turn, the stethoscope reminds the viewer that that nurses often assess many vital parameters of those committed to their care. Because this tool has traditionally functioned as a doctor's attribute (David and Dumitrascu 2015), the fact that more and more TV nurses carry a stethoscope around their necks undercuts the degrading myth about their professional subordination to doctors. On the whole, sartorial strategies intended for the nurse-characters in the examined TV series are markedly different from the earlier popular culture image of the nurse as a sexy object of desire of her male colleagues and patients.

In relatively few occupations, the depicted female characters are shown as switching between uniforms and personalized clothes, depending on what job tasks they perform. CSIs, medical examiners and STEM professionals belong to this group. The TV series that demonstrates the work of female CSIs employs a standard repertoire of sartorial indicators of these women's professional identities used according to the tasks at hand. During fieldwork, they typically involve ball caps and forensic vests, with a name tag over the right breast pocket and the unit patch on the left. The vests are worn over T-shirts and other casual tops, depending on the time of day (or night) and weather conditions. When necessary, CSIs may also don windbreakers with the police insignia. The identifying credentials badge is usually pinned down to the belt rather than hung around the neck. They may occasionally wear protective gear to avoid cross-contamination of evidence at the crime scene. In laboratory work they wear protective gloves and white lab coats, with their names embroidered on the left breast and the logo on the right (*CSI: Miami*) or just the sign "NY Crime Lab" across the left breast (*CSI: NY*). Curiously enough, they do not get to wear hairnets, a mandatory accessory in actual crime labs. Although no formal requirements appear to regulate their dress for office duties, they wear casual or smart casual clothes for the occasion.

The costumes of medical examiners and forensic anthropologists reflect similar clothing strategies that correspond with the dual functions of their jobs, namely fieldwork and morgue or laboratory duties. While engaging in fieldwork, medical examiner Alexx Woods (*CSI: Miami*) usually wears a white trouser suit, a V-neck blouse showing cleavage or a sleeveless tank top, stilettos, and sunglasses. Working at the dissection table, Woods wears blue, green, or bordeaux scrubs and disposable rubber gloves, and never uses a hairnet to cover her long tresses while leaning over the corpses with a sponge, scalpel, forceps, or other similar utensils. In a similar manner, Temperance Brennan (*Bones*), a forensic anthropologist, is usually shown as opting for more casual look that consists of comfortable slacks and fitted jackets, often belted, or a long buttoned-up coat, plus knee-high boots. Working in the lab, Brennan usually dons a buttoned-up teal lab coat with her name embroidered over the logo of the Jeffersonian Institute on the left breast and a name badge attached to the right side. The coat only partly covers up dresses, flared skirts or black jeans, paired with feminine tank tops or button-down shirts underneath. However, starting from Season 5, her flowy apparels are replaced with more tailored, conventional office cuts. Characteristically, Brennan is very particular about her accessories, choosing bold statement necklaces and earrings, often ethnic in origin. Both Woods and Brennan are shown as alternating between two looks mandated by the dual nature of their tasks, that is fieldwork and lab work, balancing sartorial self-expression with the necessity to yield to internal dress policies. Importantly, these clothing strategies allow the characters to distinctly yet effortlessly emphasize their femininity while applying advanced scientific methods and techniques in their respective, traditionally "unfeminine" professions.

A completely different slant on performing professionalism in terms of clothes is represented by female computer technicians. Rather than project an image of adult

femininity, the forensic specialist Abby Sciutto (*NCIS)* and the computer technician Penelope Garcia *(Criminal Minds)* show a penchant for unorthodox, youthful dress styles, revealing fascination with youth subcultures, goth and pin-up, respectively. Even though Sciutto dons a white lab coat when working with high-end and cutting-edge equipment, her tattoos and spiked choker necklace blatantly defy the conventions of age-appropriate workplace attire. These costume decisions result in a rather infantilized femininity image of specialists whose education, professional skills and competencies are well above average.

A uniform is also worn by the only chef in the cohort, Sookie St. James in *Gilmore Girls.* In the early seasons she is usually seen wearing a white double-breasted jacket and sporting her hair in low pigtails. In the later seasons, the array of jacket colors expands to include red, blue, and lilac. Instead of a white hat considered part of the chef's uniform, St. James's look is completed with wide, ornamental headbands or bandanas. Although they fail to keep the bangs off her face when she handles the food, they do help bring out her feminine hairstyles. One other item, technically not an element of her job outfit, is the Band-aids and bandages on her hands and fingers. Their frequent presence and stark visibility communicates two things about her occupational identity, namely exposure to job hazards such as handling sharp or hot objects typical for all chefs, and her accident-prone nature.

On close inspection, some of the sartorial choices made by costume designers, writers or directors for the working women characters in the TV dramas appear purely nonsensical, as they clash with the commonsense knowledge of the workplace contexts. Notably, opting for stilettos where mobility is one of the priorities, or letting one's hair hang loose over the crucial part of crime scene evidence or the victim's body are most likely informed by the visual conventions in representation of women on television, emphasizing their attractiveness at the cost of realism and credibility.

4. Quasi-uniforms

Companies, schools, agencies and many other establishments tend to have specific dress code for their employees to adhere to. For this reason, the work clothes selected according to such guidelines can be considered quasi-uniforms – their function is to mold employee outfits (and, oftentimes, hairdos and nails) without making them dress identically. The term encompasses traditional suits and skirted suits common in business, corporate and government settings. It most typically applies to the workwear in the law enforcement sector, such as higher-ranking police officers and detectives, agents, lawyers, and White House administration staff.

Female police lieutenants and captains in supervisory roles as well as police detectives are dressed according to similar clothing strategies, displaying a conservative corporate look in line with their office duties. For example, lieutenant Anita Van Buren (*Law & Order*) and captain Claudette Wyms (*The Shield*) most often appear in collared

shirts with trouser suits, or jackets paired with dress pants in darker hues; they sporadically appear in pencil skirts or simple tube dresses. Similarly, detective Olivia Benson (*Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*) is casually dressed in belted slacks, casual tops or T-shirts, and suit jackets made of various fabrics. The female characters in this category are featured wearing comfortable, flat or block-heel, black, no-nonsense shoes. They mostly keep their badges or shields tucked behind the belt, and occasionally one can also get a glimpse of a holstered gun. Additionally, when participating in police action, they don bulletproof vests. The last three elements best express their distinctive occupational identity; other than that, their outfits represent a classic, smart casual office look stripped of feminine components. However, cautious experimentation with shirt or blouse colors, patterns, and necklines accentuating their bosoms can be interpreted as an attempt to reclaim their femininity.

Female agents are yet another occupational group conspicuous by appearing in highly homogeneous outfits. Sam Spade (*Without a Trace*) performs most of the job-related tasks wearing a dark or grey trouser suit coupled with a white shirt, whose collar is usually kept open to expose cleavage. Alternatively, she is seen wearing tops or blouses with deep decolletage producing a similar effect. She usually does not wear any jewelry, except for an occasional simple silver chain and hoop earrings. Casual clothes consisting of lace trim tops, leather jackets, and jeans are a preferred option while conducting surveillance operations or making arrests. An indispensable element of the female agent's identity is a badge, attached to a pocket or tucked behind the belt, or a plastic-covered identity card pinned to the lapel.

The above quasi-uniforms replicate masculine-style wardrobe, with the wearer's femininity played down in effect. The inherent masculinity of the occupations in question is additionally emphasized by guns as essential working tools. However, such modifications of the masculine standard as bold colors, plunging necklines and jewelry effectively serve the female working characters in restoring their femininity.

Female lawyers in the study sample constitute a group of characters conspicuous by their attire, meticulous about their outfits, and extremely salient for their power-dressing skills. According to Entwistle, these could be perceived as a 'technology of the self', popular in the 1980s among the women attempting to break the so-called 'glass-ceiling' in professional careers (1997, 312). Three such strategies have been identified. The first is the conservative, masculinized office look, mostly sported by the older generation female lawyers, and occasional young imitators such as Ellen Parsons in *Damages*. The second is the conservative, yet feminine, look achieved through carefully chosen accessories, characteristic of the middle-aged to older demographics. The third one is the sexy style associated with the younger cohort of *Boston Legal* lawyers, whose sex-appeal is enhanced by plunging necklines, miniskirts, and stiletto pumps.

The importance of the sartorial style for the symbolic articulation of female lawyers' professional identity in the shows can be illustrated by juxtaposing Sally Heep of *Boston Legal* and Diane Lockhart of *The Good Wife*. The professional failure of the first one is conveyed by her extravagantly feminine style violating the established

conventions. After one ignored warning by the firm's senior partner, herself very strict about appropriate attire, Heep, whose professional competence is unquestioned, gets fired for unsuitable garb, mostly consisting of short, tight-fitting skirts and revealing blouses. In contrast, Lockhart's professional status and authority is strengthened by power-dressing without compromising her femininity. She wears figure-hugging suits and sheath dresses, in unorthodox colors and reflecting latest fashions, and her outfits are accessorized with eye-catching earrings, pendants or brooches. These elements create a compelling look that speaks authority and feminine power, drastically different from the masculine manner of dress characteristic of women in positions of power popularized in the 1970s (Rubinstein 2001, 115).

As already pointed out, breaking the masculine outfit conventions by female lawyers may occasionally have a negative consequence for their professional performance. Such insight into the wardrobe tensions is offered in Episode 4, Season 2 of *The Good Wife.* A presiding male judge interrupts Alicia Florrick's courtroom speech and begins to interrogate her about her outfit. In reply, Florrick offers the name of the designer, specifically Ralph Lauren. The unimpressed judge insists that female lawyers must wear skirts, and not pants, in his (sic!) courtroom. In this deeply disturbing scene, Florrick's authority and competence as a lawyer are undermined, and she herself is reduced to her womanhood. What is even more troubling, she does not challenge the male judge, but meekly promises to wear a skirt next time.

The costumes of women employed in the White House (*The West Wing*) also follow the quasi-uniform dress code. Since these characters represent a presidential administration, their clothes reflect a high level of formality: blouses and shirts, trouser suits or skirts and jackets, communicating seriousness, sternness, and professionalism. Their groomed looks are partly necessitated by the constant presence of the media around them, and the possibility of their visual image being circulated in the media for different purposes. Thus, the sartorial manifestation of their occupational identity is tied to the public image of the White House and, by extension, of the President and the First Lady at the national and international level as well.

5. Sartorial freedom

It appears that in the selected dramas the greatest freedom regarding one's work clothes is granted to the characters depicting self-employed women in HORECA industry (with the exception of chefs), women in fashion industry, journalists, and social workers. Partly restricted in their sartorial freedom are teachers, STEM professionals, and PR specialists, whose wardrobe choices are likely to reflect institutional workplace regulations.

The costume decisions made for the heroines and secondary female characters in HORECA occupations differ depending on the type and size of the businesses they operate. For instance, the wardrobe of the inn keeper Lorelai Gilmore (*Gilmore Girls*) blurs

the boundaries between her work attire and everyday clothes. She mostly wears a variety of Diane von Furstenberg wrap dresses, but she does not abstain from pants, blouses, and cardigans either. Her casual clothes exude the aura of homeliness, which is in line with the type of business she operates. On the other hand, the professional strengths of Bree Van de Kamp (*Desperate Housewives*), a lifelong housewife who runs a budding catering business, consist of her capacity as a cook directly involved in food preparation and as a manager who represents her company in business situations. This is why she is shown wearing classy aprons and oven mitts when baking cakes and pastries in her kitchen, communicating dedication to cleanliness, hygiene, and safety. Additionally, the clothes she wears underneath paired with her signature string of pearls and matching earrings exude the aura of refined elegance, conjuring the nostalgic image of a submissive and docile Stepford housewife. When she attends business meetings with her clientele, Van de Kamp most often wears a smart dress paired with a cardigan or blazer, or a twinset coupled with a pencil skirt or conservative pants, all in styles reminiscent of the 1950s. These sartorial choices successfully communicate her dual identity as a homemaker and a feminine businesswoman, which she manages to mesh perfectly.

The costume choices for women characters working in the fields of science, technology, and mathematics appear to depend heavily on their work environments and the institutional constraints on their sartorial freedom. The newly appointed professor Amita Ramanujan (*Numb3rs*), apparently quite free to create her professional image, is, however, shown as rather clueless about it. Her casual and youthful wardrobe consists of jeans, tops (often times low cut ones), cardigans and scarves, entailing a risk of being mistaken for a college student or a doctoral candidate. In fact, her male colleague Dr. Larry Fleinhardt advises Ramanujan to refashion her image so as to be accepted as a professor by other colleagues, whereas the female Chair Dr. Mildred Finch bluntly scolds her for choosing unprofessional clothes totally inappropriate for a person of her standing. Clearly, Ramanujan is institutionally expected to go up a notch, add gravity to her workplace persona, and create some distance between herself and her students to counterbalance her young age. Similar concerns regarding "the need to negotiate an optimal level of identification and differentiation" were commonly expressed by academic women interrogated by Kaiser et al. (2001, 126). However, the budding professor does not yield to pressure, retaining her youthful and carefree look.

As an occupational group, STEM professionals exemplify an interesting strategy of costume designers in constructing professional identity through sartorial choices. It seems to result from two interrelated reasons: personal eccentricities of the characters and the lack of sartorial conventions in their novel professions. The aforementioned predilection for clothing and accessories characteristic of goth or pin-up subcultures visible in costume choices made for Sciutto and Garcia implies their sartorial immaturity, apparently clashing with their professional status. However, the lack of prescriptive dress code creates leeway for experimentation, suggesting that women in STEM jobs actively shape clothing practices in these new work environments, making unconventional and eccentric apparel the actual convention.

Fashion choices made for female media professionals also reflect a similar freedom of self-expression, albeit adjusted for a particular character's rank and position. The costumes designed for Lucy Spiller, a powerful tabloid editor-in-chief in *Dirt*, such as low-cut V-neck tops or blouses, chiefly in black and occasionally in red, paired with tailored jackets and slim leg trousers, emphasize her position of authority. The laid-back columnist Carrie Bradshaw (*Sex and the City*) wears outfits and designer shoes that make her look as if she has just stepped off the runway. Bradshaw's love of fashion and penchant for designer shoes (Bruzzi and Church Gibson 2004, 117) have little to do with her work routine. Her work clothes when writing in the comfort of her bedroom are quite often pajamas, revealing tops paired with boxer shorts and other lingerie-like clothing. On the other hand, as evening and night social hours inform her column, these wardrobe choices can be interpreted as an extension of her work attire. Finally, the daily newspaper reporter Alma Gutierrez (*The Wire*) wears simple shirt-like blouses with an open collar, white or patterned, combined with dark or khaki pants. Her work clothes resemble those of her male colleagues, with a slight feminine concession regarding the top part.

The costumes of female teacher characters on *Boston Public* imitate the outfits that are commonly deemed appropriate for representatives of this profession. Although dress code regulations for American high school staff are not stringent and tend to be geographically diverse, with considerable latitude as to what constitutes professional attire, one of the key requirements is reasonableness (Sternberg 2003). In the case of the *Boston Public* female teaching staff, it translates into blouses or shirts paired with cardigans or jackets, whereas the preferred bottoms are pants, occasionally exchanged for skirts. The color schemes are neutral and toned down, and the jewelry pieces tend to be inconspicuous. The characters are seen wearing sensible flats, comfortable while traversing the school corridors for long hours. The only teacher who stands out from the rest is the music teacher, whose garb consists of feminine wrap dresses, form-fitting dresses, with V-necks and delicate patterns. Overall, the female teachers' costumes appear practical and correspond to their authority as educators to high school students. The selected fashions appear to be motivated by the intention to represent this group of professional women as accessible, respectable, and de-sexualized.

Varying degrees of sartorial freedom can be also observed in the clothing choices made for the female PR professionals, with the exception of those employed at the White House. Jennifer "JJ" Jareu form the FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit (*Criminal Minds*) is regularly shown talking to the press in a casual blouse or a lilac turtleneck sweater, or wearing a suit and white shirt, or a belted trench coat for outdoor meetings. Her apparently inconsistent wardrobe reflects the fact that her stint as media liaison officer is only part of what she actually does on the team. A different clothing strategy is exemplified by the dressing style of Samantha Jones (*Sex and the City*), notorious for her glamorous, sexy dresses and short skirts paired with high-heeled shoes which she wears day and night. Such outfits are in line with the fairy-tale realities of her PR executive job as a renowned party planner. In fact, the costume designer on *Sex*

and the City declared that Jones's outfits were heavily indebted to the 1970s and 1980s and modeled after *Dynasty*'s Alexis portrayed by Joan Collins (quoted in Sohn 2002, 74–75).

6. Clothes and femininity in the televised workplace

The classification of women's sartorial styles observed in several types of fictional workplaces in the TV dramas under scrutiny has revealed an array of representation strategies ranging from limiting the characters' self-expression by highly restrictive rules to allowing them, what can be interpreted as, absolute freedom of choice. However, a closer analysis of those representations reveals that they are governed by a few rules in costume design. The most general one is the correlation between the level of sartorial freedom, the socioeconomic status of an occupation, and the level of its masculinization/feminization. The higher the rank and occupational prestige of a job, and the tougher the competition with men for professional recognition, the more contained the working women are in the manifestations of their femininity through clothing. Moreover, women's higher positions within the occupational hierarchy appear to entail more cautious sartorial choices and restrictions. Nonetheless, no matter what level of uniformity is in place, the inclination is to emphasize the physical attributes of the working women's femininity. Their uniforms are fitted, the skirts and dresses accentuate bosom and waist, and expose shapely legs. The headgear, even protective, allows for some exposure of the hair. If such modifications are unrealistic, at the very least the costume designs involve experimenting with colors and patterns, or accessorizing outfits with feminine jewelry and shoes.

The above findings appear open to dual interpretation in the wider context of women's experience on the non-fictional American labor market. On the one hand, they reflect the still strong tendency to control or contain women who enter traditionally masculine occupations by heavy policing of their workplace attires. Through the symbolic use of clothes, they indicate that gender inequality persists in certain professional environments. On the other hand, they show women characters who increasingly resist such attempts, do not intend to forsake their femininity at the cost of careers, and do not obligingly abide by the workplace conventions created mostly by men. The mass viewing public of primetime dramas revolving around the dilemmas of women in paid employment receives the message that working women should refuse to masquerade and live a double life; instead, they should attempt to be themselves, to perform their gender by experimenting with fashion, and enhance their sexual attractiveness without fear of jeopardizing their professional standing.

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