

MIMICKING THE DEVIL:

DIMORPHOUS IDENTITIES FOR CORPORATE WOMEN

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Pop culture narratives are where literature meets real-life. Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* is a contemporary text that explores and reaffirms how women must create and perform a "workplace identity" in order to succeed in corporate America. Behind the "kitschy" sayings, the brand-name dropping and the sappy romance Weisberger presents a true time-honored cultural conundrum: where do women fit into America's workforce? Pop culture authors such as Weisberger imagine, create, and bear female characters who are literarily perfect: just a bit quirky, a size six when a size two is preferred (she's not fat but *normal*—just like you!), and we as readers, eat them up. We empathize and envy how these authors can depict the backstory to our lives, but funnier and a bit more exciting. Are we forgetting to realize there is a point? Sure, in the end of *The Devil Wears Prada* the protagonist Sachs regains her ethical compass after quitting her job, but what should readers chalk that experience up to: A wayward year for a mid-twenties college

graduate? The truth is that Sachs' *Runway* tenure would have been extremely different had she performed an alternative identity to fit into the parameters set out by *Runway*.

Weisberger explores this issue most directly through her portrayal of the compelling characters Miranda Priestley and Andrea Sachs. These characters illustrate that women must de-feminize themselves in order to succeed in corporate America. Most people would assume that women should adapt masculine traits in order to flourish, but these characters prove that it is not necessarily a masculine identity that Corporate America prefers, rather a dimorphous one that mimics one's superiors. A dimorphous performance of identity occurs when a person removes certain characteristics from their self-defined identity, and in doing so, creates a newly formed self that is consistent with the dominant culture around them. Andrea Sachs must literally identify and remove her socialized *feminine* behavioral characteristics and do her best to perform a similar persona to her superior, Miranda Priestley. This new performative identity will be deemed as insufficient because it is not the original, preferred *masculine* identity that America is socialized to think of as the most desirable in the workplace—but it is the best that women can do. This is why those who work with Miranda Priestley see her as the devil. She is the devil because she is a one-of-a-kind anomaly that puts fear into her subordinates who cannot empathize with her.

According to a study through the American Psychological Association, college-aged students described personality traits of men as “assertive,” “risk-taking,” “extraverted,” and “excitement-seeking”. Women, on the other hand were seen as “anxiety-driven,” “tender,” “neurotic,” “agreeable,” “conscientious,” and “vulnerable” (Allik, Realo, Schmitt, Voracek 168-169). This study shows that as recently as 2008 there is still a major difference in how young people perceive men

and women. Women are seen through a cultural lens as anxious, agreeable (rather than assertive) and vulnerable (rather than being able to tough out any sort of situation that comes at them). These preconceived notions push women to shed these undesirable qualities in the workforce for those that are gendered as *male* such as risk-taking and extraverted-ness, for these latter traits are attributed to what a successful businessperson ought to have in the eyes of an employer. What is largely ignored in any corporate industry is that men and women effuse power in different ways:

Women act powerfully all the time, but in ways different from men. Relying on our “girlish charm” can be just as influential, but less direct and less confrontational. In other words, we wield powerless directly than men. We’ve learned to be less direct so we will not be perceived as taking too much power away from men. (Frankel 14)

Unfortunately for women, non-direct or confrontational uses of autonomy are not preferred in the workplace, therefore their power is largely ignored unless it is presented in a more direct manner.

One would assume that the pressures for working women are to adapt socialized male traits because most CEOs of American companies are men; in 2008, of the largest 1000 publicly traded companies, only 27 women were their CEOs (Brown), and studies show that “Traditionally, board members have been chosen from the ranks of existing CEOs (Gutner, 2001); and, because CEOs are mostly men, they engage in homosocial reproduction, or placing others on the board who have the same general characteristics—including age, gender, background and experience” (Arfken, Beller, Helms 180). Women understand that their superiors promote people with the same characteristics as themselves, thus even if they cannot be the same gender as their generally male bosses, they can at least adapt similar traits

to make their superiors see themselves in the female employee. This is the incentive for women to portray themselves differently. It is important to note, however, that corporate America does not want for women to act like men, but rather to possess a dimorphized identity that enables them to still be seen on the exterior as a woman (especially attractive women), but have the desired personality traits that are gendered as male. This is another form of disassociation from identity.

The Devil Wears Prada veils itself as a pleasure read and non-feminist, yet the plot always come back to the glaring realization that there is no place for a traditional female identity in the workplace. Book critic Rachel Cooke castigates Weisberger's novel, lamenting: "What a wasted opportunity this truly dreadful book is. Weisberger has taken a world rich with comic potential - a world that should have you crying with laughter - and rendered it as sober as an AA meeting" (Cooke 15). Although Cooke may yearn for a more light-hearted feel to the novel, the sobering effects that she describes are due to a cultural phenomenon that is largely ignored: the displaced identities of women in the workforce. It is a necessity that these women must appropriate a dimorphous identity in order to succeed; ambitious women such as Miranda Priestley created her performative identity by making a deal with the Devil to gain autonomy.

One would think that a fashion-based industry would open doors for women to be able to act as their innate feminine selves, however normative gender-based stereotypes are propagated even in such a female-driven industry showing that there is truly no escape from gendered performances in one's career. Why is all of this relevant when in *The Devil Wears Prada* the editor-in-chief Miranda Priestley is a woman? First consider Weisberger's title: *The **Devil** Wears Prada*. Weisberger has attributed a satanic personality to Priestley. Anyone who has read the book can certainly ascertain that Priestly is an extremely harsh boss, but it suggests that from

the literature review above that toughness and an overcompensation of effort are necessary components in achieving a prestigious job title. Priestley understood that in order to be considered for a promotion, she had to discard all of her “feminine” traits for a mean-spirited dimorphous performance: “Typical double-bind for women in leadership positions is that they must be tough and authoritative (like men) to be taken seriously, but they will be perceived as “bitches” if they act too aggressively” (Oakley 324). Priestley is certainly considered a bitch in the novel, but moreover is seen as the Devil.

The concept of the Devil is an extremely powerful one—and attributing that title to Miranda Priestley makes a tremendous statement about the dimorphous identity that she has created. In the biblical sense, the Devil is an angel fallen from heaven for going against the word of God. The Devil is generally considered to be male, and most importantly, there can only be one Devil. Through donning her Prada and other illustrious brand-names Priestley has essentially made a deal with the “dark-side” to become the ultimate Devil of fashion—and in doing so, sacrifices her family, friends and personal life in order to be able to be the sole person who decides what is fashionably admissible and what is not. This sacrifice comes with some perks, it should be noted. Priestley now has the power to marginalize her employees and force them to change just with a glance or stare: “Miranda was smarter than all this and had deliberately created a persona so offensive on every level that she literally scared people skinny” (217). She is the forbearer of fashion because it is her one avenue of hegemony, and she has given up all other elements of her life: she is a slave to fashion. Even Priestley’s employees are able to see the subsequent effects that Priestley’s pact to become the Devil has had upon her:

Have you ever noticed that she has no friends, Emily? Have you?

Sure, her phone rings day and night with the world's coolest people, but they're not calling to talk about their kids or their jobs or their marriages, are they? They're calling because they need something from her. It sure seems awesome looking in, but you can imagine if the only reason anyone ever called you was because they—[needed something]. (207)

Priestley's lack of friends, dissolution of several marriages, and latch-key relationship with her children is latent proof that although her newly appointed title of the Devil comes along with immense power, it also is concurrent with a multitude of personal sacrifices.

Weisberger uses a myriad of other adjectives to describe Priestley including: "cold" "firm" "supreme evil" and "cold hearted monster". Priestley's subordinates demonize and consider her an anomaly because she does not fit the hetero-normative category of female, even though she appears as such because of her impeccable fashion sense. This dual performance of a feminine exterior with an androgynous "bitch" personality completely isolates Priestley into a category of her own: one that is dimorphous. None of the fashion forward employees at *Runway* empathize or understand Priestley as anything else but a completely foreign force of power because the other women in the office adhere to markedly "feminine" characteristics. Priestley is the devil because she is not what people would expect her to be upon first glance: a warm, sympathetic, doting figure. She is cut-throat beyond measure. Priestley manifests her power, which is uncharacteristic for women, as they are socialized to believe that they don't deserve to project their autonomy—however if a man were to show authority like Priestley does, it would be considered normal: "Women denied their power because of the messages they received growing up. Power was associated with men and, as such, was a masculine term. Their

perceptions of power had to do with who was in control” (Frankel 234). Priestley, in her dimorphous shift, refused to deny her power and that is part of the reason why she is so different from all of the female characters around her—she refused to capitulate her authority to a man, and kept it for herself.

Weisberger clearly outlines Priestley’s journey to her successful dimorphous identity, no doubt in an attempt to show the drastic measures women have made in order to make themselves seen as more desirable in the workforce—which is not the fluffy or humorous material that a common pleasure read would attempt to convey. Weisberger depicts the extreme transformation that Priestley underwent to become the devil that she is to Andrea Sachs:

Miranda Priestly was born Miriam Princhek, in London’s East End. Hers was like all the other orthodox Jewish families in the town, stunningly poor but devout. [...] Miriam promptly dropped out of high school upon turning seventeen—a mere three months shy of graduation—to take a job as an assistant to an up-and-coming British designer, helping him put together his shows each season. [...] at twenty-four years old, Miriam Princhek became Miranda Priestly, shedding her undeniably ethnic name for one with more panache. Her rough, cockney-girl British accent was soon replaced by a carefully cultivated, educated one, and by her late twenties, Miriam’s transformation from Jewish peasant to secular socialite was complete. (38)

In order to be perceived as similar to the successful Anglo-Saxon corporate employees already in place she shed her ethnic name and disassociated herself with anyone who would be akin to her former, poor self. Identity is something completely changeable.

Priestley's makeover outlines the significance of performance in order to succeed. Priestley understood her initial socioeconomic and cultural status as a poor Jewish young woman, and removed those negatively perceived traits from her persona. The society that Weisberger creates is similar to modern day America—it is one where people are expected to alter themselves in order to be attuned with the world around them. This constantly changing performance creates the perception that: “An individual's gender identity is discursively constituted as the effect rather than the cause—an individual's identity does not exist behind the performance, but is created by the performance itself” (Lester 283). Priestley's “effect” as Lester puts it is that her employees cower when she walks into the room and revere her every move. Her effect is that no one questions her authority or autonomy over her employees because she has taken the tedious steps to remove all undesirable qualities that might undermine her clout. In order for Andrea Sachs to succeed at *Runway*, she too, must make a transformation.

Much like Priestley, Andrea Sachs creates a performative identity in order to survive in the *Runway* world. Sachs quickly realized that she could survive only based on the guidelines that had been created by her superior, being directed to adapt gendered male characteristics while still having a feminine exterior: “Women are often signaled early in their careers that traditional male traits are expected in senior administrative roles and that promotion depends on their ability to act like men” (Lester 278). Lester argues that male traits are expected in order to succeed, however I would argue that one needs to mimic the traits of their superior in order to gain attention. While women have progressed immensely by being permitted to work in corporate America, the parameters they are expected to endure have remained unchanged from when they were put into place, which was far before women were

even allowed into the workforce. According to the United States Department of Labor, women made up 46.8% of the national workforce in the year 2009 (US Dept of Labor), yet women in managerial positions make eighty-one cents to every man's dollar for performing the same position (Wolfhurst). Even though women represent nearly half of all workers in America, *The Catalyst Women's Activist Group* projects that women will not have an equal number of board seats in major companies until the year 2064 (Arfken 181). It is no wonder why characters such as Priestley and Sachs felt such a need to alter their identities after emerging into the corporate world; they realized the inequities they faced and engaged in a dimorphous identity as a form of problem-solving. It is disheartening that these two characters had to create a secondary identity in order to succeed.

Many women in America have been able to identify with Andrea Sachs in *The Devil Wears Prada*, except they inevitably have a more complicated life and aren't able to up-and-quit because life isn't fair, not to mention that their workplace setting isn't nearly as glamorous. For Andrea Sachs, every day at *Runway* is a constant uphill battle for approval. She works from eight in the morning until the dreaded mock-up book is finished anywhere from nine to eleven in the evening, all the while trying to avoid the snickering comments about her wardrobe, weight, or general inability to perform the most menial tasks. Sachs knew that she was not the usual type to work at the fashion-forward magazine straight from the beginning, acknowledging her lack of like-mindedness with the attitudes of the magazine: "I was an imposter, and not a very good one at that. I had known the minute I stepped on the *Runway* floor that I didn't belong. My clothes and hair were wrong for sure, but more glaringly out of place was my attitude" (21). Sachs' attitude was one of a dissenter, looking down upon the rest of the women at *Runway* who worshipped the brand named clothing

and impeccable lifestyle that went along with it. Sachs realized almost immediately upon her interview at *Runway* that in order to succeed she would need a major shift in identity, much like Miranda Priestley's transformation.

Sachs' "glaringly out of place attitude" was not the only obstacle that needed to be overcome in order to keep her job at *Runway*. Arguably, the most prevalent issue wedging itself between Sachs and success at *Runway* was her image, and how her other employees viewed her: "I'd already grown accustomed to being looked up and down every time I went anywhere, and I could've sworn she was looking at me with the same expression I would've given a five-hundred-pound person with eight Big Macs arrayed in front of him" (64). Essentially the people working at *Runway* saw Priestley as an alien, someone who did not understand that lunch breaks weren't for eating, but rather catching up on idle gossip and self-body loathing. Although at first Sachs did not adhere to the cultural norms of *Runway*, she changed her attitude once she realized that she could not continue to act and dress the way she did and keep her job. She quickly began trying on different outfits of self-identification. The perpetual judgment and disgusted stares were omnipresent by the devilish Miranda Priestley:

She leaned on the counter that ran over my desk, leaned over it and even closer to me, until she was able to see my entire body as I sat, immobilized, in the chair. Her bright blue eyes moved up and down, side to side, all over my white button-down, my red corduroy Gap miniskirt, my now buckled camel-hair Jimmy Choo sandals. I felt her examine every inch of me, skin and hair and clothes, her eyes moving so quickly but her face remaining frozen. (105)

This silent judgment manifests just how vital one's appearance was at *Runway*. Sachs was not the only employee under this scrutiny, but she was certainly the only one who resisted changing herself for as long as she did.

Sachs abstained from altering her outward appearance for her first three months at *Runway* before she took the plunge and starting gorging herself on the company's seemingly limitless supply of fashionably appropriate clothing. In the beginning of her one year tenure, Sachs attempted to use her own wardrobe to pick out a suitable work outfit: "I'd stood with my microwaved coffee for nearly a half hour each morning, agonizing over boots and belts, wool, and microfiber. I'd change stockings five times until I finally had the right color, only to berate myself that stockings of any style or color were *so not OK*" (123). Finally, after Jeffy the wardrobe stylist held up a chic outfit and said, "This, Andy, is what you should be wearing if you don't want to get fired" (123), she capitulated and began her identity change. Sachs needed to adapt her outward appearance in order to blend into the *Runway* world. First came the outfits, then came the assertiveness. Like Priestley making a pact to become the Devil in order to wear her Prada, Sachs was making her first steps toward a marginalized dimorphous personal life in order to gain corporate success.

The Devil Wears Prada is representative of what females endure in order to be taken seriously in their careers, whether it be in the fashion industry or not. The fashion industry was a well-chosen venue for Weisberger to portray a struggling woman such as Andrea Sachs to find herself—Sachs is literally trying on different identities as if they were clothing until she finds the correct "outfit" or identity that would suit her well at *Runway*. Because women must try on these different identities as if they were clothing in order to blend well with corporate America, a dimorphous identity foreign to their own has been born. These women have willed themselves to

change at a high price: the loss of their innate identity. Their co-workers will never know the true them, but this is the price that must be paid for success. Through Sachs' outfit changes, Weisberger mirrors all of Sachs' transitions into different identities.

The first outfitted identity that Sachs dons is for her interview at *Runway* after returning from her sojourn backpacking abroad after graduating from Brown University:

[I] managed to assemble a jacket and pants that did not match and in no way created a suit, but at least they stayed put on my emaciated frame. A blue button-down, a not-too-perky ponytail, and a pair of slightly scuffed flats completed my look. [...] *They're not going to hire me or reject me on the outfit alone*, I remember thinking. Clearly, I was barely lucid. (13)

Sachs' next change of clothing and identity occurs when she tries to wear her amateur clothing to *Runway*, and have it pass off as acceptable: "After much agonizing and clothes-flinging, I finally decided on a light blue sweater and a knee-length black skirt, with my knee-high black boots" (35). This outfit was clearly not acceptable due to the fact that none of her clothing was up-to-date with the latest trends, so Sachs tried on more identities and outfits, until she finally donned the appropriate ensemble, and identity for *Runway*: Hell, I'd already survived three full months—if wearing a Prada turtleneck instead of one from Urban Outfitters was going to help me survive the next nine, then so be it. I decided I'd start putting together a new and improved wardrobe immediately" (124). There is no doubt that the different trends of accoutrements that Sachs wears throughout *The Devil Wears Prada* is representative of the shifting identity that she performs. It is certainly troubling that women can try on and peel off identities as easily as they can clothing, but this practice is a necessary mechanism of amalgamation within the corporate world. These outfit/identity changes are maddening to Sachs because, in truth, there

is no correct outfit to be put on. Whatever outfit Sachs chooses will be wrong simply because she is wearing a performance, and a performance is never as quality or convincing as reality.

The definition of identity and the notion of shifting one's identity is important if we want to understand Sachs' transformation at *Runway*. I am using Jaime Lester's definition of identity as, "the conscious and unconscious thoughts or ways in which an individual understands herself in relation to the world" (Lester 283). Before adapting her style to the *Runway* norm, Sachs saw herself as inept. Presentation of one's self is the first thing that a person sees (and consequently assesses) of another, and therefore it was essential for Sachs to change her outward appearance in order to no longer feel "stupid, incompetent, and all-around moronic" (121). Sachs' coworkers simply would not respect her until she looked like someone who demanded respect, and in the case of *Runway*, that meant donning only the most fabulous couture. It is despicable that Sachs had to change her outward appearance to gain autonomy within her workplace. Respect should have been given for her intellect and work-ethic, but instead we as Americans base our value judgments upon materialism and the projection of self.

Luckily for Sachs, her unacceptable appearance could be easily rectified. As we have seen from Priestley's transformation, a change in identity can be as drastic and comprehensive as one chooses to make it. Sachs' goal in changing her appearance was to locate desirable identity qualities of her superiors and adapt them to herself: "Identity is not a fixed state of being, but a fluid process that is able to change. Multiple and competing identities exist simultaneously with individuals choosing to perform each identity based on the contexts in which they find themselves" (Lester 283). The context that Sachs found herself in was one of high fashion and intensity, so in order to be seen as someone who could potentially be a

greater asset to the company, she birthed a new dimorphous identity that was more conducive to the harsh gaze of the *Runway* elite: “I was working at Runway magazine for chrissake—simply putting on anything that wasn’t torn, frayed, stained, or outgrown really wasn’t going to cut it anymore” (123). The latter passage is a pivotal moment for Sachs in the novel, one where she has come to the realization that she had the ability to be herself outside of the office, and at the same time could perform an identity that would allow her to succeed within it. As many seasoned veterans of the corporate arena will tell a fresh face, “Follow the maxim, *Dress for the job you want, not the job you have*, and you won’t go wrong” (Frankel 200). There is no question that Sachs would go nowhere at *Runway* if she didn’t dress more appropriately.

Following her exterior alterations, Sachs began to understand fully why Miranda Priestley was the way she was—and adapted herself to that model. After describing her hellish job to an acquaintance, Sachs quickly ends her diatribe of complaints by rationalizing the way that Priestley acts: “Of course, she IS the most powerful woman in fashion and publishing, and you just can’t get to the top of two major industries in New York City handing out candy all day long. Um, it’s understandable that she’s a little tough to work for, you know? I would be, too” (127). This is the epiphany, the bright lights shining down from above where Sachs ceases to feel sorry for herself, and truly understands the sacrifices that must be made in order to climb the corporate ladder as a woman. From this point on, although it is not explicitly stated in the text, Sachs uses Priestley as a model for what she must become, in the sense of forming a dimorphous workplace identity as an avenue for success. Sachs understands that Priestley is not a moral compass, but rather an icon to follow to gain corporate success in exchange for her true identity.

Miranda Priestley served as an exemplar for Andrea Sachs, but who was Priestley's example? According to the text, Priestley had no precursor to follow other than what she could observe about societal norms of who succeeded in the corporate world. As growing numbers of women have entered the workforce the blatant issue that women's gendered traits are not acceptable in the workplace has emerged:

The private and public domains have become gendered spheres, with masculine values and skills governing in the public and feminine skills and values in the private sphere. Thus, men have defined the nature of organizations and work in terms of their experience (Acker, 1992). Because males developed and built [business] organizations, their cultures reflect male values and development (Mills, 1989). (Buttner, 254)

Buttner has pin-pointed the issue that inevitably plagued Priestley in her quest for success: if women are socialized to act in ways that aren't respected or appreciated in corporations, how will they ever succeed? Priestley's response to this phenomenon was the creation of her dimorphous identity, which allowed her to adapt the desirable cultured male values: she needed to beat the men at their own game. Priestley defined her own nature of organization within the walls of *Runway*, rendering her oppressive in the eyes of her subordinates, but also deserving of respect.

Weisberger did not fabricate the tactics that Priestley used in order to gain her prestige, but rather outlined the steps that have been taken by successful women in corporate America. Over 96% of all women interviewees, all of them top-female executives, gave two key factors to success; the first was to constantly go above and beyond all performance expectations—also known as the superwoman model:

“These women reported that they had to prove their ability repeatedly, and needed to over-perform in order to counter negative assumptions in a predominantly male business environment” (Ragins 29). Essentially, these women went into their respective jobs knowing that they had negative points against them simply for their gendered identity. They counteracted this negative image by out-performing all men around them in order to be considered *at least* equal to them. Priestley proved her capacity for success by being a cut-throat businesswoman who never took no for an answer when she wanted a yes, who acted like a wretch in order to command respect, and who never saw her children or husband. Priestley did not act like a male in order to gain respect, but rather acted as an entity of her own that defied gender norms, but commanded reverence in exchange for her hard work.

Priestley’s harsh treatment of Sachs can be seen in one of two ways: She can either be perceived as a tyrannical superior who was never satisfied with Sachs’ work, or a woman who saw immense potential in an employee and pushed her in order to create a successor. I believe that the latter is true—that Priestley was empowering Sachs. There is no doubt that Priestley’s treatment of Sachs was horrendous. Priestly was demeaning, dehumanizing, snide, and impossible to please—yet that was the only way for her to force Sachs to understand the harsh realities of a woman succeeding in the corporate world. Priestley’s never-ending tyrannical judgments of Sachs were to help her learn about the fashion industry. Sachs needed to realize that it was essential to put her vulnerable feelings aside, and create a dimorphous identity in order to be taken seriously. Going back to the gendered traits of the 2008 American Psychological Association, young people see women as vulnerable and tender. Priestley wanted to eradicate those qualities in Sachs just as she did for herself so that she could later succeed. An example of this is that it was imperative

for Sachs to learn the language of her business, much like Priestley did in order to be taken seriously: “Influence comes from knowing the business, and one of the best ways you can exercise your influence is to use language unique to your industry and profession” (Frankel 166). Through Priestley’s crude treatment of Sachs a harder skin emerged, one that refused to be seen as weak or accept defeat. Once Priestley saw Sachs’ dimorphous identity emerge in Paris, she knew that Sachs had the potential to truly succeed.

One of the most important factors in Sachs being a successor to Priestley was the realization for Andrea that Miranda Priestley was extremely talented, even though she was a miserable wretch:

Miranda Priestley was, as far as I could tell, a truly fantastic editor. Not a single word of copy made it into the magazine without her explicit, hard-to-obtain approval, and she wasn’t afraid to scrap something and start over, regardless of how inconvenient or unhappy it made everyone else [...] *Runway* wouldn’t be *Runway*—hell it wouldn’t be much of anything at all—without Miranda Priestley. I knew it and so did everyone else. (208)

By wholly understanding the talent and hard work that Priestley put into the magazine, Sachs was able to bypass her hatred for her boss, and learn what it took to get a corner office. Priestley was harsh, but only because she demanded the very best. Sachs saw the pattern that successors had to forge in order to succeed at *Runway*: “From everything I’d seen so far, each [subordinate employee] was humiliated, degraded, and generally abused by their direct superior, only to turn around and do it to those under them the second they got promoted” (209). This abuse was cyclical and repetitive because superiors had the foresight to train their

employees by hardening them for the demanding realities of corporate America. One of Priestley's trademark tactics in hardening Sachs was to stare her up and down, in order to show her disapproval: "She was looking at me up and down. Her eyes moved unabashedly as they checked out first my shoes and then my pants and then my shirt, and continued upward to my face and hair, all the while avoiding my eyes. The expression on her face was one of massive disgust" (246). This passive disgust was a medium in molding Sachs in a more admirable candidate for success. Once Priestley had influenced Sachs to her satisfaction, it was time for her to acknowledge that she was ready to be considered as more than a minion to fetch her daily Starbucks.

In order for Priestley to consider Sachs worthy of being seen as a potential successor, Sachs needed to prove her loyalty and commitment to her job at *Runway*. This task was fulfilled in the eyes of Priestley when Andrea decided to remain in Paris to work instead of flying home when her best friend got into a car accident and was comatose:

"Ahn-dre-ah, I'm very pleased with your decision. It is absolutely the right thing to do, and I appreciate that you recognize that. Ahn-dre-ah, I have to say, I had my doubts about you from the start. Clearly, you know nothing about fashion and more than that, you don't seem to care [...] I'll be much more willing to help you get where you'd like to go now that you've demonstrated that you're committed. You should be proud of yourself, Ahn-dre-ah." Just when I thought I'd faint from the length and depth and content of the soliloquy—whether from joy or from pain, I wasn't sure—she took it one step further. In a move that was so fundamentally out of character for this woman on every level, she placed her hand on top of the one I had

resting on the seat between us and said, “You remind me of myself when I was your age.” (338)

The devil’s icy exterior has melted; Priestley has finally capitulated in a sense by revealing a bit of her true self, and conceding to Sachs that she has not always been the person she is now. At this point for Sachs, Priestley is not so much an anomaly, rather a person whose exterior shell has come off and true self has emerged. This is a side of Miranda that has thus far been tucked away into her past life; Priestley only reveals herself to those whom she deems worthy of seeing behind the mask of her dimorphous identity. It is almost as if Priestley is initiating Sachs into the coveted, and minute world of successful corporate women. Once Sachs has proved her willingness to create a hardened dimorphous identity, she is received with open arms, Priestley was then willing to network for Sachs knowing that she would not be a disappointment.

My research within and outside of Weisberger’s text has made me come to a disparaging conclusion: women are marginalized and stereotyped in corporate America unless they do something to counteract that negative image. It is disheartening to think that women need to go that extra mile in order to gain respect, autonomy, and success—yet it is a latent truth in America today. That is not to say that there are not powerful women who aren’t extremely successful. I would argue that all of the successful women in America, like Miranda Priestley, have made a deal with the devil in order to create success for themselves. Women must try on different identities, casting aside their own, until they have created one that is accepted by the patriarchal structure holds control in corporate America. Is it worth it to throw away your own identity in exchange for job advancement? I would argue, yes. Creating a dimorphous identity that is “not too male, but not too female” is challenging and tiring, but without that identity women would still be chained to their domestic spheres. Change will come; one day women will define their own rules

within corporate America, however it will take more women like Miranda Priestley to create such a revolution. Although a dimorphous identity is a disparaging concept because women need to change themselves in order to be respected, I believe it should also be thought of as a form of empowerment. These dimorphous women have empowered themselves by circumventing the conventions of patriarchal structures.

Pop culture narratives are often written off only as “pleasure reads”—but why wouldn’t they be? An exact goal of an author such as Weisberger would be to get modern women to read her book, which would in turn begin the conversation of “Why does it have to be such a sacrifice, such a shift in identity, an either/or decision when it comes to women working?” Of course academics can wait and study texts such as these in retrospect of America’s glass ceiling issue when it all doesn’t seem so familiar, when the language has been outdated so the text is deemed challenging enough and “study worthy”, or we can act now. We can explore now in this essay or in the future why there are such an outpouring of texts where women are constantly performing different identities in order to fit into workplace parameters that simply weren’t meant for them in the first place. Characters like Miranda Priestley and Andrea Sachs empower women: they convey the message that success can be attained if you are willing to sacrifice it all. But do the ends justify the means? That all depends on how much you want the corner office.

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