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A new battlefield in office etiquette

New research reveals the corporate politics of cleavage, reports **Elisabeth Squires**

You see them everywhere: spilling out of push-up bras on billboards, popping out of tops on internet sites.

An abundance of cleavage seems to rule the marketplace and the take-up of implants reflects a belief that bigger is better.

However, new research shows that supersized does not spell success: women with medium-sized breasts are viewed as being more professional in the workplace. The analysis, from the University of Central Florida, indicates that smaller breasts imply greater intelligence and athleticism, while larger orbs suggest nurturing and more sexually active behaviour.

Participants were shown one of four videotapes featuring the same actress giving a speech on careers. Men and women were asked to rank her performance based on positive and negative characteristics. In fact the only difference between each film was the size of the presenter's bra, representing an A, B, C or D cup.

While no bias was found among the female viewers, the men ranked the actress significantly higher on all levels when her breasts were represented as "just right", that is, medium sized. Men evaluated the same woman less positively when she projected too much or too little mammary mass.

It is not clear whether men are aware of this bias. Other studies suggest that men prefer no particular

breast size, but are primarily attracted to proportionality in women, with a specific hip to bust to waist ratio.

Women, on the other hand, tend to overestimate the size of breasts that men prefer, ranking the size they believe men desire as higher than the one that men choose.

Another interesting highlight of the Central Florida study was the actress's own reaction to her growing bosom. As she moved up the alphabet in terms of cup size, she felt more self-conscious about her breasts and more worried about her performance.

Everyone appreciates looking at breasts — beloved as symbols of sexuality, femininity and nurturing — but most of us rarely discuss the contributory effect they have towards how a woman is viewed.

Nobody wants to talk about breast etiquette at work, but everyone has an opinion. Some workers find breast displays so unsettling that one female boss was warned that her cleavage could constitute sexual harassment of her male colleagues.

The Florida research shows that in order to rise up the career ladder it is probably best not to draw attention to your chest.

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