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Leopard in Kitten Heels: The politics of Theresa May's sartorial choices

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the clothing choices of Theresa May as a female Member of Parliament (MP) and as the second woman Prime Minister of Great Britain. A Conservative MP since 1997 with a conservative background growing up a Vicar's daughter and grammar school education, Mrs May's sartorial choices have evolved to conform with an understanding of female MP's as proxy men and to reflect British national dress as defined by tradition. However, within this conservative persona a discordant note is struck by her choice of shoes. Not always neutral, in this article her choice of fabric is examined as a form of 'everyday resistance'. Compromised as these choices are, her choice of leopard print kitten heels is suggested as a form of subaltern resistance.

KEYWORDS

Everyday resistance, heels, gender politics, Theresa May, leopard print

Contributor Details

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Leopard in Kitten Heels: The politics of Theresa May's sartorial choices

“Fashion is a site where politicized embodiment emerges in response to various local, national and global influences, and where power is both formative and transformative” (Shinko 2016: 45)

What does it matter what clothes a politician wears? What do the sartorial choices they make mean? Why do Jeremy Corbyn's sandals make him unfit to lead a country? Mark Twain's observation that 'Clothes make the Man. Naked people have little or no influence in society' (Merle 1927), states the long-held Western view that clothes are essential to civilisation. Once the preserve of Royalty, the role of projecting a visual statement of the body politic has devolved to democratically-elected bodies such as the House of Commons (Behnke 2016). Clothes became markers of political beliefs, and could literally mean life or death in turbulent times such as the English and French Revolutions (Parkins 2002). While in everyday life clothes are no longer so acutely important, for today's politicians they are an important source of asserting and maintaining authority and a means of widening their appeal to the voting public.

Place Figure 1 here, quarter page image.

Figure 1: Theresa May announcing her premiership in Downing Street, 13th May 2016. Image Gareth Fuller/PA

This paper considers the choices that Theresa May made in her role as British Prime Minister, with a particular focus on the outfit she wore on 13th July 2016 (figure 1), the day she accepted Queen Elizabeth II's appointment to form the Government and became the second, female to be Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Head of the British Government. All professionals have choices about the clothes and accessories they wear and there are a variety of pressures that come into play in balancing those choices. For a Head of Government these include issues of projecting national identity, religious considerations, supporting national designers and adhering to dress codes. By exploring Theresa May's sartorial choices as Prime Minister and in particular her choice of shoes, this paper seeks to investigate the politics of dress in projecting a visual image of a Head of Government and in her day-to-day job within the House of Commons.

The discussion first examines the role of ideology and dress in European political life after the English Civil War (1642-1651) and most importantly the French Revolution of 1789. Drawing on the work of Behnke and Parkins this paper considers the implications this has for female politicians. Secondly, the contemporary political concern with projecting a national identity is discussed, and how Theresa May's outfit on 13th July addressed these ideas. The third section attends in detail to May's choice of kitten heels and leopard print for the feet of a British Prime Minister and then, drawing on the work of Vinthagen and Johanssen, considers the possibility of their mobilisation as a form of 'everyday resistance'.

The Ideology of Political Dress

As expounded by Behnke and Parkins, alongside the rise of elected governments in Europe ran the change in male clothing known as 'The Great Male Renunciation' (Flugel 1930), that saw a polarisation in male and female clothing in terms of visual extravagance. This moment also encompassed a mapping of eighteenth century French concerns over the political activities of sexually licentious women, embodied by the French Queen Marie Antoinette, onto women in general and established a suspicion of women who wish to enter politics. The polarisation of sartorial codes means that it is the role of a ruler's female consort rather than the ruler himself to display appropriate elegance and/or extravagance in their clothing. An exemplary example of this in Western politics is Barak and Michelle Obama's wardrobes during his terms as American President (2008-2016). Accepting that in the majority of situations leadership has either been exclusively male or is still understood as a masculine preserve, then female politicians find themselves in a double bind. Following Behnke's discussion of the symbolic form of Michelle Obama's clothing choices as First Lady it can be seen that Western female heads of state carry the burden of representing the nation sartorially, whilst rejecting feminine dress and adopting 'The Great Male Renunciation' (Behnke 2016). In Britain the adoption of a more modest masculinity can be traced to the reign of Charles II after the Restoration of 1688. To distance himself from dangerous associations with the French court, Charles II introduced a distinctly English form of dress known as the 'vest' that has transformed into the three piece suit of male dress of today. To show his disdain for this innovation Louis XIV had his servants all dressed in the new vest. This modest

masculinity, and the consequent political legitimacy, aligned the display of luxury with femininity and so reinforced the exclusion of women from politics (Parkins 2002)

Women in politics face far greater commentary on their sartorial taste than their male counterparts and each female politician has to develop her own response to this scrutiny. Theresa May's contemporary, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, resolutely refuses to discuss her clothes and has adopted a uniform of jacket and trousers with little variation. In contrast, May answers questions on her clothing choices, asked for a year's subscription to *Vogue* as her luxury item when she was interviewed on Desert Island Discs (BBC 2014) and commented at the Women of the World conference in 2015

I like clothes and I like shoes. One of the challenges for women in the workplace is to be ourselves, and I say you can be clever and like clothes. You can have a career and like clothes. (Conti 2016)

Within the Western tradition of the primacy of self-expression, the dominant clothing system is understood as fitting to the body. The Feminist ideological stance that women are entitled to wear what they want, also plays into the range of choices Western female politicians have available to experiment within (Marzel and Stiebel 2014).

However, this personal expression must always be balanced against the need to not appear feminine, to not be morally lax, to not be Marie Antoinette. This is a dividing line that can be transgressed all too easily and without warning creating a backlash of commentary. Theresa May's leather trousers worn for a *Sunday Times* magazine interview and photo shoot (Mills 2016) shortly after becoming Prime Minister were a step too far for her British audience. For May the visible extravagance of her £995 trousers, made from a material that is associated with fetishism (Bolton 2004), moved too close to the female pole, back to Marie Antoinette, out of touch with the populace and away from the plain tailored silhouette that represents "public virtue" through "modest masculinity" (Parkins 2002).

National identity in dress

The contemporary importance of dress as a statement of political beliefs, famously mobilised by Ghandi's adoption of the dhoti, is more easily seen in the dress choices

of politicians from former colonial nations than in countries that dress in the Western tradition. However, consideration of these dress imperatives can give us clues as to Theresa May's clothing choices. Two examples are the former Pakistani President Benezir Bhutto, a contemporary of Theresa May at Oxford, and Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto head of state of Myanmar. Both have chosen to wear clothes that reflect a concept of ethnic national costume, and so reject the wearing of Western dress that signified the 'modernisation/civilisation' of their countries in Colonial periods (the subject of 'traditional', 'heritage' and 'modern' dress is the subject of considerable scholarship recently, see Jansen 2016 for one example). In particular, the choice of traditional clothing allows them to avoid the pitfall of inappropriate sexuality if adopting Western style clothing (Ross 2008). These dress choices align both leaders with their constituents and help to reinforce their image as approachable (wo)man of the people.

So for a British Prime Minister the task in dressing is to represent both the Western ideal of individuality but also indicate membership of a larger British society (Root 2002). But what constitutes British national dress? British national dress lies firmly within the Western clothing tradition of male tailoring with its close links to military uniform and sporting attire. In *The Englishness of English Dress* Breward et al (2002) identify tailoring as a key aspect of English dress, building as it does on the long tradition of Savile Row and Jermyn Street businesses. Whilst the English clientele of land-owning aristocracy and gentry has declined, these businesses now draw on their long history and connections to British Royalty to sell their wares to Middle Eastern customers who can afford the £3,500 pound unit price in multiples of ten (Gerrard 2002).

Aileen Ribero (2002) identifies tradition and 'a deep seated concern with the past' as fundamental to understandings of Englishness, demonstrated by Breward et al (2002) through a *Country Life* spread from 1996 that includes, within its all-male examples, Jermyn St shirts, Guardsmen's Uniforms, Clark's Desert Boot, a Land Rover and cricket players. *Country Life's* 2017 'Gentleman's Test' included "Possesses at least one well-made dark suit, one tweed suit and a dinner jacket" at number 7 and "Sandals? No. Never" at number 34 on their list of 39 things a gentleman is (Country Life 2017).

Within the Houses of Parliament the importance of the past in defining Englishness is reinforced by the daily visual displays of tradition and the understanding, by many of the MPs, of the importance of tradition to their carrying out of twenty first century politics (BBC 2015). Hobsbawm (1983: 1) cites the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament in the Gothic style in both the nineteenth century and in the twentieth after World War II as an exemplar of invented tradition designed to establish continuity with the past. This emphasis on tradition means that the field of British politics promotes a clothing-society culture rather than the dominant fashion-society culture of Western dress (Marzel and Stiebel). This clothing-culture reinforces the adoption of puritanical clothing codes already supported by the understanding of the political body as male. Clothing-culture is also reinforced by the value placed in Britain on putting Party before personality, despite the rising dominance of personality politics. British distrust of personality, an aspect in play when comments arise about Britain not being a Presidential democracy, means too much interest in fashion, in personal appearance or luxury ie fashion-culture, is not acceptable for British politicians particularly Prime Ministers. For female MPs this expectation of unchanging approaches to dress impacts at two levels in the British political system: the constituency selection committees and on the floor of the House of Commons.

Despite a century of equal opportunities legislation, the proportion of female MPs still does not reflect the British population. At the election in 2017, women accounted for 208 out of 650 elected MPs representing 32% of the total. This was against a level of approximately 51% in the general population in 2016 (Statista 2016). In the 1970s and 1980s Silvia Rodgers examined the situation of women MPs, where at that time there were 19 women MPs out of a total of 635 seats. As Rodgers (1993) points out this is not due to male MPs, who as the majority in the House of Commons have passed this equal opportunities legislation. In her research, she identified that the problem of selection for female candidates, was that they were chosen by committees who still expected male candidates and masculine forms of dress. As exemplified by comments to one candidate, prior to her selection to stand in the 2010 General Election, that she had ‘unparliamentary hair’ (BBC 2015) this is a trend that continues.

Rodgers identified forms of reclassification within the House of Commons as a

strategy by male MPs to keep an understanding of the House as a male preserve despite the presence of women MPs. The two most common forms were reclassification as a man as ‘an honorary man’ - as with Margaret Thatcher being described as the best man we have- or as a supernatural being- as with Nancy Astor’s designation as a witch (Rodgers 1993: 54). A consequence of this reclassification for the clothes women choose is to adhere as close as possible to traditional masculine attire and to reflect the ‘... perennial strain of Puritanism long endemic in Englishness’ (Pevsner as quoted in Ribero 2002: 23). That this Puritanism, and the requirement for female MPs to adhere to it, is relevant today can be seen when Theresa May herself became the centre of a media feeding frenzy for wearing a red dress and jacket that showed cleavage during the 2016 budget debate (Bates 2016).

How then did Theresa May’s choice of dress on her first day in Downing Street reflect this negotiation between becoming an honorary man, demonstrating Western individuality and sexuality and projecting an English nationality based on tradition? In common with the female members of the Royal Family, such as The Queen, The Duchess of Cambridge and most recently The Duchess of Sussex, Theresa May makes a point of supporting British designers and manufacturers. Reflecting a position taken by Margaret Thatcher, who believed ‘if anyone represents Britain, with our reputation for tailoring ... they ought to turn out looking quite good’ (Conway 2016). May’s outfit upon becoming Head of Government was traditional in its tailored outline and block colours. She chose to wear a dress rather than trousers indicating her femininity but the dress was styled to below the knee, with a shallow v-neckline and in dark navy. Her matching edge-to-edge coat, again in dark navy but with a strongly colour contrasting deep yellow hem was also tailored. The outfit was from British designer Amanda Wakeley, a favourite of the Duchess of Cambridge and whose designs were also worn by Diana, Princess of Wales. May chose to accessorise the dress and coat with, what *Vogue* designates the best power-dressing prop, a statement necklace (Sheffield 2016), also designed by Wakeley.

Kitten heels and leopard prints

Theresa May’s shoes were the only unusual note in her ensemble- leopard print kitten heels from British High Street fashion retailer L.K.Bennett. First attracting comment in 2002, when she wore the same leopard print shoes with an all navy dress to address

the Conservative party conference as Party Chairman (and famously informed her party that they were perceived as the nasty party), Theresa May's shoes, as well as her other clothing choices, have continued to attract attention; she has become famous and/or notorious for them.

English shoe manufacturing is even older than the English tailoring tradition. The Cordwainers, established in 1272, are one of the oldest London Guilds and English shoes are another clear signifier of English dress to the world (Glenville 1996). However, even for men, a British politician's choice of shoes carries with it the possibility of transgression

[...] it was widely considered that overstated designs in footwear were worn by those who were 'cads', 'bounders' and 'gigolos'. Even such minor variations as the use of suede were usually regarded as unacceptable, to the extent of signifying homosexuality. (Glenville 1996: 171)

In May's case it was her choice of glossy black, croc print patent leather over knee boots to a state event greeting the President of Mexico in 2015 that provoked outrage in some areas of the press:

It's the high-shine patent that is particularly unflattering. It can look, dare I say it, a bit cheap. They don't really go with that coat and gloves either, which are actually very chic. (Glazin quoted in Tweedy 2015)

The response to these boots demonstrates some of the problem of choosing suitable footwear. May wore them in Whitehall at Horse Guards Parade and with their to-the-knee-sheath and over-knee flap the styling is reminiscent of the boots worn by the Queen's Household Cavalry, a fitting militaristic reference for the situation. However, their glossiness and the faux crocodile pattern made these boots inauthentic and therefore unseemly, their production by British High Street stalwart Russell and Bromley and their price, far from being cheap at about £495, did not save May from appearing inappropriately dressed, instead the shiny leather material referenced aspects of kinky behaviour and sexual availability aspects, revealed by comments such as 'kinky boots' and 'She always gives good boots' (Prince 2015).

Theresa May's choice of shoes on her first day as Prime Minister continues to reinforce her role in projecting British (English) national identity coming as they do from an

important British retailer. However, in these shoes, May clearly steps away from the male puritanical precedent to something more feminine. The question the rest of this paper addresses is whether this step is towards a form of everyday resistance and subversion, or towards a form of hetero-normative sexual fantasy and reinforcement, of the male dominance of the House of Commons. The discussion focuses first on these shoes as heeled footwear before considering the choice of leopard print decoration and the two in combination.

The heeled shoe is the most clearly gendered object in Western wardrobes (Riello and McNeil 2006). Originally worn by both men and women through the course of the eighteenth century, with the rise of restraint in male clothing and the wish to distance themselves from aristocratic excesses, men abandoned the heel and it became an exclusively feminine accessory (Semmelhack 2006). One of the perceived advantages of the heel for women was that it reduced the apparent size of the foot, ‘big feet ... have always signified vulgarity, peasantry and poverty ...’ (Pine 2006: 357). The Cinderella fairytale has this privileging of small feet at its heart marking out their owner as unique and separating her from the ugly sisters with their oversized feet.

Heels with steel rods or ‘Stilettos’ first created in 1951, had instant erotic overtones when pictured worn in the bedroom and through the translation of the name stiletto meaning ‘little dagger’. The 10cm full stiletto was associated with sexual availability (Semmelhack 2015) whilst the demure 5cm kitten heel was associated with youth and inexperience (L.K. Bennett). The day before May’s appointment as Prime Minister, British newspaper *The Sun* ran the headline “Heel Boys” clearly referencing the erotic nature of the heel and also invoking ideas of female domination that together referenced the fantasy of the dominatrix. The headline’s reference to Maggie May clearly aligned May with Margaret Thatcher, a woman who was also portrayed as erotic in her domination of her all-male Cabinet as well as referencing the Rod Stewart single of the same name about a Liverpoolian prostitute. Conway (2016) identifies the Nanny aspect of this domination and the implied subtext of women as better managers because they are the ones who get everything done in the home. May’s early depiction as ‘the Headmistress’ dressing down the Party in 2002 resonates with these understandings of women as disciplinarian.

At this stage May's choice of kitten heels on the 13th July 2016 appear to be another traditional choice, conforming as they do to ideas of feminine display and infantilisation; methods by which women have passed within environments understood as masculine. So how can an accessory so clearly connected to sexual fetish (Steele 2006) and hetero-normativity be attributed as resistant? The discussion of this possibility understands women in Parliament as a subaltern group and draws on the idea of 'everyday resistance' to the dominant group (Haynes and Prakesh 1991) as expressed through the material culture of dress. This also aligns with the feminist position that women should be able to wear what they want without assumptions of their sexual availability or intellectual status; a position articulated by May as 'I know I have a brain and I'm serious so I can wear pretty shoes' (Retter 2016). The site of resistance is situated in the choice of 'fabric' for the shoe; a kitten heel in a plain leather would do no more than conform to the traditional codes cited above both as sign of national identity and as appropriate feminine attire allowing her to pass as an 'honorary male' on both the national and international stage. Women politicians who have followed this route are Angela Merkel, German Chancellor since 2005 and Beato Szydlo the Polish Prime Minister.

The reading of women MP's as a subaltern group derives from the mismatch between their number within the House of Commons, and the proportion of women in the general population as discussed earlier. Combining the work of James Scott on everyday resistance and de Certeau's understanding of consumption as production using the materials of the dominant culture, Vinthagen and Johanssen (2013) develop a framework for discerning actions by subaltern groups as resistant. Importantly, they identify the entangled nature of power and resistance and locate resistance in the specific act and context thus allowing for changing and contradictory acts of resistance by the same actor. As everyday resistance is more enmeshed with the dominant field than resistant behavior and only resists some actions and not all, 'everyday resistance is necessarily contradictory- both subordinate and rebellious at the same time' (Vinthagen and Johanssen 2013: 37). Theresa May's choice of kitten heels (subordinate) in a leopard print (rebellious) sits within this enmeshed and contradictory field.

Vinthagen and Johanssen propose the following criteria for identifying actions as forms of everyday resistance:

- (1) done in a regular way, occasionally politically intended but typically habitual or semi-conscious;
- (2) in a non-dramatic, non-confrontational or non-recognized way that (has the potential to) undermine some power, without revealing itself (concealing or disguising either the actor or the act), or by being defined by hegemonic discourse as “non-political” or otherwise not relevant to resistance;
- and is (3) done by individuals or small groupings without a formal leadership or organization, but typically encouraged by some subcultural attitude or “hidden transcript”. (2013: 37)

The remainder of this paper considers how a pair of leopard print kitten heels may be an example of ‘everyday resistance’ by considering the possible meanings and associations of fur in general and leopard print in particular and then placing those meanings within the wardrobe of the Prime Minister.

The wearing of fur and animal skins has a long history within human dress history and varies across time and cultures. From the 12th century in England sumptuary laws were enacted by Parliament governing the use of luxury items by social hierarchy (Phillips 2007). Most of the items regulated are items of dress, and fur is mentioned in many. Most restrictions are associated with levels of yearly income. Most fur moved across income barriers however the use of ermine was restricted to the King, Queen and their children. This understanding of ermine as the Royal fur is gloriously expressed in the 1701 portrait of Louis XIV of France by Hyacinthe Rigaud. Ermine also had associations with virtue, the 1585 ‘ermine’ portrait of Elizabeth I is understood as an allegory of her virginity and chasteness. While in general, English sumptuary laws paid little attention to women’s attire, one exception was the wearing of fur by prostitutes such that they might be not be mistaken for virtuous female citizens (Phillips 2007). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the sumptuary discourse became less about social divisions and standing, and more a moral discourse on material excess and Puritanical debates about the control of female sexuality (Bolton 2005). The wearing of fur became increasingly associated with prostitution and sexual fetish and in 1870 the publication of *Venus in Furs* upended the association of ermine with virtue when the protagonist Wanda dominates the male character dressed in an ermine edged robe (Harper 2008). The association of fur and

immorality continued through the twentieth century becoming associated with both the pimp and the prostitute, epitomized in the Annie Leibovitz's image for Nija Furs of P Diddy in a full length white fur coat and Kate Moss in a leopard print wrap (c1999) and Helmut Newton's image *Laura dressed in a fur cape, Avenue Georges V, Paris* (1974) (Bolton 2005). With technological advances in textile production furs and faux furs have become lighter and more accessible; the middle-aged woman wearing her mink tippets to demonstrate the social advances of her life (Harper 2008) has been displaced by a younger, more sexually aware woman who negotiates a line between appropriate sexuality and vulgarity.

Leopard skin, or leopard print, has a long history of association with bravery, hunting and war. The wearing of the animal's skin was used variously to indicate power and status, as in Uganda, or to connect priests with a relevant god as in Egypt. Leopard skin was associated with fierceness in hunting and was particularly associated with women as the leopardess was known as the more deadly hunter. Thus early artistic representations of women such as Diana the Huntress and Amazonians depicted them wearing leopard skins. This positive association lasted well into the eighteenth century in Europe with representations of aristocratic women as Diana such as Jean Marc Nattier's *Madame de Maison Rouge as Diana* (1756). Leopard skins formed part of the Hussar saddle furniture from the eighteenth century and simulated skins continue to be used by regimental horse bands to protect the saddles from damage (National Army Museum). Alongside this, however, were less celebratory associations such as the wildness associated with Bacchantes, the female adherents of the god Bacchus, who in their drink-induced madness would tear to pieces any man they came across. The leopard skin also became associated with enchantresses and witches such as Circe and Morgan Le Fey, the half sister of King Arthur.

Over time the association with dangerous women, the femme fatale, and sexual availability became the dominant meaning. In the late eighteenth century, Emma Hamilton, Lord Nelson's mistress, became famous for her tableau vivant, striking poses of classical figures. Victorian artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema, along with others, became known for his depictions of the Roman Empire using archeological detail to surround images of decadence and luxury. His painting *The Roses of Heliogabalus* (1885) shows the Emperor of Rome smothering his guests with roses whilst listening

to music played by a leopard skin clad bacchante. Alma-Tadema's work was exhibited at the Royal Academy and was popular with Victorian society, however, his work also reached a far wider public, with his involvement in theatre design depicting again the fall into decay of the Roman Empire before its salvation by Christianity (Barrow 2010). Another figure beloved of painters such as Alma-Tadema and theatre producers was Cleopatra, Pharaoh and lover of Julius Ceaser and Mark Anthony. Cleopatra, the last Pharoah to rule Egypt independently, was represented as the ultimate exotic lover and femme fatale. Alma-Tadema painted the meeting of Antony and Cleopatra with the Pharaoh aboard her barge sitting on a leopard skin covered stool. In Victorian theatres, in sharp contrast to Queen Victoria as the pattern of a female ruler, Cleopatra was played by Lillie Langtry, mistress of the Prince of Wales, and Constance Collier, both of whom were photographed in their costumes including leopard skin cloaks.

The association of leopard prints with actresses and performers and by association sexual availability continued throughout the twentieth century. The emergence of jazz (McClendon 2015) in the early part of the century linked its wearing to exotic barbarian cultures by way of Africa, the slave trade and the depiction of Negro men as barely-contained animals (Guyatt 2000). In 1920s Paris Josephine Baker, the famous African-American burlesque performer, was renown for her pet leopard and her use of the print in her stage costumes (Alexander 2018). Hollywood actresses of the forties and fifties, such as Jane Mansfield and Marilyn Monroe often wore leopard print bathing suits and evening dresses in films and publicity stills. Elizabeth Taylor, one of the most famous British Hollywood stars of this period, known for her lavish lifestyle and multiple marriages and whose scandalous affair with Richard Burton was ignited on the set of *Cleopatra* in Rome, often wore leopard print. Beyond this association with immorality, leopard print became increasingly associated with kitsch, popular culture and bad taste. In 1973, BIBA opened Big BIBA its new London store in Kensington, leopard prints were used liberally throughout the store (Figure 2) and were scattered throughout the promotional store guide- the centre spread is a poster of a BIBA employee dressed as Cleopatra reclining on a leopard covered bed, the mistress section of the 'Men only' third floor was entirely decorated in leopard print. What is charted here is a long-standing association of female political power with leopard fur and print that in both art history and popular culture has become

representative of a dangerous female sexuality and immorality. For a female Prime Minister to wear leopard print in the heart of British government can be understood as a challenge to the convention of women politicians as proxy men.

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Figure 2: View of part of the household department in the Biba shop in Kensington High Street, London, 1973, showing display of furnishings with imitation leopard skin patterns. Credit The Design Council Slide Collection at Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections.

Everyday Resistance

How then do Theresa May's shoes rank as transgressive when measured against the three criteria identified by Vinthagen and Johansson?

1) May wears noticeable shoes habitually and often wears leopard print- these kitten heels in particular- on significant occasions such as her first day as Prime Minister and when announcing the snap general election in May 2017.

2) These shoes undermine the dominant system of the House of Commons in two ways. First, as introducing the system of change that is represented by fashion into the traditional and therefore more static clothing- society of Parliamentary dress codes and secondly by introducing routinely a print with associations of female not male power. Both interventions reflect feminine characteristics and so disrupt the reclassification of May as an honorary man.

3) May wears these shoes on her own cognizance with no 'official' remit. However, May, with Baroness Jenkin of Kensington, co-founded the group Women2Win to provide support and mentoring to women wishing to gain election as Conservative MPs and during their time as MPs. Moreover, she has consistently networked with women MPs across party lines in acknowledgement of their similar situation despite political differences. This is in contrast to Margaret Thatcher who did little to support or advance female Conservative MPs and encouraged male colleagues' reclassification of her as a supernatural being (Rodgers 1993).

The resistance signified by leopard print shoes on the feet of the British Prime Minister is contradictory, playing as they do to notions and fantasies of hetero-normative female sexuality. However, that contradiction is inherent within everyday resistance. The scale of challenge is commensurate with the subaltern position that

women still occupy within the House of Commons both numerically and ideologically. This position limits the scope of everyday resistance to what is possible without retribution whilst still pushing and testing those limits. Theresa May's choice of these shoes, ones she returns to at 'momentous' moments, conflicts with and balances the traditional choice of dress suitable to her role as Prime Minister and as a subaltern group in Parliament. By invoking the feminist ideology of wearing what she pleases and with reference to the feminine sexuality and power associated with the leopard, these shoes represent a moment of rebellion by inserting fashion-society into the everyday costume-society of politics generally and the House of Commons in particular.

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