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Empowerment Through Clothing? The *Hosenanzug*, Women, and Political Power

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Tyler William Johnson entitled "Empowerment Through Clothing? The *Hosenanzug*, Women, and Political Power." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in German.

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Empowerment Through Clothing?
The *Hosenanzug*, Women, and Political Power

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Tyler William Johnson

August 2018

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Abstract

Early in the 1990s, feminist Judith Butler wrote in her book *Gender Trouble* over the idea that gender is a performance. Through this idea, I analyze through media examples how the pantsuit or the German equivalent, *der Hosenanzug*, is depicted through media outlets in relation to women in power. This thesis aims to answer the question if women are scrutinized over the pantsuit or clothing more than men are, especially those in power or with a powerful spouse. Though the answer can seem to be an obvious yes, I delve into how the media outlets treat the pantsuit as a clothing item of progression, even when on the one hand, women of power in the conservative spectrum use their dress as femininity, even when running an ‘alt-right’ platform, but on the other hand, women of power on the liberal spectrum tend to dress more conservatively. This analysis covers the past 150 years of history from the USA and Germany, as well as other instances where women were victimized from wearing pants in a western context. The goal of the thesis is to see in which ways the media either boast or victimize women in powerful roles, even when one is the spouse of the one in power.

Keywords: Judith Butler, feminism, pantsuit, Hosenanzug, powersuit, Angela Merkel, Hillary Clinton, Melania Trump, Theresa May, Margaret Thatcher, Ivanka Trump

Preface

Writing my master's thesis over the *Hosenanzug* was definitely not what I planned to research when I started at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. This thesis, however, has helped to accomplish my goal, namely to successfully research on a more academic level. As a white male from a lower-to-middle-class family, I have no personal experience when writing about what women, women of color, men of color, nor anybody in between feel, think, or how society still points-the-finger at non-white-males, but I wrote this thesis to point out what is currently plaguing our society: the usage of women's clothing as a means of ridicule in a polarized political landscape. The observations in media today are quite precarious, especially while at the current historical moment several women are in powerful political positions. For the western society, this is a newer concept, which is sadly for some, still hard to shallow. Thus, I use this piece as a media analysis to investigate how media in selected German, United States, and United Kingdom newspapers and tabloids exploit, ridicule, and try to control women in power. In this discussion, the discussion of men's clothing is brought forth, however, men are not the focus. I also would like to see in future research, how women of 'non-Caucasian' heritage are portrayed in the media, especially since Oprah might be running for president in 2020.

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Introduction. Starting Points, Methodologies, and Arguments

“Ihr Outfit ist prall und sexy und zeugt von ihrem neuen Selbstbewusstsein. Je höher sie in den Umfragewerten klettert, umso mutiger wird ihr Stil.”¹ This is a quote from the German “Star-Stylist,” Armin Morbach after the German-Chancellor, Angela Merkel, appeared at the opening of the Oslo Opera in 2008. Her dress was deemed by many as inappropriate, especially since “[M]an kennt Angela Merkel klassisch und konservativ im Hosenanzug.”² In English, the word *Hosenanzug* means *pantsuit*, which has also been considered in the English vernacular today as a more conservative version of clothing. However, as stated by *The Atlantic*, women in United States senate were not allowed to wear the pantsuit until 1993.³ What was so demonizing about this pantsuit and what is demonizing about Chancellor Merkel’s low-cut dress? Why are these fashion choices debated in the press?

The pantsuit is neither an invention from the 1990s nor a creation of today’s haute couture. Marlene Dietrich, a famous German-American actress, was known for wearing a pantsuit even before it was socially acceptable for women to wear pants. She was not the first woman to have done this, especially not in the western context. Throughout the 1930s, she is seen wearing her version of the pantsuit on and off camera. She was, however, not the only famous Hollywood star who followed this trend. Another notable celebrity of the time is Katherine Hepburn, who also, throughout her life, wore pants. She has been described as a “role

¹ Meier, J. (2008, April 14). Ausschnitt mit Absicht. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <https://www.stern.de/lifestyle/mode/angela-merkel-ausschnitt-mit-absicht-3093296.html>.

² Meier, J. (2008).

³ Henderson, N. (2015, March 02). Barbara Mikulski made it okay for women to wear pants in the Senate. Retrieved May 13, 2018, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/03/02/barbara-mikulski-made-it-ok-for-women-to-wear-pants-in-the-senate/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.adcca2a1919b.

model for the independent woman” during the 1930’s in the United States. Hepburn was relentless in her insistence on wearing pants, saying “unless you give me back my pants, I intend to walk through the RKO lot naked.”⁴ She helped pioneer the acceptance of women embracing pants in daily life.⁵ In 1938, Helen Hulick, a Kindergarten teacher in Los Angeles, CA was arrested for wearing pants to a court case.⁶ She wore pants to court and the judge ordered her to wear a dress next time. She told the *L.A. Times* in 1938 that, “[Y]ou tell the judge I will stand on my rights. If he orders me to change into a dress I won't do it. I like slacks. They're comfortable.”⁷ The pantsuit has also been popularized in “female-to-male drag” films in post war cinema in Germany and in America as a way for women to “disguise” as men.⁸

This brief overview shows that after Dietrich’s pantsuit appearances in 1930’s film *Morocco*, the pantsuit gained in popularity in entertainment. The pantsuit was an expensive item of clothing, though, mostly worn as formal night fashion. In the late 1960s, the pantsuit made its debut on the runway during a fashion show. The designer of the 1960s pantsuit, Yves Saint Laurent, wanted to make the pantsuit socially acceptable and popularize this mode of clothing for women. Even after Laurent’s pantsuit debut, the trend did not completely take off, though. In

⁴ Women who created a standard of glamour and elegance. (1996, December 17). Philadelphia Tribune, p. 1D. Retrieved April 15, 2018, from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/533205554/pageviewPDF/117FBE1FCE134AE1PQ/1?accountid=14766>.

⁵ Women who created a standard of glamour and elegance. (1996).

⁶ Harrison, S. (2014, October 23). In 1938, L.A. woman went to jail for wearing slacks in courtroom. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-california-retrospective-20141023-story.html>.

⁷ Harrison, S. (2014).

⁸ Guenther-Pal, Alison. (2018). “Should Women Be Amazons?” Reallocating Masculinity in German Postwar History and Hosenrolle.“ forthcoming in *Seminar* Volume 54, Number 3. The research in the paper is about the cinema after the end of World War II in Germany. The analysis includes the film *Fritz und Friederike* (1952). A short analysis of the paper and the film is used in a later chapter, which explains the difference from the portrayal of women in these masculine roles.

the mid 1970s, fashion photographer Helmut Newton photographed famous women, such as Liza Minelli, in the pinstripe pantsuit for women. These silhouettes helped popularize and engrain this image into the fashion forward world. Laurent's almost failed attempt went on to become one of the world's most popular so called "powersuit" for women.⁹ Since then, this mode of clothing has continued to evolve.¹⁰ The 1980s were a very popular time for the pantsuit, namely in the workplace.¹¹ Women were known for wearing these suits in the workplace, especially with huge shoulder pads. In a *Forbes Magazine* interview, Ivanka Trump talks about how she remembers seeing her mother in the 1990s wearing the "powersuit". She mentions that the pantsuit is now an obsolete version of clothing, because "I think now we're more comfortable expressing our femininity as opposed to assimilating, even in the most corporate of environments."¹² Fashion designer Adam Lippers says in the same interview that "there is a real craftsmanship that is inherent in the pieces, and I think the woman wearing them can often understand that there is something really special in what she is wearing."¹³

This sense of "something really special" might originate in a second historic trajectory of the pantsuit: women wearing pants to fight for gender equality, equal rights, and emancipation. The correlation between the fight for suffrage and the acceptance of women wearing pants dates back to the 19th century. Amelia Bloomer, editor of *The Lily*, early suffragette, and 'maker' of

⁹ Shardlow, E. (2011, August 08). How Yves Saint Laurent Revolutionized Women's Fashion By Popularizing The "Le Smoking" Suit. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <http://www.businessinsider.com/ysls-greatest-fashion-hits-2011-8>.

¹⁰ Shardlow, E. (2011).

¹¹ Shardlow, E. (2011).

¹² Hyland, V. (2010, March 25). 10 Fashion People Weigh In on the Power Suit. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <https://www.thecut.com/2015/03/10-fashion-people-weigh-in-on-the-power-suit.html>.

¹³ Hyland, V. (2010).

the Bloomer's pants,¹⁴ was influenced by the work of Elizabeth Cady Stanton.¹⁵ Half a century later, during World War II, the 'fictional' character, Rosie the Riveter, was created to help promote "queer jobs" for women.¹⁶ These so-called "queer jobs" were propagandized as "selling young women on the notion of joining the WAAC."¹⁷ It is that curious intersection between entertainment, fashion, and politics that makes the pantsuit such an interesting case study. Since this thesis aims at tracing the trajectory between the entertainment and political realms for women wearing pants and contemporary debates about the pantsuit, it is interesting to note that women were propagandized into wearing pants. This campaign led to women feeling comfortable in the work place, namely by wearing the clothing needed. Those women on the front during the war were required to ration out their clothing, proving that in dire needs, clothing was a choice of accessibility and practicality, not of fashion. The objective of outlining this juxtaposition in clothing is not to observe what was worn, but rather to see how examples of 'media depict and politicize images of women wearing or not wearing pants. What is notable here is that after the war and once rations were not as 'limited' in western societies any longer, images of women in pantsuits were replaced by ideals of the 'perfect housewife.'

In the early 1990s, women in positions of power, especially in politics, started to wear this pantsuit as an expression of empowerment *and* a display of power. *Harper Bazaar* Online Magazine turned Hillary Clinton's iconic pantsuits into a gallery. In this gallery, they highlight

¹⁴ Simmons, L. (2016, September 23). Petition of Amelia Bloomer Regarding Suffrage in the West. Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/bloomer>.

¹⁵ Florman, Jean. "Bloomer, Amelia Jenks" *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa*. University of Iowa Press, 2009. Retrieved 16 April 2018, from <http://uiopress.lib.uiowa.edu/bdi/DetailsPage.aspx?id=35>.

¹⁶ Knaff, D. B. (2013). 3. Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women of World War II in American popular graphic art. Kansas: University Press of Kansas.

¹⁷ Knaff, D. B. (2013). 2.

over 63 times that Clinton revolutionized the pantsuit “into a powerful symbol [a] female power and feminism.”¹⁸ The rotating gallery at the beginning shows Clinton in her different rainbow colors, signifying her advancements for LGBTQIA+ rights. Roughly a month before the 2016 United States Presidential election, Libby Chamberlain created a Facebook Group under the name “Pantsuit Nation.” This Facebook group quickly went viral and is itself a homage to Clinton and her trademarked ‘pantsuit.’ Unlike other social media movements that seem to die down after the contender of the group has lost or is not in the spot light anymore, the page is still used today to empower not only women, but also to advance a place of acceptance. The intentions of the group are to empower women and to push a progressive agenda. This alleged agenda displays diverse instances of empowering situations or stories throughout the nation. One example is Oprah Winfrey’s Golden Globe’s Cecil B. DeMille award story to emphasize, “like we do here in Pantsuit Nation every day,”¹⁹ that “we” should “keep speaking up. Oprah wants you to.”²⁰ Chamberlin uses the pantsuit in a very unique way. In her book *Pantsuit Nation*, she allows other contributors to explain why they wear the pantsuit and why the pantsuit is not only an outfit, but it also is “more than any other campaign pin, slogan, or logo, the pantsuit symbolize this moment in history, and I wanted to wear that symbol” defining the pantsuit as a

¹⁸ Algoo, J. (2017, October 06). 63 of Hillary Clinton's Most Iconic Pantsuits. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <http://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/g8119/hillary-clinton-pantsuits/>.

¹⁹ Tunis, C. (2018, January 8). Facebook post from Courtney Tunis. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10100232808880970&set=gm.1700821830015412&type=3&theater&ifg=1>.

This photo is taken from the Pantsuit Nation's Facebook. To have the ability to view the Facebook page, one must have a Facebook account and be a member of the Group on Facebook. The Group is open to all. Administrators, however, view and accept certain post to the group. This post in particular was taken from one of the administrators of the Group after Oprah Winfrey accepted the Cecil B. DeMille award. She is also the first African-American to have received this award.

²⁰ Tunis, C. (2018).

symbol of optimism in the quest for gender equality.²¹ Alternatively, the opposite is argued about the group. In a *Los Angeles Times* article from December of 2016, Klein writes about the possibility of discouragement from the group. She describes: “I thought I was getting into when a friend invited me to join the secret Facebook group. Pantsuit Nation. I imagined we were mobilizing for the political fight of our lives. But the movement never happened.”²² She, like many others, expected the group to start a movement, but instead, it posts memes and shares other feel-good, mainly personal news and stories. There are also examples of negative portrayals that in theory attack women. Another critique was that many of the feel-good stories were by and about white women, again ignoring women of color and their fight for acceptance.

This thesis first traces the evolution of the pantsuit in a few historical snap shots and then addresses how media portray the so-called powersuit, pantsuit, and the German equivalent *Hosenanzug* today. Following this introduction, I give a historical overview: “From Le Smoking to The Merkel Suit: The History of the Pantsuit.” This section explores the idea of women wearing pants in western cultures and *Hosen* or the ‘Merkel branded’ *Hosenanzug* in the German Language. In this part of the analysis, I trace how women throughout history have shaped something as simple as the ability to wear pants for certain social and work activities, to becoming the mode of modern traditional business garb for women in the work force in the 1980s. The discussion traces the last 80 years of how the pantsuit has entered entertainment as well as cultural and political spheres.

²¹ Chamberlain, L. (2017). *Pantsuit nation*. xi. New York: Flatiron Books.

²² Klein, K. (2016, December 26). *Pantsuit Nation had the potential to mobilize millions. Instead, it's just a feel-good commodity*. Retrieved May 13, 2018, from <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-klein-pantsuit-nation-20161226-story.html>.

After a historical overview, I switch to a contemporary analysis of politicians and public political figures such as Hillary Clinton, Theresa May, Ivanka Trump, Melania Trump, and Angela Merkel. Throughout the thesis, the study of contemporary images of and discourses about the pantsuit refers back to this historical lens to show the multiple levels of meaning emerging in contemporary reactions to powerful women in pantsuits. While it has only been 25 years since women were first allowed to wear pantsuits in the United States government²³, today the common clothing style for western women in business and politics is the pantsuit. Yet, discussions about this style of clothing still draw on feminist history, they involve discussions of modesty and respectability, and appear to continue to focus on a clothing style in a struggle with questions of gender, power, and representation.

The second part of this thesis focuses on contemporary examples and includes discussions of how Hillary Clinton and Angela Merkel's clothing choices are addressed. As stated in the quote above, Merkel is known to dress conservatively and respectably, and both she and Clinton have trademarked the pantsuit as their outfit of choice. However, this so-called respectable mode of clothing is a more contemporary mode of describing women wearing suits. In my analyses, I address how the pantsuit, worn by high profile women in politics such as Merkel, Clinton, Theresa May, and women in Trump's circle, is portrayed in selected examples of popular "reputable" newspapers, which the primary sources for the discussion derive from, and fashion articles from covering a timeframe of roughly a decade, from 2008 until 2018.

Using examples from current political leaders and politically influential women, I discuss the discourse of how pantsuits, powersuits, and *Hosenanzüge* are displayed in media. Examples are from *CNN*, *Fox News*, *The New York Times*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Stuttgarter*

²³ Henderson, N. (2015).

Nachrichten, Bild, Spiegel Magazine, die Welt, The Daily Mail, and a few other online and printed news sources. The argument is aimed to an in-depth media analysis of depictions of generally respected women of power. From the start, I had assumed that *Die Welt* and *Fox News* would on the one hand demonize the pantsuit and other clothing choices of women in power, but on the other hand, newspapers and tabloids, such as *CNN, Spiegel Online*, and *The New York Times*, use the pantsuit as a symbol “to embrace it and embody it and celebrate it.”²⁴ These examples show the public’s reactions to women’s clothing choices. Though clothing choices from men are often discussed, and, as was the case with President Obama, these discussions are often racialized, they do not take on the same level of discursive urgency and importance. Most of the times, clothing choices of President Donald Trump or previous President Barack Obama were discussed in connection to them wearing a piece of clothing that was considered “not-presidential.” President Trump is often ridiculed in the press for the many times he has played golf in his golf attire. The ridicule, here, does not focus on his clothing, but on the fact that he appears to have a lot of time on his hands while he, himself, emphasizes that “er sich als Präsident keine Zeit nehmen würde, den Schläger zu schwingen: Er würde nur arbeiten, arbeiten – zum Wohle des amerikanischen Volkes.”²⁵

The time frame of the media analyses covers 2008 until 2018 and focuses mainly on how different news outlets and popular tabloids have concentrated on the clothing choices of Merkel and Clinton to further certain political agendas. My analyses compare and contrast these examples to how media describe the clothing choices of “right-wing” candidates, such as the

²⁴ Chamberlain, L. (2017). xi.

²⁵ WELT. (2017, November 25). Donald Trump: Als Präsident zum 80. Mal beim Golf – Person des Jahres abgelehnt - WELT. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article170951678/Als-Praesident-zum-80-Mal-beim-Golf-Person-des-Jahres-abgelehnt.html>.

former female Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Margaret Thatcher, the current British Prime Minister Theresa May, and President Trump's circle of women, mainly Ivanka Trump and Melania Trump. Through each of these women holds a different placement of power, their clothing is still interpreted along similar lines and in similar media outlets. The position of the First Lady, though not elected, is highly visible and often criticized, as could be seen in the—often also very racialized—comments about Michelle Obama's dress when she was First Lady. My analyses of the pantsuit thus include political leaders as well as spouses or children of political leaders. Hillary Clinton, however, has held both, the role of the elected official and of the First Lady. The correlations with England seem peculiar because the two noted Prime Ministers both wear similar feminine, but power clothing, much like the Queen. Each of these women in powerful elected or representative positions are known as being dressed well and dressed for the occasion. May and Thatcher have not been shy about their clothing choices and have both been criticized for these choices, even when trying to 'power-dress' to conform with male colleagues.²⁶ The women in the Trump circle are also known for being 'fashionistas.' Current First Lady Trump was a model before marrying President Trump. She came to the US to peruse a modeling career, when she eventually met President Trump. She was featured on the cover of *Vogue* in 2005, which shows her in her Christian Dior culture wedding dress.²⁷ Ivanka Trump also owns her own clothing line and is known for wearing her brand *Nordstrom* in public. As a White House advisor, it can seem 'unethical' that she keeps her brand and advertises it

²⁶ Gander, Kashmira`. (2016, December 18). Fashion, women and power-dressing: Margaret Thatcher's impact on clothing. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/margaret-thatcher-clothes-dress-suits-power-dressing-fashion-impact-women-victoria-and-albert-museum-a7480026.html>.

²⁷ *Vogue*. (2018, February 26). THE DRESS OF THE YEAR. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <http://www.vogue.co.uk/article/the-dress-of-the-year>.

when possible.²⁸ Are they critiqued as much as liberal or centrist politicians? How does the German context compare to the North American context?

Discussions about powerful women in pantsuits take on multiple meanings in the contemporary media landscape. Depending on who or what wears the pantsuit in what context, different media outlets discuss and interpret this clothing style differently and appropriate it for their agenda. In some instances, it is considered ironic that the pantsuit embodies female empowerment, but at the same time, does not allow women to be overtly “feminine.” This “respectable” mode of clothing seems to level out the difference between male and female clothing styles. The pantsuit is now considered liberating and a way to emphasize equality between the sexes while at the same time it can be branded as a modest, conservative, and respectable style of clothing for women.

Judith Butler, a contemporary feminist philosopher, suggests in her book *Gender Trouble* that in order to change perceptions of gender in society, “a radical rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity appears to be necessary in order to formulate a representational politics that might revive feminism on other grounds.”²⁹ She continues to argue that “gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex; gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established.”³⁰

Current discussions about the pantsuit, so the argument of this thesis, illustrate how media is struggling to find ways to “formulate a representational politics” and illustrate that “for

²⁸ Eaglesham, J. (2017, December 28). How Ivanka Trump Is a Walking Billboard for Her Namesake Fashion Business. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-ivanka-trump-is-a-walking-billboard-for-her-namesake-fashion-business-1514389465>.

²⁹ Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. 5. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. http://lauragonzalez.com/TC/BUTLER_gender_trouble.pdf This book was found as a PDF online on 13. April 2018.

³⁰ Bulter, J. (1990). 7.

politics to take place, the body must appear.”³¹ To look at pantsuits as gender performance is complex. The pantsuit clearly shows how gender is performative,³² but the question of whether women in power wearing pantsuits perform masculinity or recode femininity remains open. The pantsuit is a clothing style that is considered conservative for women; it can take on politically progressive meanings; or, in the case of Clinton or Merkel, can be worn to signify a woman in charge. What is clear is that the pantsuit becomes a central set of clothing in discussions over gender, performance, and power.

In the following examples, I trace how media outlets have addressed the pantsuit from the suffragette movement in the 1880s to today’s Pantsuit Nation. It is interesting to see how this folds out. On the one hand, there are debates over women wearing pants in the western context as a sign of empowerment and progression, but on the other hand, without power dressing, at the least, women were not as respected. Senator Mikulski challenged these roles in the early 1990s by wearing pants in her position. Here is a link to the pants being a political statement. “Once she won, Mikulski, with her very presence, changed long-held ideas about what Senators should look like,”³³ alluding that her gender was represented through clothing in this Butler-style interpretation.

Today, the idea of gender as a performance is complicated by the extensive circulation of gendered bodies in social media. Twitter and hashtagged posts on social media, not only link the posted images or clips of gender performance to followers and friends but also to the branded #.

³¹ Butler, Judith. 2011. “Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street.” *Transversal*. Accessed April 13, 2018. <http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en>.

³² Butler, J (1990). 128.

³³ Henderson, N. (2015, March 02). Barbara Mikulski made it okay for women to wear pants in the Senate. Retrieved May 13, 2018, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/03/02/barbara-mikulski-made-it-ok-for-women-to-wear-pants-in-the-senate/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.adcca2a1919b.

“There appears to be a consensus, then, that digital activism constitutes a paradigm shift within feminist protest culture,”³⁴ a pragmatic shift. Feminists have engaged with this paradigm shift and tried to actively intervene in digital platforms to promote a new politics. Feminist digital actions

reveal the pervasive, structural nature of sexual violence, linking the specific, local stories of individual women to larger narratives of inequality. Utilizing the digital to make visible the global scale of gender oppression and to link feminist protest movements across national borders, these actions exemplify central aspects of digital feminist activism today.³⁵

After exploring the history of the pantsuit and of women wearing pants in politics and media, this thesis discusses how the pantsuit became one of many such images of gender performance that feminist digital activisms struggle with and try to re-code. The production of gender and the cultural inscriptions of meanings of the pantsuit remain contested to this day.

³⁴ Baer, Hester (2016) Redoing feminism: digital activism, body politics, and neoliberalism, *Feminist Media Studies*, 16:1, 18. DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2015.1093070.

³⁵ Baer, Hester. (2016). 18.

One: From “Le Smoking” to Should Pads: A history of the Pantsuit and of Rebellious Women Wearing Pants

Tracing the historic trajectory, I chose events in history that caught the public eye. These examples are built on the argument that the pant and the so-called pantsuit created the idea that women wore these items of clothing as rebellion at first, but eventually as a way to express where they were: in politics and in powerful roles. Media examples are the easiest to trace, because the public remembers the majority of these events. Though there are several examples in which women wore pants in protest or out of necessity, I focus on the few case studies in the argument of the media’s proliferation of pants, which ultimately lead the acceptance of pants for women as the style of power dressing in the western context. It is impossible to show every example of women wearing pants throughout western culture; therefore, I focus on selected examples from Western, mainly US and some German, history, which are drawn from political activism, to the introduction of queer culture, then later to Butler’s idea of gender performance and women wearing the pant and pantsuit to embody women in power. I start with the idea of pants becoming accepted in the 19th century in the US to and end with a discussion of Clinton indirectly revolutionizing the pantsuit as a brand of empowerment of women in politics. My, however brief, tracing illustrates that “no matter what women wear, their clothes form, shape, and delineate society’s vision of them. Women are bound, belted, circumscribed, and ultimately judged by their choice of costume.”³⁶.

³⁶ Sperling, J. (2004). Women in Pants: Manly Maidens, Cowgirls, and Other Renegades. *Business Leadership and Culture*, 27(2), 259-259. Retrieved May 14, 2018, from https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:2050/doi/full/10.1111/j.1537-4726.2004.133_33.x.

I start with Amelia Bloomer and her idea for women to wear bloomers under their skirts, I then talk about the 1930s in Hollywood and how two known actresses were not afraid to break gender roles. In the case of Dietrich, this is a kind of playful gender performance, Hepburn claims she simply wore pants for comfort. I then look into the pre-, during-, and postwar culture in Germany, England and the US and how women first started wearing pants for work, then because of low supplies, women were forced to wear their husband's clothing and through propaganda, women were ultimately allowed, if not forced, to wear pants in their so-called queer jobs.³⁷ These queer jobs would eventually disappear and change as the idea of the "nuclear" family dominates the discourse of the 1950s, only to be countered by second wave feminism in the 1970s and 1980s. Over the last 30 years, women in pants begin to illustrate women entering the business world and women becoming elected officials, therefore leading to the discussions about power dressing, the powersuit, and the pantsuit to be not only a sensation in the haute couture, but also of how women in politics should dress. What is interesting is that discussions about the pantsuit circulate back to one thing: women's progression and rights. I show this in examples from both women in power and women who are married to men in powerful roles.

What is a bloomer and why should I be scared of them as a man?

The word pantsuit is not first seen in English until the 1960s;³⁸ however, rules against women wearing pants can be seen as far back as 200 years ago. A law in Paris forbid women from wearing pants. The law says that women should not be allowed to wear trousers, because

³⁷ Knaff, D. B. (2013). 2, 3, 49, 170-171.

³⁸ Paris and the politics of pants. (2011, September 18). Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/paris-and-the-politics-of-pants-2091527.html>.

women were caught impersonating men in men's clothing during the revolutions.³⁹ "Trousers were not only a symbol of male power, but of the separation of the sexes. A woman who wore trousers was accused of cross-dressing."⁴⁰ Christine Bard writes in her book *Une Histoire Politique Du Pantalon* about the political turmoil for women wearing pants throughout history. She suggests that "Le rapport entre les sexes est aussi engagé par cette dissymétrie"⁴¹ and that "L'ouverture du vêtement féminin évoque la facilité de l'accès au sexe féminin, sa disponibilité, sa pénétrabilité," (*The relationship between the sexes is also engaged by this dissymmetry [...] the openness of female clothing speaks to the facility of access to the feminine sex, her availability, her penetrability*).⁴²

During the *Biedermeier* Epoch in Germany, men and women were taught and expected to dress a certain way.⁴³ Women were encouraged to wear longer dresses and shirts and have their hair neatly done: "[...], dass Kleider nicht nur eine Frage der Mode sind, sondern Menschen auch in bestimmte Rollen (oder in enge Korsetts und Mieder) drängen."⁴⁴ Women were expected to satisfy their so called 'God-Given role' of a caregiver, and by doing this, they were supposed to be dressed as such.⁴⁵ Women were on the one hand to be loyal to their husbands, and by wearing pants, they were subjected to losing their "Anmut"⁴⁶ as a woman, but on the other hand, they

³⁹ Paris and the politics of pants. (2011).

⁴⁰ Paris and the politics of pants. (2011).

⁴¹ Bard, C. (2010). 11. Une histoire politique du pantalon. Paris: Éd. du Seuil.

⁴² Bard, C. (2010). 11. Translation by Jodie Miller

⁴³ Hosen als ein Stück Emanzipationsgeschichte. (2011, October 11). Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <https://www.shz.de/lokales/insel-bote/hosen-als-ein-stueck-emanzipationsgeschichte-id1725181.html>.

⁴⁴ Hosen als ein Stück Emanzipationsgeschichte. (2011).

⁴⁵ Mentges, G. (2011, February 22). Europäische Kleidermode (1450–1950) Europäische Kleidermode. Retrieved May 15, 2018, from <http://ieg-ego.eu/de/threads/modelle-und-stereotypen/europaeische-kleidermode-1450-1950/gabriele-mentges-europaeische-kleidermode-1450-1950#HfischeInszenierungundbrgerlicheModestileFrankreichalsModevorbild>.

⁴⁶ Hosen als ein Stück Emanzipationsgeschichte. (2011).

were allegedly not allowed to achieve the strength of men through wearing pants.⁴⁷ In a Butler-style interpretation, Bohmer seems to suggest that during the *Biedermeier*, women invented or reinvented gender by wearing certain clothing that would be the most “angemessen,” “Schön” and “züchtig”, reflecting an extreme proverb that “Kleidung machen Menschen,” or, as Butler might interpret it, “Kleidung machen Gender.”⁴⁸

This idea of women being subordinate to men and having to wear a certain dress slowly changed in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. Sports were also becoming prominent in the western world. For certain upper-class women to be able to participate in sports, ride horses like men, and ride the newly invented bike, they needed a new form of clothing, which would not constrain them during these activities.⁴⁹ Gustav Klimt, among others, advocated for women having more freedom in their clothing choices.⁵⁰ He was already known for speaking out against censorship.⁵¹ The censorship he spoke against was mainly in relation to his paintings and other artist at the time; however, also was a partner of helping with women’s advancements.

In the mid 19th century in the United States, Amelia Bloomer was the editor of *The Lily*, the first newspaper for women.⁵² Bloomer, who was also influenced by the work of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, would eventually write about dress reform for women. Bloomer was not only a proponent of women being allowed to wear pants, but also an early participant in the suffrage

⁴⁷ Mentges, G. (2011).

⁴⁸ Böhmer, G. (1977). *Die Welt des Biedermeier*. 1. Aufl. München: M. Hueher. 159.

⁴⁹ Mentges, G. (2011).

⁵⁰ Mentges, G. (2011).

⁵¹ Friehs, J. T. (n.d.). *Vom Kunstkandal zur Austro-Trademark: Gustav Klimt*. Retrieved May 15, 2018, from <http://www.habsburger.net/de/kapitel/vom-kunstkandal-zur-austro-trademark-gustav-klimt>.

For more information over the secession movement and Klimt’s involvement in the movement and women’s rights, please refer back to this website or to Mentges.

⁵² *The Lily: A Temperance and Abolitionist Newspaper*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <http://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/the-lily/>.

movement in the US.⁵³ As a property owner, by having a bit of wealth and possessions, she found it unjust, that she was deprived of representation, even though she was paying taxes. In a letter Bloomer wrote, she requested that she “petitions your Honorable Body from relief from this burden of taxation – or for the removal of political disabilities” and she wanted “the right of self-government at the ballot-box at all state constitutions, or laws to the contrary notwithstanding”⁵⁴ Bloomer, however, is now noted in history books for something else: The Bloomer Outfit. She was a suffragist, newspaper editor, and contemporary feminist; alongside these struggles, she also fought for women to be able to wear trousers. The bloomers that Bloomer is most known for are worn underneath the dress. They give women the physical mobility to hold jobs outside of the home, namely in factories or other facilities in which only men worked, as well as perform other activities.⁵⁵ Of course, there was controversy over the bloomers.⁵⁶ The bloomers are worn underneath the dress, but the mode of clothing for women remained the same. The skirt is a bit shorter than the original dress, but the pants would still cover the female’s legs. The pants were of Turkish design. Bloomer still has her feminine silhouette but has the bloomers underneath the dress for convenience as well as comfort. At the same time as it slowly became acceptable for women to wear these bloomers underneath their clothing, they started to demand constitutional rights, which Bloomer and her husband fought for. *Life and Writing of Amelia Bloomer*, published by her husband, recounts separate occasions

⁵³ Simmons, L. (2016, September 23). Petition of Amelia Bloomer Regarding Suffrage in the West. Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/bloomer>.

⁵⁴ Simmons, L. (2016).

⁵⁵ Mentges, G. (2011).

⁵⁶ Steiner, Linda. "Amelia Bloomer (27 May 1818-30 December 1894)." *American Magazine Journalists, 1850-1900*, edited by Sam G. Riley, vol. 79, Gale, 1989, pp. 64-68. *Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 79. Dictionary of Literary Biography Complete Online*, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/KNAVZQ512224128/DLBC?u=knox61277&sid=DLBC>. Accessed 16 Apr. 2018.

of the public's reaction of wearing pants. Bloomer writes that she had, "no thought that my action would create an excitement throughout the civilized world and give to the style my name and the credit due Mrs. Miller."⁵⁷ Around this period, women started to enter the workforce while men were away in war. Below, I discuss how in the 1940s and 1950s the idea of the bloomers took off and made it acceptable for women to wear trousers in certain situations.

Hollywood in the 1930s: The Big "Pantsuit" Debut

It is the turn of the decade: The United States is in the beginning of a dramatic recession "The Great Depression," Germany is about to experience the fall of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazi Party, and the rest of the western world is still recovering from World War I and from the Great Depression of the United States of America. However, in these difficult times, Hollywood experienced a Golden Age in the film industry.⁵⁸ The film industry thrived during the 1930s and 1940s. With film becoming a new mode of entertainment, stars of the films as well as the directors pushed the limits of what would and could be allowed.

Marlene Dietrich became a popular name of the time; first in the Berlin Cabaret scene, then later as a Hollywood actress.⁵⁹ Her notorious forgetting to wear underwear would attract

⁵⁷ Bloomer, D. C. (1976). *Life and writings of Amelia Bloomer*. 67. Saint Clair Shores (Michigan): Scholarly Press. Book is available online for download. Accessed 14. April 2018. <https://archive.org/stream/lifeandwritings028876mbp#page/n7/mode/2up>.

⁵⁸ Golden Age of Hollywood. (2018, February 20). Retrieved May 17, 2018, from <http://www.environmentalhistory.org/revcomm/cinema-clips/golden-age-of-hollywood/>.

⁵⁹ Hunt, C. (Director). (1995). *No Angel A Life of Marlene Dietrich* [Video file]. Retrieved April 18, 2018, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HvkQhzhZJE>. (2013, April 4) Original film published by London Weekend Television Productions. <http://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b7f49ad6c>. Video found on YouTube.

Berlin Cabaret-Goers to constantly come back for additional showings.⁶⁰ She came from a background of social and sexual openness in Berlin, which offers one explanation for why she was comfortable changing from being an overtly effeminate woman, directly to an overtly masculine woman. Her exhibitionist acts caught the attention of Josef von Sternberg, when he was looking for an actress to star in his next film.⁶¹ Her first major role was von Sternberg's "The Blue Angel," which starred Dietrich as a risqué cabaret dancer. Dr. Immanuel Rath, a local Gymnasium professor, is lured by Dietrich's character, Lola Lola, and eventually falls in love with her, practically becoming her love slave. He eventually quits his job as the Gymnasium professor and joins Lola's cabaret troop. Lola Lola, being the promiscuous cabaret singer that she is, starts showing interest in another man, eventually breaking Dr. Rath's heart. He returns to his old place of employment in search for a position he no longer holds and dies at his desk of broken heart. Dietrich's depiction of Lola Lola is one of the first times that the Berlin cinemagoer would learn her name. This portrayal also showed Dietrich in a witch like role. On the one hand, she is working her job moving from city to city entertaining people, but on the other hand, she is known to lure men. Rath, being the sad, lonely man, he is, is easily lured by Dietrich's character. Later in the same year, Dietrich and Sternberg would go to Hollywood together. In 1930, Sternberg's first major American film would be released, which once again has Dietrich as the lead female. Though Dietrich plays another cabaret singer in this movie, her character has a role that would change the public's view of her for the rest of history: Dietrich made her first American appearance wearing a men's tux. Mademoiselle Amy Jolly, Dietrich's character, enters a room of people simultaneously cheering and booing at her. The man, with

⁶⁰ Hunt, C. (1995).

⁶¹ Hunt, C. (1995).

whom she later has a love affair, both in the film and also off-screen,⁶² commands the men and women around him booing to stop. They cheer, and Mademoiselle Amy Jolly begins to sing. Before she sings, the viewer sees how both how feminine and masculine her silhouette is. Dietrich's character's hair is not very long and is covered up by a typical gentleman's top hat. Her appearance is not seen as overly effeminate, to the extent that she does not wear much makeup. If she had not started to sing, this silhouette could easily have passed as that of a man. The rest of the suit is fitted as it would be for a masculine form. Dietrich is shown sitting on a bench with her audience behind her. This photo of Dietrich shows her in a masculine pose sitting, smoking a cigarette. Her tuxedo fits her well and gives her a boyish look. Soon after she starts singing, it becomes easier to recognize that Dietrich's character is in fact a female. This is the only instance in the film where she is seen wearing this tuxedo. Ironically, this certain tuxedo scene highlights her so called "masculinity" when she wooed a woman on-screen by asking for her flower, smelling it, placing it in her tuxedo pocket, and then kissing her in a romantic way on the lips. The other men in this scene take it as a joke and the woman looks not only flattered, but even convinced. Dietrich was never shy to wear a tuxedo or even stylistically designed "men's clothing." Even though she was in this masculine dress and shoe, she still "personified the mystery, sex appeal, detachment and aloof confidence."⁶³

⁶² Hunt, C. (Director). (1995).

⁶³ Young, C. (2013, November 27). Style in Film: Marlene Dietrich in 'Morocco'. Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <http://classiq.me/style-in-film-marlene-dietrich-in-morocco>.

Rosie the Riveter and her Following: We are Women and Pants are Comfortable

World War II was pushing on. Men and women were being sent to Europe to stop the Axis forces from advancing. More men were being sent over than women; therefore, the workforce needed women. Women found it harder to work in dresses. In countries such as England, women were forced to wear their deployed husband's clothing because of clothing rations.⁶⁴ This was not the only reason why women were wearing men's clothing, however. Women in blue-collar jobs, such as factory workers, found it easier and more suitable to wear pants to their factory jobs than the traditional skirt. However, if women were working in the eyes of the public, such as a teacher or in a governmental role, they were still expected to wear skirts or dresses.

During this time in Germany; however, women were propagandized through the media to wear the classic dress of the German *Volk*, namely the German *Tracht*.⁶⁵ What the difference is here, is that on the one hand women in other western countries, like the US and England, were forced to wear other (often men's) clothing due to lack of clothing supplies. On the other hand, a general conservatism returned to female fashion and to concepts of the role of "the women (in the form of "motherliness" and an emphasis on gender differences) in many European countries,"⁶⁶ meaning that women were still expected in most European countries to stay in this motherly role and dress traditionally, which, in Germany, meant that women were encouraged to wear the clothing of their traditions. These clothing choices, specifically the *Lederhosen* and *Dirndl*, are popular in the German Bavarian and Austrian cultures. The *Tracht* today is normally

⁶⁴ Paris and the politics of pants. (2011, September 18). Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/paris-and-the-politics-of-pants-2091527.html>.

⁶⁵ Mentges, G. (2011).

⁶⁶ Mentges, G. (2011).

worn in a celebration or at a festival; however, this was an encouraged piece of clothing to be worn by the German Volk. In the portrayal of Eve Braun in *der Untergang*, actress Juliane Köhler wears a *Dirndl* in a majority of the film's scenes, especially, when they are celebrating.

The infamous "Rosie the Riveter" poster shows a woman with her shirt sleeve rolled up, a stern look on her face, and her arm flexed. Above the woman are the words "We can do it," which is to signify women being capable of working during the war, as they were needed to fill the places of men who had gone to fight. This original photo was released by artist J. Howard Millar in 1942 for the Westinghouse Electric Corporation, in order to recruit women to work.⁶⁷ This symbol became a widespread propaganda photo for women to work a year later, after a song titled "Rosie the Riveter" was published by Redd Evans and John Jacob Loeb. In the song, the two men sing about how women can do anything a man can do: "that little frail can do more than a male can do."⁶⁸ The video associated with this song shows women working in several different positions that, at the time, were traditionally men's work. However, women were doing these jobs to fill in for men missing from the work force; "Rosie is protecting Charlie working overtime on the riveting machine."⁶⁹ This "Woman" of war became a masculine figure, even when women were thought to stay feminine. Knaff also argues that since femininity became more masculine, there was a corresponding fear that men or masculinity would become effeminate.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ History Channel Staff. (2010). Rosie the Riveter. Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/rosie-the-riveter>.

⁶⁸ Jack Doyle, (February 28, 2009). "Rosie The Riveter, 1942-1945," Retrieved April 14, 2018 from PopHistoryDig.com, Link to the song is found on YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2E613J9m0I> retrieved on April 14, 2018.

⁶⁹ National Public Radio (NPR), "Rosie the Riveter" [[Re: Rose Monroe's death](#)], All Things Considered, June 2, 1997.

⁷⁰ Knaff, D. (2012). 49.

The Queer Role in Hosen?1950s German Film: Hosenrolle

Fritz und Friederike (1952), a film about a woman who is known for doing what were considered manly activities, is an interesting case study in the *Nachkriegskino*. The reason for choosing this film is to show how film highlighted the portrayal of women in pants as normalized, while, in the end, the film pushes women back into traditional feminine roles. The film is about both the characters Fritz and Friederike, played by the same person. In the beginning of the film, Friederike is shown teaching a horse lesson. While teaching, she is wearing men's pants and a men's top. Her aunt is worried that she is not feminine enough. Friederike, however, wanted a different life. In a poster from the film, it shows Friederike as both a female and a male. The plot of the film is somewhat confusing: as the poster shows, the person on the right is Friederike and on the left is Fritz. Fritz, however, is not a man, but rather the "alter ego" of Friederike. Due to the masculine manner of the character of Fritz, Friederike is asked to join a finishing school for women. In her time there, she shows a few other girls in the school the art of smoking, dancing, and doing other activities. After she leaves the finishing school, not graduating from it, she then joins the army, but as Fritz. Here Fritz is shown in "male-drag." Friederike joins the army in order to find her place for acceptance. Ironically, near the end of the film Friederike is shown falling in love with a man who her female friend originally loved. It is hinted at that Fritz and the friend might make a good couple:⁷¹ however, Friederike ends up with the male figure in order to normalize women's roles in the end.⁷² Here is another example of

⁷¹ Guenther-Pal, Alison. (2018). For more information over queer culture in German film, please refer back to this paper. Dr. Guenther-Pal writes about the idea, especially in a Butler-style interpretation of how the gender in film translate through the society.

⁷² Bolváry, G. V. (Director). (1952). *Fritz und Friederike* [Motion picture on DVD]. West Germany: Fama Film and Meteor-Film GmbH.

interpreting the pantsuit as ‘cross-dressing,’ but in end, the woman is put back into the heteronormative relationship. In this film, the main character struggles with the concept of how a woman should present herself during her time. She wants to ride horses, smoke, drink, and socialize in this manner. This queer idea of women playing men’s roles in a *Hosenrolle* is not new. Dr. Guenter-Pal argues that “normalizing” gender roles and retraditionalizing the family were a matter of public policy and management of the sociocultural realm, though some argue that this represents a modernization of the family under industrial-capitalist conditions and is not simply a return to tradition.”⁷³ There was a push for normality between the sexes, and this was propagated widely through film and other media. Though this film is not a major classic, it is still an interesting case study for the idea of re-establishing the heteronormality of the *Nachkriegskino*.

Pants and Pantsuits in Haute Couture

The 1960s and 1970s were important decades for fashion, especially for women. Many new ideas were being brought forth in the fashion world. After noteworthy public figures, like Katherine Hepburn and Marlene Dietrich, wore their pants on and off film, women already had the idea of pants being fashionable and glamorous. In 1966, Yves St. Laurent debuted the first tuxedo for women as “Le Smoking.” The woman in the photo has a male silhouette, is pictured holding a cigarette in her right hand, and has already blown out the smoke. The androgyny of the woman shows that both men and women could pull off this look. Her tuxedo is fitted to her body and is complemented with a vest and tie underneath. The model’s hair is also not shown much,

⁷³ Guenther-Pal, Alison. (2015). (3).

reiterating the androgyny of the tuxedo. Of course, this tuxedo was criticized rigidly by fashion other designers, like Gloria Emerson who thought that the tuxedo was dated and awkward.⁷⁴ Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the feminist movement affected change: the contraceptive pill became available, but still, “second-wave feminism”⁷⁵ did not completely make widely acceptable women wearing pants or other men’s attire. One photo from Newton shows again another androgynist woman dressed in another example of the tuxedo and, next to her, a naked woman. This photo, by photographer Helmut Newton, was featured in French *Vogue* in 1975. Newton can arguably be called the one who made the “Le Smoking” infamous, even though St. Laurent had introduced it almost a decade earlier.⁷⁶ Newton had the opportunity to photograph several influential people of the time, for example Liza Minnelli, in this silhouette.⁷⁷ Newton’s work is considered appalling, mainly because “the women of Helmut Newton’s world are women who know and get what they want; they are far removed from the weak, compliant sex-object dominated by the misogynist macho.”⁷⁸

Big Shoulders and Stuffing them with Pads: My Mother looks powerful with her big shoulders

The 1980s are known for being the decade of both the ‘pop’ look and the colorful “workout” wear look. The *New York Times* printed the article, “Pants for the Weekend or Whatever” by Anne-Marie Schiro shows five different women sporting five different types of

⁷⁴ Shardlow, E. (2011, August 08). How Yves Saint Laurent Revolutionized Women's Fashion By Popularizing The "Le Smoking" Suit. Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <http://www.businessinsider.com/ysls-greatest-fashion-hits-2011-8>.

⁷⁵ Newton, H., & Newton, J. (2009). 20. Helmut Newton. Köln: Taschen.

⁷⁶ Helmut Newton's photograph of "Le Smoking" by Yves Saint Laurent. (2015, May 21). Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <http://www.icon-icon.com/en/fashion-accessories/ready-wear/helmut-newtons-photograph-le-smoking-yves-saint-laurent>.

⁷⁷ Helmut Newton's photograph of "Le Smoking" by Yves Saint Laurent. (2015).

⁷⁸ Newton, H., & Newton, J. (2009). 20.

pant styles. Every woman depicted in the photo is showing a different style of trousers. By this point in time, women were socially allowed to wear pants in most of the western world. In the 1970s, Levi's released huge campaigns of men and women wearing jeans, which clearly illustrates that women in jeans would not be problematic, especially for the younger generation. The 1980s continued this idea of allowing women to wearing pants, but the powersuit, which followed, not only allowed women to wear pants, but made an explicit connection between women wearing pants and political power. The second the wave feminist movement formed in the 1960s and 1970s called for new styles of dress that would illustrate, first, women's rebellion and then their increasingly influential roles in media, politics, and business. These new styles were quickly adapted in the fashion world. By 1986 women are seen often on the runway with pants, even in high couture.

In the 1980s, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Margret Thatcher, and then President Ronald Regan propagated free and open markets,⁷⁹ and the idea of 'trickledown economics.' These economic models evolved to what we call neoliberalism today, an ideology that poses specific challenges to feminism and questions of (gender and economic) inequality. As Hester Baer argues, "In the context of neoliberalism, hegemonic discourses of individual choice and empowerment, freedom, self-esteem, and personal responsibility have conspired to make feminism seem second nature and therefore also unnecessary for women, especially in the West, where structural inequalities are increasingly viewed as personal problems that can be resolved through individual achievement."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Wilson, J. (2017). 38.

⁸⁰ Baer, H. (2016) "Redoing Feminism", *Feminist Media Studies*, 16:4, 20. 2016.

In the 1980s and with the mantra “greed is good” era, Giorgio Armani became a popular name. He introduced the powersuit in 1982 after his sister convinced him to make something powerful for women, especially since the United States had such an economic boom.⁸¹ This new design enabled both men and women to feel powerful. The woman’s outfit illustrates Armani’s design for the 1980s. The shoulders are broader, much like a man’s would be. The jacket is also larger, making the silhouette again not as feminine and tight. The outfit is complemented with a pair of matching trousers. In that time, many higher executives both on Wall-Street and in the television and film industry would wear these power suits. Women in film and on television were seen more often with these “power suits” on. In a case study from *NPR*, correspondent Bates writes about women in powersuits, specifically in television.⁸² The main photo from the article shows two females, both dressed in the signature powersuit.

At the same time women were entering the corporate workplace in large numbers, the power suit began to pop up. It was usually a long jacket with the kind of big, padded shoulders Joan Crawford made famous, a straight skirt and, often, a floppy silk bow tie that Little Lord Fauntleroy would have been at home in.⁸³

The shoulder pads also helped to revolutionize how women dressed and looked in the time. A should pad is worn underneath the garment. The purpose of it is to broaden the woman’s shoulder, making it a more masculine silhouette. “At the big game on Friday night it was kind of hard to tell the difference between the players on the field and the girls in the stands. We both had our uniforms on — giant, helmet hair and giant, linebacker shoulder pads,”⁸⁴ describes how

⁸¹ Giorgio Armani's Power Suits. (n.d.). Retrieved May 17, 2018, from <https://www.designer-vintage.com/en/masterclass/article/giorgio-armani-s-power-suits>.

⁸² Bates, K. G. (2014, October 20). The Look Of Power: How Women Have Dressed For Success. Retrieved May 17, 2018, from <https://www.npr.org/2014/10/20/356468554/the-look-of-power-how-women-have-dressed-for-success>.

⁸³ Bates, K. G. (2014).

⁸⁴ Ferraro, L. (2014, August 14). Shoulder Pads. Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <http://www.liketotally80s.com/2014/04/shoulder-pads/>.

the female silhouette was rendered powerful by being rendered more masculine. Like Ferraro writes, the women were also in their uniforms, but in a different sense. Power anthems from contemporary pop stars also helped in influencing the fashion industry. Songs like “Straight-Up” by Paula Abdul from 1988 shows her dancing in the new pants to her song.⁸⁵ The dancing movements that she does require that she wears pants to exenterate the easy flowing movement of the pants.

It is the 1990s and Women still cannot wear Pants: How Hillary Clinton and others Revolutionized the Pantsuit in the 1990s

In 1990, Madonna released the song “Vogue”, in which the video has her and her fellow male and female counterparts are dressed in the powersuit. This powersuit, however, is redesigned to flow with the style that would be introduced in the 1990s. Armarni also came out with a new design for his pantsuit, which would be slimmer looking on the female and would take out the obsolete shoulder pad. This shift marks the end of power suit for women, with its connotation of empowerment, and marks a shift to the common mode of what becomes traditional woman’s business clothing.⁸⁶

The elegant pantsuits of Giorgio Armani and Calvin Klein made the power suit and its knockoffs rabidly popular for several years. But as women gained a more secure foothold in executive suites, things began to change. Agins says by the '90s, women began to hang up their broad-shouldered jackets to favor the softer, more luxurious fabrics used by designers like Donna Karan.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Paula Abdul - Straight Up [Advertisement]. (2009, February 27). Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E11kgCqD7Xk> The original song came out in 22 November 1988.

⁸⁶ Amann, M. (2009, December 06). Jetzt haben die Frauen die Anzüge an. Retrieved May 15, 2018, from <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/kleidung-und-karriere-jetzt-haben-die-frauen-die-anzuege-an-1582771/der-power-suit-1896530.html>.

⁸⁷ Bates, K. G. (2014).

The rotating picture gallery from *The Frankfurter Allgemeine* shows the different type of pants that women have on now. These various images are shown through different roles that women play. The first and last photo of the gallery are of Merkel and Clinton.

There was still a part of the workforce that did not allow women to wear pants and the articulated suit top: governmental positions. In 1993, Senator Barbara Mikulski made history in several different ways. She was one of the first women elected into the senate in 1986. Then, there were only two other women in the Senate, other than herself. Most women, she says, went into the Senate after their husbands had died.⁸⁸ However, for her to mesh well with overly dominated men majority, Senator Mikulski made history by wearing pants to a Senate hearing in 1993. "I'm most comfortable wearing slacks, and well, for a woman to come on the (Senate) floor in trousers was viewed as a seismographic event,"⁸⁹ she says in an interview with *CNN*. She wanted to be comfortable somewhere where she would not be viewed as an outsider; "one of the gang."⁹⁰ As in the cases of Dietrich, Hepburn, Laurent, and many other pioneers of women wearing suits and pants, heads were turned as if she had "walk[ed] on that day and you would have thought I was walking on the moon."⁹¹ Soon thereafter, women in the political sphere started to wear pants or the iconic "pantsuit." The idea of women coming into power needed one thing: what should women wear. Through proliferation of media, the pantsuit then became the powersuit that women needed to control the room. After Mikulski commanded the senate floor in 1993, she led the collation for empowering women in political roles. This change helped to allow women to become more relaxed with their clothing, which is ironic, because the pantsuit is

⁸⁸ Bash, D. (2010, December 27). Mikulski still breaking barriers 24 years into Senate career. Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <http://www.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/12/27/mikulski.senate/>.

⁸⁹ Bash, D. (2010).

⁹⁰ Bash, D. (2010).

⁹¹ Bash, D. (2010).

now known to be more conservative in the sense of not showing off the body in the way a shorter dress would. The pragmatic shift of the pantsuit went from one the on hand, the item of clothing that women wore to complete task only done by men, to, on the other hand, being the vice to lead a nation. The then first lady Hillary Clinton never shied away from wearing a pantsuit after its Senate debut by Milkuski. In the photo gallery from *Newsone*, Clinton is shown on multiple occasions in the 1990s wearing her iconic pantsuit.

In the next section, I explore how pantsuits, powersuits, and *Hosenanzüge* are displayed and discussed in contemporary media through both the German and American political landscapes using examples from newspapers and tabloids from German, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Two: Women are Now in Politics ... So what should be worn?

In this section, women in politics does not only describe elected officials, but also the spouses of elected officials. This means, that Hillary Clinton is analyzed both as a First Lady and as an elected official. Melania Trump and Ivanka Trump, though not elected officials, are still viewed in the political spheres similarly, even if they are only in their roles due to their spouses or in the case of Ivanka, her father, President Donald Trump. What is interesting is to see how the different chosen media outlets write about each of the figures. Since this thesis focuses mainly on women in power, the focus is on Ivanka and Melania Trump only to explore one aspect of the case of the confusing pantsuit.

I have chosen both Hilary Clinton and Angela Merkel to analyze as the more 'left' candidates; even though Merkel is considered conservative in her own terms, in the US, she is seen a more 'left' politician. In Germany, Merkel is considered to be on the central 'right' of the political spectrum. These different readings of Merkel's politics further facilitate the confusions in the discussions around the pantsuit in media examples, because, as I show, most of the examples applaud that women are in power; however, they do not necessarily delve into much detail of why each female candidate chose this item. Small examples from May and Thatcher used to compare and contrast. While in the UK context, female politicians have explained their clothing choices, neither Merkel nor Clinton never necessarily talked about their choices, except for the few examples, in which Clinton spoke out about the pantsuit.

The Conservative Prime Ministers and their dress/suit. Does the queen wear it too?

Women in the western world have been in powerful positions long before the 20th century. There have been several Queens who accepted the throne after the King died; however, England elected its first female Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and she served from 1979 until 1990. Thatcher is famously known as the “Iron Lady,” and was never afraid of using her dress as a form of power, as the title of a *New York Times* article attests: “For Margaret Thatcher, a Wardrobe Was Armor.” Though she was not known for wearing the pantsuit, or the popular 1980s powersuit, she was still known for dressing to display power. She had to defend herself since she was a woman in a then—and, arguably, still - “man’s” world. The idea of power dressing became a so-called trademark of Thatcher, that even after a small conversation of “girl talk”, Amanda Platell, the writer of the article “A navy single-breasted suit, string of pearls, black court shoes and magnificent hair: How Margaret Thatcher taught me powerful women never wear trousers”,⁹² writes about her memory of meeting Thatcher. Platell writes that shortly after they had their “girl talk,” Thatcher looked at Platell and said “Never trousers, my dear. They rob a woman of her authority,”⁹³ which implies that Thatcher was not a supporter of the pant/power suit. Maybe she thought it took away from her femininity or it would suggest that she was not conservative enough? A notable silhouette from Thatcher was after her 1979 win, which

⁹² Platell, A. (2015, November 04). A navy single-breasted suit, string of pearls, black court shoes and magnificent hair: How Margaret Thatcher taught me powerful women never wear trousers. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3304242/A-navy-single-breasted-suit-string-pearls-black-court-shoes-magnificent-hair-Margaret-Thatcher-taught-powerful-women-never-wear-trousers.html>.

⁹³ Gregory, J. R. (2013, April 08). Margaret Thatcher, 'Iron Lady' Who Set Britain on New Course, Dies at 87. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/09/world/europe/former-prime-minister-margaret-thatcher-of-britain-has-died.html?pagewanted=all>.

shows her in her signature look. Her hair was always neatly kept, her blouse covered any décolleté, and her skirts were at least knee length; in most cases, she wore stockings covering her legs. Could this be a homage of the Queen of the United Kingdom? The Queen is also known for dressing in this power style, with the suit top and skirt. The silhouette of this modest look has been featured by other women of power in the press. This modest regal look, one can presume, helped to shield Thatcher from as much scrutiny over her dress style. By dressing in a modest power-skirt-suit, she intended to emphasize what she was there to do: be the prime minister and to be a powerful political and economic force in the Western world.

These discussions appear to change in the 21st century in the western world when the fashion choices of women in power became an item of intense media scrutiny. Today, visual and digital media controls our daily life. Anyone can easily take a photo and post it on the internet or quickly search the web for a recent photo of whoever they would like to see; the image that pops up might be altered, mimed, or satirized. Thatcher was prime minister in a different world than the current British prime minister Theresa May. Though there were cameras and tabloids, social media did not dictate how the media landscape is shaped. “As the country’s most prominent female role model, what May wears, matters. As Charlotte Ross writes in the *Evening Standard*, by wearing a pantsuit, May is saying to girls everywhere: ‘You can be the prime minister. And you can do it trousers.’”⁹⁴ In this article, Ross writes about Prime Minister of England Theresa May’s clothing choice. Shortly after this, former Minister of Education Nicky Morgan argued against her clothing choice saying she has “never spent that much on anything ‘apart from my

⁹⁴ Ross, C. (2016, October 03). Dressing for power: The politics behind Theresa May's trousers. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <https://www.standard.co.uk/fashion/news/dressing-for-power-the-politics-behind-theresa-mays-trousers-a3359781.html>.

wedding dress.”⁹⁵ There are some comments from the “internet trolls,” which immediately mention the ironic tendencies in Morgan’s argument. User *Ewan Uzami* writes “Hundreds of male MPs wear bespoke suits, the trousers of which are very expensive. Morgan will never criticize them. If anything, they’ll be praised for supporting British tailoring,” which shows that once again, the topic of dress only alludes back to women. Morgan’s only argument is against May wearing the expensive pants, which on the one hand is very trivial of a woman to point out that claim against another woman. Morgan was not known for speaking out against clothing choices of other previous Prime Ministers. The sexist catfight started after Morgan was removed from office. The discourse of her wearing the ‘expensive’ trousers was not to aim at her spending money on them, but rather Morgan used this to establish a discussion of May’s stance on immigrant children in schools. Morgan’s main argument here, though, is she has never spent that much money on clothes apart from her wedding dress. This

The Case of the Confusing White Pantsuit

Current First Lady of the United States Melania Trump was targeted for wearing a pantsuit at the 2018 State of the Union.⁹⁶ Her wearing a white pantsuit to the event, especially after reports saying she would not come, sparked a press war between many different newspapers. What is most ironic about her wearing this white pantsuit is what happened the year before. In February 2017, when President Trump held his first State of the Union speech, house representative Louis Frankel posted the tweet “Tonight, Democratic Members will wear

⁹⁵ Ross, C. (2016).

⁹⁶ Curl, J. (2018, January 31). Melania Trump wears 'white' pantsuit to State of the Union? No, she didn't. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2018/01/31/melania-trump-wears-white-pantsuit-to-state-union-no-didnt.html>.

suffragette white to oppose Republican attempts to roll back women's progress

#WomenWearWhite.” A photo circulated, in which several Democratic women are shown wearing suffragette white in protest of Republican’s endeavor of sending any Obama-era women advancement back, especially for women of color.⁹⁷ Therefore, it is ironic that Mrs. Trump wore the white pantsuit on the anniversary of the State of the Union address. However, the press’s war of Mrs. Trump’s clothing choice has been unpredictable. *Fox News* rejected the claim that she wore a white pantsuit, but rather:

[E]xcept she didn't. Fake news. Didn't happen. Totally wrong. Melania wore a cream-colored pantsuit to the speech, and a pricey one at that, made by Christian Dior. She did wear a white Dolce & Gabbana blouse, but her Christian Louboutin pumps were tan. So, USA Today, it clearly wasn't an ‘all-white outfit.’⁹⁸

which is strangely interesting. Here, the exact opposite is happening between the case study of May and Morgan verses Trump and the interpretation. On the one hand, *Fox News* completely argues against the color of the pantsuit, stating that it is ironically a different color, and they perpetuate the stereotype again, that even *MEN* would know that this color is ‘egg-shell color’. But on the other hand, they are doing the exact same as Morgan did against May. *Fox News* tries to turn the story of First Lady Trump wearing white into a story showing everyone against the First Lady. Morgan wanted to show she had never spent so much money on clothing. Alternatively, *Fox News* made sure they mentioned that the price of the suit was stated, to further emphasize, that the color had nothing to do with the outfit. This quote alludes to the fact that all of the other news outlets told a different story about her dress. Why would this be a problem? *Fox News* continues the article saying that since Mrs. Trump is a world-renowned model and

⁹⁷ Kenny, C. (2017, March 01). Democratic women wear white to Trump's address. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <https://www.cnn.com/2017/02/28/politics/democratic-women-wear-white-donald-trump-speech/index.html>.

⁹⁸ Curl, J. (2018).

fashion icon, “she wouldn't be caught DEAD in white after Labor Day,”⁹⁹ which is a perpetuated stereotype that *Fox News* continues to use as a centralized argument against her wearing white. The *New York Times*, however, had a different idea of why she wore the white pantsuit. Unlike in the *Fox News* article, *The New York Times* writes about the pantsuit as an “accepted as sartorial shorthand for both the suffragists and contemporary women’s empowerment and something of an anti-Trump uniform,”¹⁰⁰ arguing that First Lady Trump wore this outfit in protest of her husband. *Fox News* claim the “fake news”¹⁰¹ outlets, such as *CNN*, are alluding to false accusation of the pantsuit, never relaying the conversation back to the suffragette symbolism that was previously displayed in 2017.¹⁰² *Fox News* responds to the media interpretations of Mrs. Trump’s white suit as a potential stab at her husband by arguing that “the scary thing” is that “America's news media can’t get such a simple fact right – and ladies you know, but men, ask your wives if ‘eggshell’ is the same as white – then how can they get anything else right?”¹⁰³. This is noteworthy since the First Lady entered President Trump’s State of the Union Speech alone, wearing this infamous suffragette pantsuit. In this photo, it is easy to observe that she is wearing a feminine pantsuit silhouette. The legs of the pants are larger, giving the longer, more draped allusion of a dress. The confusion here is indeed the idea of the politics behind the pantsuit choice. On the one hand, this white pantsuit has been seen as an idea of progression in women’s rights, but on the other hand, since President Trump has US- “right” leaning political policies, the confusing statement then comes from the First Lady. Since a

⁹⁹ Curl, J. (2018).

¹⁰⁰ Friedman, V. (2018, January 31). Melania Trump and the Case of the White Pantsuit. Retrieved April 15, 2018, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/30/fashion/state-of-the-union-melania-trump-white-suit-black-clothes.html>.

¹⁰¹ Curl, J. (2018)

¹⁰² Curl, J. (2018)

¹⁰³ Curl, J. (2018)

similar design of this suit has already been worn by former First Lady Clinton after her Democratic nomination acceptance, in which the white pantsuit has been given the idea of progress and renewal. But with First Lady Trump wearing the so-called ‘egg-shell’ pantsuit, it is possible, that she wore it out of her own color choice.

The German press also described the peculiarity of Melania’s white pantsuit outfit. Similar to *CNN*, *The New York Times*, and *Fox News*, most German news outlets wrote about First Lady’s dressing choice asking, “War das ein Statement?”¹⁰⁴ once again suggesting that this clothing choice was a conscious and political choice, but the *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* asks:

Wollte die First Lady, die einst eine Wahlkampfrednerin ihrer „Amtsvorgängerin“ Michelle Obama fast 1:1 kopierte, nun auch die Klamotte von Wahlverliererin Hillary Clinton nachahmen, getragen etwa auf ihrem Nominierungsparteitag in Philadelphia? Dachte Melania Trump beim Ankleiden an die Suffragetten-Bewegung, die ganz in Weiß das Wahlrecht für Frauen eingefordert hatten? Oder war es doch einfach nur ein weißer Hosenanzug?

The *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* hypothesizes that this could be another “copy” from the 2016 Republican National Convention speech, which was plagiarized significantly from former First Lady’s Michelle Obama’s 2008 Democratic National Convention speech and goes on to allude to former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential nomination.¹⁰⁵ The dress choice of the current First Lady is definitely contentious. To make the situation more confusing, a few weeks¹⁰⁶ before First Lady Trump decided to wear the ‘egg-shell’ color pantsuit, Stormy

¹⁰⁴ Melania Trump ganz in Weiß: Outfit wirft Fragen über Fragen auf. (2018, January 31). Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <https://www.stuttgarter-nachrichten.de/inhalt.melania-trump-ganz-in-weiss-outfit-wirft-fragen-ueber-fragen-auf.a5b94211-238f-4faa-a11d-ad3d8cfc3c02.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Krieg, G., & Scott, E. (2016, July 19). No one to be fired after Melania Trump speech plagiarism episode. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <https://www.cnn.com/2016/07/19/politics/melania-trump-michelle-obama-speech/index.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Twohey, M., & Rutenberg, J. (2018, January 12). Porn Star Was Reportedly Paid to Stay Quiet About Trump. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/12/us/trump-stephanie-clifford-stormy-daniels.html>.

Daniels, a popular female pornographic star, released a statement that she and President Trump had an affair, leading the *New York Times* to posit a “pointed subtext” in Mrs. Trump’s outfit. The speculation about the current First Lady’s outfit was generated after the allegations of President Trump’s lawyer paying Daniels \$130,000.¹⁰⁷

The current First Lady has been criticized for her clothing on more than this occasion. The German tabloid newspaper *Bild* writes about the First Lady’s outfit choices and the relationship between her and the president. In Germany, *Bild* is considered a “more right leaning” tabloid. The article from *Bild* from January 2018 emphasizes that the clothing selections from the First Lady are subject to interpretation, especially since there is no definite answer to the meaning of clothing choice.¹⁰⁸ The main point of the article, however, focuses on the relationship between Mrs. Trump and her husband, is that “Ähnliche Situationen wiederholten sich seither so häufig, dass man fast ein wenig Mitleid mit dem Commander-in-Chief bekommen könnte,” meaning that their relationship appears to not be successful and that one should *almost* feel *Mitleid* for the President. The dress choice is not why one should feel the *Mitleid*, but rather, that their relationship is not working out as well. Like *Bild*, many other “leftist” magazines and newspapers in both the USA and Germany argued that the First Lady’s clothing choice means that she tries to keep her distance from the president. But why would that be the case? These interpretations are enhanced by readings of body language, mainly in short videos of the pair:

¹⁰⁷ Donald Trumps angebliche Affäre: Pornostar Stormy Daniels gibt verräterisches Zeichen. (2018, January 31). Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <https://www.stuttgarter-nachrichten.de/inhalt.donald-trumps-angebliche-affe-pornostar-stormy-daniels-gibt-verraeterisches-zeichen.34da7c9e-a3bc-451a-9086-be5d5ca4a78e.html>.

¹⁰⁸ Donald Trump: Handfestes Ehe-Problem mit seiner Melania. (2018, February 07). Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <https://www.bild.de/politik/ausland/donald-trump/us-praesident-hat-ein-handfestes-ehe-problem-54735926.bild.html>. No contributed author other than Bild.de was given.

“Melania responded in the video by quickly slapping the hand away and showing no emotion while remaining a half-step behind her husband.”¹⁰⁹ Since I have already shown, and show again later, that the white pantsuit has been a political nuance of being ‘suffragette’ clothing item, there might be political significance behind the clothing choice of the white suit. Earlier in 2018, released a newer article showing that the President Trump and his wife were holding hands again after the allegations came out from Stormy Daniels.¹¹⁰ This is one of the first times that they are seen together in this manner. *Bild* focuses on the way that the “hand holding” is perceived, first noting that “[D]irekten Hautkontakt gab es freilich nicht. Denn Melania trug schwarze Handschuhe.” This might show there is still a consistent barrier between them. However, *Bild* also describes another moment, “[D]iesmal ohne Handschuhe. In der Nahaufnahme klar zu sehen: Ihr Ehering!” pointing out that their relationship is still resilient even throughout the instances of sexual misconduct and other instances of women speaking out against President Trump in allocation against sexual misconduct.

The *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* raises the question with their title of the article “[O]utfit wirft Fragen über Fragen auf,” highlighting the multiple layers of ambiguity in Melania Trump’s white (or cream) pantsuit. First Lady Trump has not released a statement as to why she has worn the white suit. The satirical television show *SNL* relives this moment on their show the Saturday after the events. In the skit, First Lady Trump is visited by the ghost and other former First Ladies, including Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama, and Jackie Kennedy. The apparition of former First Lady Clinton appears in a pantsuit. Clinton then asks Trump why she has the white

¹⁰⁹ Spargo, C. (2017, May 22). Swat team: Melania slaps at President Trump when he tries to hold her hand after pair arrive in Israel on Middle-East peace trip. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4530836/Melania-slaps-President-Trump-holds-hand.html>.

¹¹⁰ Donald Trump: Handfestes Ehe-Problem mit seiner Melania. (2018).

pantsuit on, with its known association with the suffragettes, with Trump responding, “it is a kawinkidink”¹¹¹ implying that Trump knew why she had this white pantsuit on but would not say why explicitly. In this skit, however, they allude back to the affair accusations against President Donald Trump and that First Lady Trump does not want to be the most embarrassed First Lady in history. Later, as former First Lady Martha Washington says, “you should be your husbands confidant”¹¹² among other things, and the satirical Trump answers every time with the name “Ivanka.” *SNL* alludes that First Lady Trump knows what is going on and will not speak about it, and also suggests that the traditional role of First Lady is in fact fulfilled by the president’s daughter instead. The satirical First Lady does not want to go to the State of the Union, she has on a pantsuit that signifies advancement of women’s rights, and her body language is questionable. These were all attributes that allude to the confusion of the media or maybe as the satirical First Lady put it best as, “kawinkidink.”

President Trump’s daughter, Ivanka Trump, has also been known for wearing certain clothing to express herself and according to *Yahoo!* she “is taking fashion cues from Hillary Clinton, with a devoted love of pantsuits.”¹¹³ *Yahoo!* Writes that this is not her first time wearing the iconic pantsuit, and she is never shy about it. Ivanka Trump also wore a white pantsuit to her father’s inauguration in January of 2017. Photo 3.4 shows her in the infamous women “pantsuit” silhouette, but the color choice is white. There have been a few speculations behind her choice of color for her as well. Even though the color white was used a month *later* by Democratic women

¹¹¹ Robinson, M. (2018).

¹¹² Robinson, M. (2018).

¹¹³ Solé, E. (2017, July 06). Ivanka Trump Has a Style Uniform: Pantsuits. Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/ivanka-trump-style-uniform-pantsuits-122100497.html>.

in protest, white has also been named suffragette color, or a color to designate “a new start.”¹¹⁴

Ivanka’s sister, Tiffany, also wore a matching white pantsuit, but the only attention and press that was given to them was, “it was the stylish Trump sisters who really stood out”¹¹⁵ not directing the conversation back to the suffragette movement, but rather showing how fashionable the two women are. Please add a sentence summing up your treatment of the Trump women’s pantsuits before you move on; then add some kind of transition to the beginning of the next paragraph.

The descriptor *Mutti Merkel* has circulated in the media for a while until the right-wing in Germany coined the term *Mutti Multikulti* in reference to her *Außenpolitik* and to how she handled the *Flüchtlingskrise*. The AFD, *Alternative für Deutschland*, circulated propaganda of Merkel with a hijab on; underneath “*Mutti Multikulti*” is written.¹¹⁶ Merkel has been referred to as a ‘maternal’ figure based on how she handles her politics diplomatically, meaning she tends to stay neutral in many situations. This is however somewhat confusing, on the one hand, Merkel in Germany would be considered a more center-right politician, whereas in the USA, she is more central-left. Normally, she sits in the middle of a stance, or respectfully she will disagree, but accept the oppositions stance.¹¹⁷ Her politics against the burqa, however, are more than a curious opposition to *Mutti Multikulti* portrayal.¹¹⁸ Since the burqa is a traditional dress of women of

¹¹⁴ Solé, E. (2017).

¹¹⁵ Graafland, A. (2017, January 20). Ivanka Trump shows who wears the trousers. Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/style/celebrity-fashion/ivanka-trump-shows-who-wears-9662278>.

¹¹⁶ Sorkin, Amy Davidson. “Angela Merkel, the Most Powerful Woman in a World of Unstable Men.” *The New Yorker*, *The New Yorker*, 24 Sept. 2017, www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/angela-merkel-the-most-powerful-woman-in-a-world-of-unstable-men.

¹¹⁷ Posener, Alan. “How Germany's Mutti Merkel Has Turned Blandness into Gold.” *The Observer*, *Guardian News and Media*, 9 Sept. 2017, www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/09/angela-merkel-elections-germany-martin-schulz.

¹¹⁸ Sorkin, Amy Davidson. “Angela Merkel, the Most Powerful Woman in a World of Unstable Men.” *The New Yorker*, *The New Yorker*, 24 Sept. 2017, www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/angela-merkel-the-most-powerful-woman-in-a-world-of-unstable-men.

Islamic faith, the argument behind the ban is it deters them from integrating socially into the country. Those looking to seek asylum should agree to the demands of the German culture, *Fox News* argues, since these *Flüchtlinge* have chosen to move to Germany, they have lost their voice in the reasoning here, because they chose to move to a society where the value of speaking is with an ‘open face.’¹¹⁹ The counterargument presented is that Merkel wanted support from the more ‘right-leaning’ voters, causing Merkel to place this ban request. Here, the question can be asked, is this veil a ban to help women gain equal rights or is Merkel and her coalition indeed against believers of the Islamic faith in order to gain votes from the more “right” voters in Germany. Beverly Weber writes in her book about the “hijab martyr,” an Islamic woman named Marwa Sherbini who was murdered by a xenophobic German man. They were both in court after a law suit against the man for using Islamophobic language to Sherbini. He requested an appeal, and at the appeal case, he stabbed Sherbini eighteen times. After this event, the discussion of the burqa entered the political lens. Even before this, in 2009, eight of the sixteen *Bundesländer* banned the *Kopftuch* worn by women who sought jobs as kindergarten teachers. Berlin, however, was the only *Bundesland* that forbid any sort of religious attire, whereas the other *Bundesländer* singled out the Islamic *Kopftuch* as “a threat to German secularism, Christian culture, individual rights, feminist progress, the Enlightenment, and European Values.”¹²⁰ Again, you need to sum up what you have argued in this section, reconnecting the discussion of the burqa ban to the idea of women’s representation in the political sphere via fashion.

¹¹⁹ Germany moves forward on burqa ban for public servants. (n.d.). Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/04/28/german-ban-on-full-face-veils-for-public-servants-goes-ahead.html>.

¹²⁰ Weber, B. M. (2013). Violence and gender in the "new" Europe: Islam in German culture. 78-81. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hillary Clinton and her Technicolor Pantsuit: Branding Pantsuit Nation

Since the mid 1990s, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been known as a so-called “powerdresser,” meaning she dresses for the position she wants. Even as First Lady, when her husband Bill Clinton was president, she wore her trademark powersuit. *Mirror*, a more “left” leaning tabloid in the United Kingdom, wrote about the different Clinton trademark powersuits and looks to show who is in charge when present in a room.¹²¹ These looks have been claimed as being signature Clinton looks throughout the years. Clinton writes in her book *What Happened* about why she rather wears the pantsuit over a standard dress for business women. To what extent can Clinton be said to have “trademarked” the pantsuit? *CBNC* reported that she wears the pantsuit for four different reasons. First, it “make me feel professional and ready to go.”¹²² Meaning she can feel ready and able in this dress. Second, it gives “visual cues ... different from the men but also familiar.”¹²³ Third, it “a uniform was also a distraction technique.”¹²⁴ And fourthly, “so you may as well wear what works for you.”¹²⁵ These reasons, also indirectly quoted from her book from *CNBC* suggest that Clinton views the pantsuit as a way to bring confidence into the room whenever she enters. In United States history, there has yet to be a woman elected as president. Clinton, however, proved herself more than a First Lady, progressing to be a Senator, a Secretary of State, and the 2016 United States’ Democratic candidate. In order for her

¹²¹ Graafland, A., & Getty Reuters. (2016, November 10). The 7 subtle power dressing tricks Hillary Clinton uses. Retrieved April 14, 2018, from <https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/style/celebrity-fashion/7-subtle-power-dressing-tricks-9213917>.

¹²² Mejia, Z. (2017, September 14). 4 powerful reasons Hillary Clinton always wears her famous pantsuits. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <https://www.cNBC.com/2017/09/14/hillary-clinton-discusses-why-she-wears-pantsuits-in-what-happened.html>.

¹²³ Mejia, Z. (2017).

¹²⁴ Mejia, Z. (2017).

¹²⁵ Mejia, Z. (2017).

to succeed in the political world, she saw what she had to do, specifically brand the pantsuit. In her viewpoint, the pantsuit symbolizes equality between the sexes. By no means though does this mean, that pantsuits are the only fashion of the modern woman. Today, Clinton and her pantsuit have helped empower woman across the globe. Pantsuit Nation, as mentioned in the introduction, is a Facebook group that continues to fight for the empowerment of women in politics as well as socially and economically. Like stated above, the group has its own problems.¹²⁶ The group post daily Facebook videos and other inspiring quotes, events, and so on to help women and men create a safe environment to share stories about the fight for gender equality. An example of the “feel-good” feelings from the Pantsuit Nation would be from the 2017 Golden Globes, where Felicity Huffman wore a pantsuit in homage to Clinton saying that “I got a pantsuit in honor of Hillary. Love you, Hillary. I’m with her.”¹²⁷ The pantsuit Facebook group helped inspire Huffman to wear this suit, as well as other women at the 2017 Golden Globes after The Women’s March in the previous January. Millions of women and men protested throughout the world in a Women’s March in protest against Trump’s inauguration, having ironically a higher participant turnout globally than Trump’s inauguration.¹²⁸ Though, Huffman was the only one to say she wore this for Clinton, others wore the pantsuit as well. Evan Rachel Wood wore a pantsuit reminding girls and women that “I’m not trying to protest

¹²⁶ Klein, K. (2016).

For more information over the problems around the Pantsuit Nation’s Facebook, please refer back to this article for more in detail information.

¹²⁷ Bryant, K. (2017, January 09). At Least One Golden Globes Pantsuit Was in Honor of Hillary Clinton. Retrieved April 15, 2018, from <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2017/01/golden-globes-pantsuits-hillary-clinton>.

¹²⁸ Hartocollis, Anemona, and Yamiche Alcindor. “Women's March Highlights as Huge Crowds Protest Trump: 'We're Not Going Away'.” The New York Times, The New York Times, 21 Jan. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/01/21/us/womens-march.html.

dresses, but I wanted to make sure young girls and women know that it's not a requirement.”¹²⁹

She later explains in the interview that it was a tribute to both Marlene Dietrich and David Bowie.

In the German media, *Die Welt* has also reported on the powersuit of Clinton. In an article from September 2016, Nicole Erdmann writes about how the discourse of Trump’s tie is not discussed like Clinton’s red choice, “Rot also. Viel Farbe, viel Interpretationsspielraum.”¹³⁰ This circulation of interpretation of clothing can be seen through the political lenses in both the USA and Germany. However, *Bild* circulated a gallery of Clinton wearing *Hosenanzüge* on six different occasions, even critiquing her color choices. The writer argues that, “[S]ie trägt nicht einfach nur einen männlich geschnittenen Anzug in Frauengrößen, sie spielt mit dem klassischen Look, ohne ihre Weiblichkeit zu verleugnen,”¹³¹ alluding that Clinton, though supporting a powerful role, still retains her femininity, even when the suit should take away from her femininity.

¹²⁹ Vulpo, M. (2017, January 08). Why Evan Rachel Wood Chose a Suit Over a Dress at the Golden Globes. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <http://www.eonline.com/news/820502/evan-rachel-wood-s-suit-reminds-young-girls-dresses-are-not-a-requirement-at-the-golden-globes>.

¹³⁰ Erdmann, N. (2016, September 29). „Power Suit“: Warum wir über Hillarys Outfits sprechen sollten - WELT. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <https://www.welt.de/icon/article158434303/Warum-wir-ueber-Hillarys-Outfits-sprechen-sollten.html>.

¹³¹ Hillary Clinton und ihre Hosenanzüge: Der Look der amerikanischen Außenministerin. (2009, February 17). Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <https://www.bild.de/lifestyle/mode-beauty/und-ihre-hosenanzuege-der-look-der-amerikanischen-aussenministerin-7419774.bild.html>.

Conclusion: Femininity, Feminism, and the Pursuit of the Powersuit

The pantsuit has made its comeback not just in recent press coverage. Pantsuit Nation is a Facebook group that started before the United State of America's 2016 presidential election in September of 2016.¹³² Then, the group was private and a hashtag on twitter. The group is known for:

Many of the posts in Pantsuit Nation are actually about pantsuits: wearing them to the polls, sharing tips on where to buy them, sharing photos of what you're going to wear to vote. Others are voter selfies from those who went early. But many of the most popular posts — the ones with "likes" in the tens of thousands — are personal stories, connected to what a vote for Clinton means to them. Some of the stories are even about pantsuits, too.¹³³

The group is an example of an "age-old tendency to associate ourselves with others who hold similar views"¹³⁴ according to Gretel Kauffman. Kauffman suggests that the formation of such group can be an active gathering of individuals, who want to have a 'safe space' for posting advancement for women.¹³⁵

Unrelated to the Golden Globes of 2017, the #ImWithHer hashtag gained popularity before the 2016 United States' Presidential Election and was also a popular hashtag that Clinton used for her presidential campaign.¹³⁶ The worst thing that can happen in a

¹³² Correal, A. (2016, November 08). Pantsuit Nation, a 'Secret' Facebook Hub, Celebrates Clinton. Retrieved April 14, 2018, from

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/09/us/politics/facebook-pantsuit-nation-clinton.html>.

¹³³ Algoo, J. (2017, October 06). 63 of Hillary Clinton's Most Iconic Pantsuits. Retrieved April 13, 2018, from <http://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/g8119/hillary-clinton-pantsuits/>.

¹³⁴ Kauffman, Gretel. "What 'Pantsuit Nation' tells us about political discourse in 2016." Christian Science Monitor. 8 November 2016. General OneFile. Accessed 16. Apr. 2018 retrieved from

http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A469468149/ITOF?u=tel_a_utl&sid=ITOF&xid=2b9f5022.

¹³⁵ Kauffman, Gretel. (2016).

¹³⁶ Westby, K. (2017, July 20). What Does It Really Mean To Say 'I'm With Her?' Retrieved May 17, 2018, from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/kiri-westby/what-does-it-really-mean-_3_b_11047690.html.

democracy—as well as in an individual’s life—is to become cynical about the future and lose hope.”¹³⁷ This hashtag helped women around the world feel the confidence (again) to stand up. Other hashtags, such as the #MeToo movement and #Aufschrei, have helped women gain confidence in speaking up for themselves. This past year for the 2018 Grammy Awards, American pop singer Kesha performed her hit “Praying” in a white pantsuit. She wrote this song after the allegations that her manager sexually abused her but she was unable to stop working with him because of breach of contract. This song is an homage to her letting go, and by performing this at the Grammys shows she is not afraid to step up and speak out against those who hurt her.¹³⁸

Being able to look through the historical trajectory of the evolution of the pantsuit, it is safe to say that women’s desire to wear pants was not a question of “right” or “left” politics, but rather of equality of men to women. May and Thatcher have both occupied more “right-wing” political stances, but still have proven that women can be the “pant wearer.” On the one hand, the pant and the pantsuit stand for a women’s liberation and feminism, but on the other hand, it shows the continued importance of negotiations over femininity of women in power. Merkel and Clinton have both been accused of wearing pantsuits to not be stylish, but at the same time, when they are stylish or *modisch* they are critiqued. Why do clothing choices of women in power continue to be more controversially debated than those of men? As a male writing this thesis, I never wake up and think to myself “I want to wear blue today

¹³⁷ Kurson, R. (2017, October 11). Hillary's Last Chance. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a447/esq1003-oct-hillary/>.

¹³⁸ Friedman, V. (2018, January 29). At the Grammy Awards, White Roses Paled in Comparison to Kesha Rose. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/29/fashion/grammy-awards-white-roses-kesha-fashion-review.html>.

to confuse people,” insofar maybe it was a “kawinkidink,” when First Lady Trump wore the white pantsuit. It itself was an effeminate piece of clothing, that was interpreted to also be ‘egg-shell’ color. Butler’s argument in *Gender Trouble* talks about gender as performance. This performance, as we call it, is us putting clothes on and acting the ‘societal’ part. Women and men have challenged these roles in both the drag scene and in drag roles. Tyler Perry and Eddie Murphy are not shy to dress up as women in their films, no different than Friederike or Fritz, performing as the character he/she needed to. RuPaul Charles will be considered the SuperModel of the world, even though he is a man in a dress.¹³⁹ Does this mean we are seeing change? In certain realms, we certainly are.

Some other questions that arose during my research were about the intersections of dress, race, and class. How is the discourse different for white women wearing the pantsuit versus women of color? While doing the research, the question from Kimberle Crenshaw arose: would women of color experience as much ridicule for wearing the pantsuit as much as Caucasian women. Though I did not discuss this in detail, the ‘Republican’ part, namely *Fox News*, often criticized former First Lady Michelle Obama for her attire.¹⁴⁰ In August 2017, *Salon* reported, “Fox News suddenly cares about how the media treats the first lady’s attire,”¹⁴¹ whose first line is “Fox News says the media should leave Melania’s fashion

¹³⁹ Charles, R. (2012, April 27). RuPaul - Supermodel (You Better Work) (Official Music Video). Retrieved April 16, 2018, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vw9L0rHU8JI>.

¹⁴⁰ Stampler, L. (2014, August 13). Fox News Contributor Can't Stop Calling Michelle Obama Fat. Retrieved May 17, 2018, from <http://time.com/3108981/fox-news-ablow-michelle-obama-fat/>.

¹⁴¹ Link, Taylor. “Fox News Suddenly Cares about How the Media Treats the First Lady's Attire.” *Salon*, Salon.com, 31 Aug. 2017. Retrieved April 17, 2018, www.salon.com/2017/08/30/fox-news-suddenly-cares-about-how-the-media-treats-the-first-ladys-attire/.

choices alone. That's not how they treated Michelle Obama."¹⁴² This shows that media have a double standard when it comes to clothing, not only in the gender performance lens, but also because of political affiliation and race. Then, the argument of religion and national pride plays a role. Beverly Weber and Maria Stehle argue that the argument from Merkel against her 'Mutti-Multikulti' is in itself contradictory, because Merkel "declared the absolute failure of multiculturalism," which she received large applause for, and she wanted to ban the burqa in some political settings.¹⁴³ At the same time, the majority of the *Deutsche Mannschaft* for *Die Weltmeisterschaft 2010* was of at least 50% immigrant heritage¹⁴⁴ and the German team, and by extension Germany, was celebrated for its display of functioning multiculturalism. Multiple forces are at work simultaneously; we see polarizations and backlashes as well as significant advances for gender and racial equality.

It also becomes clear that Butler's 1990 discussion of the performance of gender is still relevant here. Butler argues that we perform gender, in the ways we dress. She also argued about there being a non-binary gender, in which one can choose their gender:¹⁴⁵ "when agreed-upon identities or agreed-upon dialogic structures, through which already established identities are communicated, no longer constitute the theme or subject of politics, then identities can come into being and dissolve depending on the concrete practices that constitute them."¹⁴⁶ I did not research the pantsuit to see how men perceived women in order to demonize masculine women, but rather to see how the media portrays something as simple

¹⁴² Link, T. (2017).

¹⁴³ Stehle, M & Weber, B. *German Studies Review* 36.1 (2013): German Soccer, the 2010 World Cup, and Multicultural Belonging. 103–104 © 2013 by The German Studies Association.

¹⁴⁴ Stehle, M & Weber, B. 104.

¹⁴⁵ Butler, J. (1990). 15-16.

¹⁴⁶ Butler, J. (1990). 15-16.

as the pantsuit, which, as argued throughout this thesis, is considered a ‘conservative’ mode of female fashion. Over 80 years ago, it was unheard of for women to wear even pants. Bloomer helped popularize this already in the 19th century, but it was not until the 1930s with Hollywood and the subsequent need for females in the blue-collar work force during the Second World War, that pants became a ‘socially acceptable’ mode of clothing. The powersuit of the 1980s showed that women could look ‘good’ in a suit, as their male counterparts, eventually leading to the creation of the ‘branded’ Merkel/Clinton *Hosenanzug*. Now, Merkel is criticized more for not wearing her pantsuit than she is for wearing it, but for men—as long as you’re a white male not playing golf over 80 times in your first term as president—clothing choices will not be as deeply interpreted or discussed. The discourse to control what women should wear is still prominent in many cultures. Women’s fashion is debated in media often; however, in today’s fast-moving news cycles, images circulate and change meaning; thus, the pantsuit is also seen as a symbol of hope and progress and has generated feminist forms of activism in today’s highly mediated discourse.

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Vita

Tyler William Johnson was born in Anniston, Alabama to Leanne and Ricky Johnson. He spent his childhood and adolescences in Valdosta, GA, eventually leading to his graduation from Valdosta High School. In school, he focused on abroad travel and music. After his high school graduation, he attended Valdosta State University for a few years before transferring to Kennesaw State University. At KSU, he completed his degree in Modern Languages and Literature with a concentration in German. During his undergraduate degree, he worked in Germany twice as an intern. After his second completed internship at Siemens in Erlangen, Germany, he was accepted to the Master of Arts in the department of Modern Languages and Literature, focusing in German Literature and Culture at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In his second semester at UTK, he attended one of UTK's partner university, University Mannheim. During his time in Germany, he focused on Medieval German Literature and Language as well as Digital Studies. Throughout his last year at UTK, he taught elementary level German courses. After graduation, he plans to teach at Pellissippi State Community College as an adjunct German professor.