

and Finally...

Keeping Up Appearances

CAN MANHATTAN POWER WOMEN EVER LET IT ALL HANG OUT?

BY BETSY F. PERRY

Observe any Manhattan mogul on a weekend walk down Madison Avenue, and—despite stubble, bed head, and a sweatshirt not quite covering his belly—I guarantee this schlubby-tubby fellow doesn't care what anyone thinks. More importantly, neither does his blonde arm candy in head-to-toe Chanel who wouldn't let go of him for all the bijoux at Buccellati. However, try being the C-level female equivalent, venturing out with unwashed hair and a jogging suit minus Spanx, and you will be news fodder for New York's claws-out tabloid media. Poor Rikki Klieman, a powerhouse criminal attorney and wife of the city's super cop, Bill Bratton, still remembers the shame of being written up by columnist Cindy Adams for a purple velour number she was spotted in a decade and a half ago! Of course, when Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein appears in need of a shave, as he did at the world's ultimate power confab, Davos, his several-days growth generated nonstop buzz and an analytical write-up (complete with a comparison to Tom Ford's artfully groomed stubble) in the *FT*. So of course there's a double standard, but does this really mean New York women on the top rung of the business or social ladder are never allowed a day off to, as they say, let it all hang out?

Ask any power woman and you'll get the same answer: NO! My pal Jolie Hunt, former chief marketing officer for AOL and now principal of Hunt & Gather, a New York-based marketing and communication company, learned that early on when working for former Pearson CEO Marjorie Scardino—the first female chief executive of a FTSE 100 company. "Here was a woman of enormous substance who couldn't go anywhere without having people ask what she was wearing," says Hunt, who feels that "people are always looking for chinks in your armor" if you're a high-profile female. Hunt thinks there's a "geographical divide" in the city, and although downtown is a lot friendlier to her off-hours style, "casual requires a lot of effort." Elizabeth Musmanno, president of the Fragrance Foundation and founder of a luxury brands PR firm, believes she's solved the off-hours fashion dilemma by "adopting Vera Wang's style of black leggings with a sweater flopped on top. I wear the same thing every day." She swaps out high heels for cowboy boots on the weekend, but makes sure they're from a major label like Dior, since "it's best to assume you will run into someone you know."

Frank Friscioni of Oscar Blandi says clients have spoken about the times they've ventured out without even lipstick and ducked for cover in bodegas or hidden behind clothing racks to avoid being seen, which unfortunately was what Katie Couric should have done before getting outed by *Us Weekly* when she appeared a little too *au naturel*. To avoid such mishaps, Friscioni will use sarcasm with clients, saying, "I see you've decided to deal with the airport landing strip barreling down the middle of your head."

Even the most powerful women—and men—can't insulate themselves from some random human contact in this great city. The higher the recognition factor, the better the odds that Madame CEO in her unvarnished splendor will cross paths with someone from Gawker. We were warned growing up: "Don't leave the house without..." And for good reason. Not long ago, after a jog in the park, I darted into Bergdorf's wearing running shorts and a ratty T-shirt. I immediately bumped into my mother. The look of sheer incredulity on her face said it all. Thanks, Mom, I get the picture. **G**

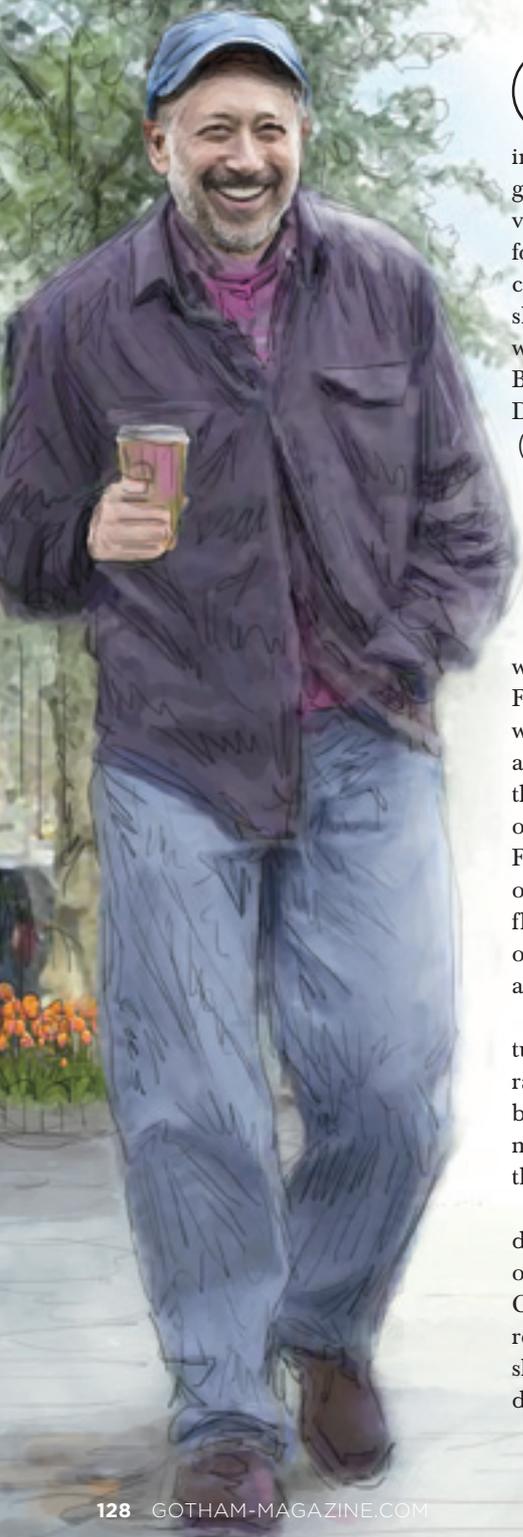


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