

A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF TRUTH AND POWER FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

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INTRODUCTION

The fashion capital of Los Angeles is a city that encompasses a political divide that transposes itself into both the personal and professional spheres. At the root of this divide is the struggle for power, which to a large degree is either obtained or relinquished depending on one's identity (Awasthi 2017). Previous literature proves that what is worn on the body grants individuals access to power and shapes how outsiders view the capabilities of the individual (Adam and Galinsky, 2012). This research asks how clothing shapes the identities of one of the most underrepresented groups, the African American woman, in Los Angeles.

OBJECTIVES

The first objective is to highlight the experiences of Los Angeles-based African American women, a minority group that encounters far more restrictions when seeking to access power in comparison to their white counterpart.

The second objective is to establish that clothing can be used as a tool to prove that social exclusion lies at the intersection of place and race for African American women.

METHODOLOGY

The following Qualitative research methods were used across ten Los Angeles-based African American women. All of the participants are white-collar workers.

- Card Sorting (Lobinger & Brantner, 2020)
- Participant Observations
- Individual Interviews



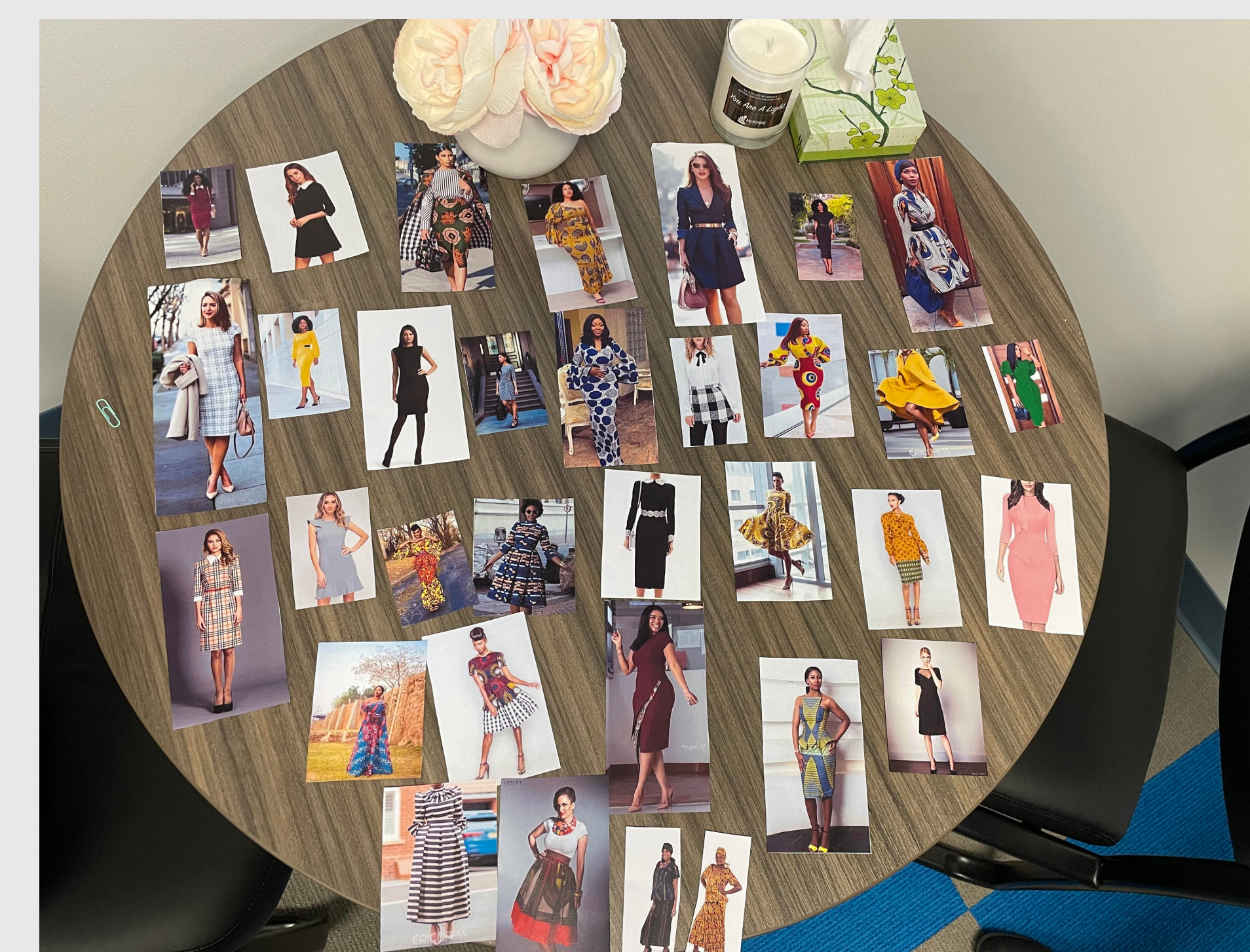
This graphic depicts the factors that alter whether or not the voices of Black women are heard. On the left side of the image, dark/ muted colors, collars, and formal Eurocentric based styles are deemed to be "acceptable" to wear within the workplace if power would like to be accessed. On the contrary, the right side of the image depicts a style of dress that would be deemed as socially "unacceptable", containing bright colors/ patterns, a cut to show bear skin and several other elements found in formal African style and wear.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

- All participants greatly altered the structure of the images from their preferential form to depict a Eurocentric approach to choosing fashion when trying to gain access to power.
- All participants reported clear anecdotes that demonstrated times in which they were outcasted because of their clothing choices in comparison to their white counterpart within the workplace.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the case of African American women in Los Angeles, having their ideas represented and heard within the workplace requires strategically placing materials against the body. In order for power to be acquired and exerted, these women must alter their exterior selves which clashes with their inherent inner identity. A future recommendation includes examining factors that will help outsiders to suspend judgement and practice inclusion regarding the clothing choices of African American women within professional workplaces.



The image on the left depicts dresses that one of ten participants preferred to wear in order from the most likely to be worn on the top left to the least likely on the bottom right. The image to the right depicts what the participant would prefer to wear at the workplace if they needed to attend a meeting in which they felt their voice needed to be heard.

REFERENCES

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