

A Woman's Perspective of a Tie'd Old Debate

Ties. There are those who do, those who don't, and those who think no-one should have to. There are those who think they're uncomfortable and unnecessary, and those who find them professional-looking, or even sexy.

And then there's me.

I've always found ties appealing; but then, I've never had to wear one. Having attended a modern high school that had discarded its tie long ago, my personal experience of ties had, until recently, been limited to buying them for the men in my life.

Not any more.

The perennial interest in The Gold Coast Tie Debate has seen me collecting, collating and analysing all manner of data on the subject – reading articles, editorials and Letters to the Editor, and even grilling hapless colleagues on their tie-wearing preferences. All of which turned up nothing new - only diverse opinions within the vast range of normal – black, white and many stylish shades of grey.

And so that, dear reader, is how, last Tuesday morning – to further my research - I approached my workplace attired in skirt suit with a man's shirt and tie, head dipped a la adulterous rock star, awaiting the jibes.

They never came.

I received many comments on how smart and professional I looked – something that had never happened previously when I'd worn that particular skirt suit; or any other outfit, for that matter. This was somewhat disconcerting for me, as I make a point of dressing

smartly for the office; but the most surprising aspect was that, so attired, I *felt* more professional, and performed accordingly.

Why is it so?

The Australian Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines a tie as 'a thing that unites or restricts persons; a bond or obligation'. And I have concluded that this is where the psychology of tie-wearing has its roots.

The practice of tie-wearing is said to have been started by Croatian soldiers, the name 'Croat' eventually evolving into 'cravate', the generic French term for a tie, and the English name for a specific style of tie. As the colour of the soldiers' ties denoted their factions, tie-wearing came to be associated with fraternity, solidarity, acceptance and belonging. And, of course, authority, and a sense that one knows what one is about – whether or not this is *actually* the case - hence its popularity among professions where conservatism and trust are most highly valued.

When worn correctly, a tie – and its wearer - may appear neat, methodical and conservative. It offers some promise that we will be on our best behaviour, and perhaps – as in my case – may in itself be conducive to that very behaviour. Would we really be comfortable entrusting our hard-earned cash to accountants who look like they've just come from Bondi Beach? And remember how Those Nice Young Boys the Beatles won over dubious seniors with their neat attire, even as they led The Youth Revolution of the 1960s?

Conversely, when worn unconventionally or untidily, the tie can symbolise dissent or mutiny from within the ranks and, as such, creates an uncomfortable threat. Perhaps it suggests we are out of control - 'busting out all over' - or about to discard all that is proper and safe. For example, few parents would like little Johnny to go to school with Angus Young, and as for Chrissie Amphlett well, we won't go there. When the wild-tied Knack burst onto the post-punk rock music scene, fathers everywhere learned a new unease - the subtle threat. They knew Johnny Rotten would never come calling for their daughters, but Dougie from The Knack – well, *he* just might. And who could forget *Brideshead Revisited*'s Sebastian – the quintessential British aristocrat who boldly defied both convention and the restrictions of The Establishment by wearing his tie *outside* of his jumper? These renegade tie-wearers were to be taken very seriously; after all, a cat among the pigeons poses far greater menace than one on the outside, looking in.

A tie is more than a piece of cloth. A tie is more than just another avenue for individuality – although that particular aspect appears important to those who wear them. The ties we choose – and the manner in which we choose to wear them – speak volumes about who we are, how we are, and possibly even *why* we are. Clothes may not maketh the man - or the woman – but they definitely contributeth.

And as for me? I'm a convert - of the there's-none-so-fanatical-as variety. Not only has my long-suffering husband lost still more of his wardrobe space to my shirts and ties – he now has to book his own ties a week in advance.

He lives in fear of my undertaking research on men's trousers.