

Wearing Yourself or Dressing the Part:
Navigating Workplace Dress Codes as Queer, Androgynous Women

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore various workplace dress codes and expectations in the Niagara Region through the experiences of six queer, androgynous women. Through a theoretical perspective that is informed by both Erving Goffman and Judith Butler, I analyze the women's decision-making around managing their appearance for work, and the relationship they perceive between their clothing, queer identity, and sense of self. I also explore the multiple challenges that participants have faced in attempting to meet normative standards of 'professionalism,' and suggest that many dress code expectations emphasize dichotomous gender norms, and notions of white femininity. Participants' narratives suggest that rigid dress codes reinforce heterosexist dynamics in the work place, and contribute to the 'othering' of queer, androgynous women who do not 'fit in' to the status quo. I argue that workplace dress codes need to be more flexible in providing multiple options for employees which do not rely upon gendered norms or categorization. I conclude by suggesting that more work needs to be done on the significance of workplace dress codes regarding their impact on workers who do not neatly fit into the normalized gender binary, and are 'othered' at various intersections of their identities.

Keywords: workplace, dress codes, women, androgynous, queer

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Chapter One: Introduction

In my first serving job, we were asked to simply wear any cut and style of T-shirt to work as long as it was the specified colour. I was happy about this flexibility because I could wear men's tops and a sports bra that compressed my chest, or a bra with an underwire that lifted my chest depending on what I felt comfortable with on a day-to-day basis. A couple of months later, the restaurant ordered new 'uniform' shirts for each of us to wear. We were told that we could order as many of the uniform tops that we wanted and that the cost would be deducted from our next pay check. There were two uniforms available: a men's loose-fitting crew neck T-shirt with the restaurant's logo, and a women's tight-fitting V-neck T-shirt with the restaurant's logo. While both of these style tops were available, only one was given to me as an option. I tried on the women's V-neck, as directed by my manager, and selected the size that I wanted. Next, I asked if I could also purchase one of the men's tops. My manager's first response was that she did not want to give out the men's shirts because she wanted to make sure there were enough in the box for all of the male employees. Quickly, I pointed out that we only had two male servers and that the entire box of men's shirts was full. My manager's next justification for why I could not have the men's shirt was that she thought the women's shirt would look better on me. I then explained to her that previous to the new uniforms, I had only been wearing men's tops to work in, and that it had never seemed to be an issue. I also gave her several reasons as to why I wanted the men's shirt for functional and practical reasons (which I thought she might relate to) beyond my own personal comfort and confidence on the job. Ultimately, I was told I could not have any of the men's shirts. The relationship with the clothing I wore to work immediately changed from being one that was flexible, comfortable, and reflecting the way I prefer to "wear myself", to one ridden with overwhelmingly negative feelings about what I had to wear to work every day, and the people who refused to give me

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alternate options, in my opinion, because of my gender. Soon after, this same workplace enforced a mandatory dress code requiring that women wear a dress and heels for their serving shifts, so I gave my two-week's notice.

My own personal experience and frustrations with gendered dress codes initiated my interest in pursuing this project, and exploring how researchers before me have approached the topics of gender and sexuality in regard to workplace dress codes. Gender inequalities in the labour market continue to be a focus that is explored within academia and broader mass media. From analyses of discrimination and sexual harassment against women in the workplace, to the gendered wage gap and disproportionate concentration of women in precarious employment (Stanford, 2008), scholars are building a body of literature that communicates and explores the experiences of women in the workplace. Understudied in this field of research, are the specific experiences of women who identify as queer and do not conform to normative gender in terms of clothing and appearance. Scholarly work on dress codes has focused on mainly heterosexual men and women for participants, without an explicit concern for how these experiences may be understood very differently by queer women who dress androgynously. While dress codes certainly impact the working lives of heterosexual women, I am hoping that my research will add the voices of multiple queer, androgynous women—and their experiences—into this larger conversation about gender performance and workplace dress expectations.

Given the relevance of gender and sexuality to work environments, this research project seeks to focus on androgynous, queer women's experiences with workplace dress codes (i.e. informal/ unspoken dress expectations, formal appearance standards, binary dress codes). More specifically, the question guiding my research project is as follows, “How do queer women who dress androgynously navigate and negotiate workplace dress codes?”

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I have several secondary research questions that I explore within my study as well. How do dress codes shape the career choices of queer women who dress androgynously? How do queer, androgynous-dressing women's perspectives on dress codes challenge and/or reproduce discourses of 'professionalism' and 'gender appropriateness?' How do classist, racialized, and heterosexist discourses of 'professionalism' and binary gender norms shape everyday experiences for queer, androgynous-dressing employees? How do my participants navigate, accommodate and challenge workplace dress codes? How does the regulation of dress codes perpetuate and uphold broader structural discrimination and neoliberal, capitalist values?

Key Informing Concepts

Now that I have introduced my project, I will explain some of the key concepts and terms which inform my research. A *dress code* is a set of rules or expectations regarding what employees can and cannot wear to work. These rules are usually decided upon by the employers, and are enforced in a variety of ways. While some dress codes are formally posted, and perhaps written in an employee manual or contract, other workplaces may enforce dress codes more informally, through verbal explanations or even unspoken expectations from employers. More informal dress expectations can also be created and regulated between workplace colleagues and from customers. Therefore, a dress code is not only about an employer's requirements, as colleagues and customers often shape expectations around 'appropriate' appearance at work as well. Dress codes can be broad and nonspecific, such as asking employees to wear clothes of a certain colour, while others are specific around branding, graphics, style of shoes, clothing material, and fit of clothing. Workplace 'uniforms' can be considered distinct from dress codes because they are a formal and standardized requirement for all employees, and are usually provided by the employers (although not necessarily provided free-of-cost to workers). In

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some cases, dress codes may exist in place of standardized uniforms. However, many organizations have dress code rules/expectations that are in addition to the mandatory work uniform. In this research, I explore a wide range of dress expectations, codes and uniforms across various working environments.

Gender refers to socially constructed identities that are specifically related to ideas about masculinity and femininity, and are associated with cultural norms, inequalities, behaviours, roles, and attitudes of a given society. Western societies typically recognize gender as a dichotomous term, in which ‘men’ and ‘women’ are placed in binary opposition to one another. Put differently, what makes one a man is dependent on what makes one not a woman. *Cisgender* or non-transgender-identified individuals are “assigned a sex at birth, placed in the corresponding sex category, and held accountable to the corresponding norms (doing masculinity or doing femininity)” (Connell, 2010, p. 32). For people who identify as *transgender*, “the sex category and/or gender of trans people does not match up as seamlessly with their sex” (Connell, 2010, p. 32). However, transgender people are still held accountable to gender norms and dichotomous ideas about masculinity and femininity. In my research, I discuss my understanding of how Erving Goffman’s (1959) conceptualizes performances of ‘self’ to inform my theoretical perspective, in relation to Judith Butler’s (1990) concept of ‘performing gender.’ I aim to explore how workplace dress codes normalize the gender binary, and reinforce notions of gender appropriateness.

While the term ‘*queer*’ has historically been rooted in homophobic and transphobic slurs and violence (Berlant, Warner, Clarke, Denisoff, Hainley, Hoad, Holmes, Newton, Nunokawa, Parker, Puccio, Shepard & Sillanpoa, 1994), it has also been reclaimed by many gender and sexual minority activists and scholars in Western society as an ‘umbrella term’ to resist categorizations that are often associated with “(oppressive) regulatory regimes and practices” (Hodges, 2014, p. 8). Both queer theory and post-structural feminism shape my methodological approach by challenging traditionally positivist

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‘ways of knowing,’ (Lather, 1992; Nash, 2010). I use ‘queer’ in my research as a linguistic tool to transcend hegemonic labels or categories of any one sexual orientation or gender identity. I also use the term ‘queer’ as an ‘umbrella term’ for non-heterosexuality to challenge the borders and assumptions associated with ‘LGBQ’ categories. As clearly put by fellow queer theorists Browne and Nash (2010), the definition of ‘queer’ “should remain unclear, fluid and multiple” (p. 7). Importantly, I draw attention to my decision to not include ‘transgender’ under my conceptualization of the term ‘queer.’ Following the lead of queer and transgender activists and scholars, I make a distinction between ‘queer’ and ‘trans.’ There are overlapping issues for queer and transgender people, but there are distinct and specific experiences that transgender people face which cannot be easily ‘lumped’ in with sexual orientation issues. For the purposes of this project, I use ‘queer’ to refer to non-heterosexual orientations, and understand ‘gender’ to be relevant to cisgender, gender fluid, and transgender identities.

Androgyny “is the state or condition of having a high degree of both feminine and masculine traits” (Way & Marques, 2013, p. 83). This term can refer to personality characteristics, but I will be using the term to refer to more aesthetic characterizations of dress and self-presentation. I conceptualize androgyny to not solely represent women who dress in ‘masculine’ attire, but rather a spectrum or range of performances that are gender non-conforming. I use the concept of androgyny to disrupt normalized notions of ‘gender appropriateness,’ and the idea that women ‘should’ dress femininely. I discuss literature that contextualizes the visibility politics of androgynous dressing for communities of queer women, who are both empowered and marginalized by queer identity appearance stereotypes. I also explore the ways in which various dress codes allow—and don’t allow—for women to dress androgynously in the workplace, and how this is experienced and understood by queer women who dress androgynously.

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Broadly speaking, there is little research to date on how androgynous queer women experience workplace dress codes. Significant research has been done specifically on the experiences of women with dress codes, but there has been limited exploration into the uniquely positioned experiences of non-heterosexual workers on this issue. In this thesis, I begin with explaining my theoretical perspective. I explore the ways in which my thesis is informed by both Erving Goffman and Judith Butler. Next, I discuss my navigation of relevant bodies of literature in the Literature Review. I present research that has already been done on workplace dress codes, as well as more general research on LGBTQ people's experiences in the workplace to contextualize my own data. In the following chapter, I discuss my methodological approach. I explain the ways in which symbolic interactionism, feminist queer theory, and my theoretical perspective have informed my methodology. I discuss the strategy of snowball sampling to select my participants, and also describe my approach to data collection, and data analysis. In my analysis of the data, I 'set the scene' with a chapter that explores various workplace settings and challenges. In this chapter I explore the relationship between participants' queer identities, and their androgynous dress. Then I discuss the multiple issues with workplace dress codes that my participants identified as significantly affecting their experiences at work, such as binary uniforms and gendered double standards. In the next chapter, I analytically discuss how my participants navigate these challenges and suggest the 'Strategies and Things That Help' with their experiences of workplace dress codes. Finally, I explore participants' suggestions for improving the enforcement of workplace dress codes in ways that can benefit all workers, and more specifically better the experiences of queer women who dress androgynously. The arguments I present in this thesis may thus suggest possibilities for meaningful interventions into the working lives of queer, androgynous women in Niagara and beyond. I argue that my research addresses a gap in the literature regarding workplace dress codes and the experiences of queer women who dress androgynously.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Perspective

In this chapter, I describe the theoretical perspectives which inform my approach to this research project. I discuss two theorists whose concepts are central to the exploration of my data analysis and thesis overall. As suggested in my opening story in Chapter One, my interest in doing this research has stemmed from my own complex experiences and relationships with various workplace dress codes. I have found that workplace settings bring me the most stress in regard to deciding how to perform ‘who I am’ through clothing and appearance. I feel that this is because there is an evaluation component to getting, having, and keeping a job. I have had job experiences where I have felt totally comfortable in deciding what to wear to work, and I have also had experiences where getting ready for work is the most stressful part of my day.

To theorize this project, I was looking for concepts which could help to explain my own thought processes and experiences, in the hopes that they could potentially be applicable to the experiences of my participants as well. Symbolic Interactionism is a “sociological framework that illustrates the diverse meanings people place on objects, interactions, and people, and the corresponding behaviours that reflect this range of interpretations” (Vejar, 2013, p. 1). The meanings that people attribute to symbols are shaped and interpreted through processes of socialization, and therefore objects such as clothing can be experienced in multiple ways and be attached to different feelings that vary from person to person. This theory fits my project well, and therefore I explore some of the arguments made by well-known symbolic interactionist Erving Goffman for the purposes of this thesis. Since my project also significantly explores gender and gender relations, I knew that I would need a feminist scholar to ‘fill in the [gendered] gaps’ of Goffman’s analysis, disrupt heteronormativity, and reflect and inform my approach to theorizing gender as a performative concept and practice. Importantly, dress codes and people’s experiences with dress codes cannot be separated from their gendered implications. Judith

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Butler's conceptualization of gender is one that offers a valuable link to Goffman, is well-known, and recognizes gender fluidity in a way that I find convincing.

Butler was not the first person to be writing about this subject, however. There are of course other well-known scholars who have written about deconstructing gender who could also be considered a reasonable fit for my project. For instance, West and Zimmerman (1987) offer a pivotal paper on 'doing gender,' and have links to symbolic interactionism. However, there are a few reasons why I chose to use Butler for my theoretical approach over other scholars. First, Butler effectively dismantles the naturalization of sex/gender categories, and the normalized correlation between them. Butler also decenters gender more radically than scholars who theorize within the gender binary (i.e. West and Zimmerman), and offers a perspective that considers gender fluidity and non-binary identities. Further, Butler provides room for disruption, and there are avenues through Butler to recognize tensions and contradictions in my participants' narratives in ways that I cannot with West and Zimmerman. Therefore in this thesis, I have drawn on my interpretation of Butler's work to discuss the gender binary, deconstructing heterosexism, and the fluidity and performativity of gender and self.

In this chapter, I discuss and compare notions of performance and performativity as conceptualized by Erving Goffman and Judith Butler. Discussions of common ground between these two theorists, and wider debates on performance and performativity, constitutes a large field of research and one that I am not able to fully analyze in an MA thesis. My aim is to present the ways in which I personally read and understand Goffman and Butler's conceptualizations of performance and performativity (in relation to gender and 'self'), and to frame my research within Butler's approach to deconstructing the gender binary.

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Goffman

To begin, I will discuss three main points from my reading of Goffman, which is also informed by other scholars' analyses of Goffman. Primarily, I draw upon Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. First, Goffman suggests that people have a certain sense of self that they perceive to be meaningful in informing their experiences. He suggests that humans come to understand their sense of self through their perception of who they are in private. People perceive their own internal thought processes and emotions to be at the core of who they are, informing a sense of self that feels innate, and separate from social discourse and broader structural relations (Goffman, 1959). Some scholars critique Goffman's acknowledgement of a sense of self for being an essentialist claim (Smith, 2006). However, I agree with those who read Goffman's argument as anti-essentialist—describing the illusion of a core identity as perceived by the individual that does not exist independently of social interactions, but is managed and regulated through them (Brickell, 2005; Siltanen & Doucet, 2017; Smith, 2006). As I understand, Goffman recognizes a person's sense of self, but is arguing that there is not an actual fixed self underneath that perception. Goffman (1959) writes that a person's sense of self is not stable or consistent, but rather that this perception of self shifts and is negotiated through various organizational structures, mechanisms of social control, and relationships. Goffman (1959) also conceptualizes the self as a performer that enacts various routines (roles) and regulatory performances everyday within all social interactions. Goffman (1959) writes, "everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role...It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves" (p. 19). Put differently, through the repetitiveness of our daily performances we project an illusion of self to the public, and it is merely this illusion (not one's core essence or inherent 'self') that we come to know of others as well, through their performances.

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Goffman (1959) suggests a broader symbolic interactionist concept, which is that someone's socialized self is engaged in daily performances (Brickell, 2005; Smith, 2006). Goffman (1959) explains that humans are prone to impulses and mood changes (which individuals come to interpret and understand as their sense of self or who they are), but that a person's socialized self learns to control the impulsivity and appear stable ('socially acceptable') to others in spite of such internal urges and impulses in order to properly perform their role (Brickell, 2005; Smith, 2006). For example, if an employee is frustrated with a customer, the employee is typically expected to appear calm, and handle the matter 'professionally' in order to have a more favourable interaction with the customer (instead of allowing that anger to be noticeable to others which could lead to a unfavourable interaction). In this way, people learn to perform their self, as they understand it, in socially 'acceptable' ways through the strict structuring and repetitiveness of normalized 'appropriate' social encounters (Goffman, 1959). Goffman suggests that this more performative, socialized self is distinct from a person's more centered understanding of their sense of self. Maintaining a consistently favourable image in the eyes of others also requires a great deal of effort. Goffman calls the energy individuals put into managing the impressions of their socialized selves and performances, *self work* (Smith, 2006).

The second main point that I engage with from my reading of Goffman is his concept of *impression management*. Goffman (1959) presents the term "impression management" to refer to how someone minimizes their own 'true' feelings, and performs their 'socialized self' in order to minimize conflict, and increase the likelihood of being perceived positively by others (p. 10). Put differently, "impression management suggests that people present the impression of themselves that they wish others to receive in an attempt to control how those others see them" (Smith, 2006, p. 100). While the conceptualization of impression management has been critiqued for suggesting that humans are essentially manipulative and narcissistic, others suggest that impression management is also the process

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through which a person's socialized self learns to help others, use manners, and develop an overall concern for being viewed as a 'good person' (Smith, 2006). Goffman (1959) writes, "in their capacity as performers, individuals will be concerned with maintaining the impression that they are living up to the many standards by which they and their products are judged" (p. 251). This analysis can be extended to consider broader racialized, capitalist systems and the regulation of neoliberal values which work to coercively shape one's impression management by increasing the value attributed to being perceived as a 'contributing,' 'successful,' 'productive' member of society. This concept of impression management suggests the awareness and concern many people have—consciously or subconsciously—about being perceived favourably by others. Goffman (1959) also argues that people may "wear an accepting look" around people that they want to "impress" and "may also be careful to wear the same look" when they are around those people in different contexts or around their extended contacts (i.e. mutual friends of colleagues) (p. 105). Goffman (1959) explains that a person may want to avoid compromising the positive impression they have left on their employer, for example, by dressing completely differently at social gatherings with colleagues outside of work. When women dress in traditionally feminine ways in their workplaces to avoid any prejudice around being 'different,' it could seem like a large risk to dress more androgynously around those same people in a different context, as it could compromise the way that they are perceived and treated.

Finally, I explore the tools that Goffman provides to understand and discuss the sincerity of people's performances of self. Goffman (1959) continues with the analogy of a theatre performance, and conceptualizes a contrast between "front stage" and "back stage" (p. 112). The front stage is when a person is "performing in the presence and judgement of others," is concerned with being socially acceptable, and engages in a great deal of impression management (Brickell, 2005, p. 30; Goffman, 1959). When backstage, the person/performer may consider the contradictions in the sincerity of their

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performances, and practice techniques for future performances of their socialized self (i.e. employee rehearsing how they are going to deal with conflict at work). Goffman (1959) writes, “here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character” (p. 112). Goffman (1959) also suggests that some performances may feel sincerer to one’s sense of self than others (i.e. the alignment of a person’s internally experienced emotions with the way their socialized self performs those emotions to others in social interactions), and argues that individuals have a certain level of awareness about the sincerity of roles that they perform. He suggests people have two levels of involvement with their performances: role embracement and role distance. Role embracement refers to when the individual is attached to the role, or the specific portrayal of their socialized self in a specific context, and becomes spontaneously involved in it (Goffman, 1959; Smith, 2006). In contrast, role distance, refers to “a wedge between the individual and his role, between doing and being” (Smith, 2006, p. 103). Along with Goffman, Butler also significantly informs my theoretical perspective.

Butler

Informed by my own reading of Butler and the interpretations of Butler by other scholars, I primarily draw upon Butler’s (1990) *Gender Trouble* to discuss three main points that are valuable in my theoretical approach to this research. First, Butler (1990) argues that there is no inherent ‘self,’ and that notions of identity are symbolic constructions which are shaped by discourses and daily repetitive processes of performativity (Brickell, 2005). She argues that identity and a sense of self is always in process, and is never stable or fixed (McKinlay, 2010). Butler (1990) rejects the idea that someone can express an inherent identity, and argues that there is no ‘true self’ to express because we are constantly being produced by our behaviours, actions, and the discursive frameworks we are embedded in (Jagger, 2008). As Butler sees it, a person’s sense of self is a fluid and shifting social construction that is present

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only in their everyday interactions. Through my reading, Butler agrees with Goffman that a sense of self is not essentialized, but a way that people understand and organize themselves in the world. Butler disagrees with Goffman's conceptualization of a sense of self (i.e. private self) that is separate from a person's socialized self (public self), however. Instead, she views the narrative of the self as a discourse for how a people see themselves which consequently hides their embeddedness in the institutions and socialization processes which construct them. Jagger (2008) writes, "in Butler's notion of performativity the 'doer' is produced in and by the act...and importantly does not stand outside of, or before it, in a position of reflection" (p. 22). This of course, contrasts with Goffman's argument that people consider the sincerity and authenticity of their various performances.

Second, Butler's arguments are useful in destabilizing the gender binary, legitimizing notions of gender fluidity, and the furthering the exploration of broader social factors that work to shape and regulate the process of 'doing gender' (Brickell, 2005; Jagger, 2008; McKinlay, 2010; Siltanen & Doucet, 2017). Butler (1990) distinguishes "culturally constructed gender" from "sexed bodies" and argues, "When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one" (p. 9). However, Butler did not only deconstruct gender. Siltanen & Doucet (2017) write that Butler "challenged the binary categories of sex and gender by deconstructing both of these terms as concepts, as practices, and as regulatory ideals" (p. 137). Butler (1990) emphasizes that dichotomous gender is reproduced through its ongoing performance, and that this performance gives an illusion of a fixed, naturalized gender binary. Butler (1990) suggests that gender is brought into being through performatives, while also being very embedded in institutions and discourse beyond any one person/subject. Importantly, Butler is not suggesting fluidity in the sense that we simply choose and

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change our gender as we please. Instead, I understand her to be arguing that even though gender is not innate, people engage in repetitive, daily gendered processes which reflect social constructedness that is beyond any individual. In this sense, Butler's conceptualization of gender is extremely relevant to my thesis as I critique the stability of gendered roles and expectations as these are lived out through dress codes.

While many queer and trans people support Butler's position, some queer and trans folks have challenged this approach to the fluidity of gender for the erasure of the 'subject' (and someone's sense of self), arguing that for many, a stable, core, gendered identity feels 'true' and empowering (Schep, 2012). This critique reflects Goffman's (1959) argument that people have a sense of self that they believe to be separate from their more socialized performance of self. My own experiences urge me to agree with this suggestion, as I know I have personally found comfort and validation in perceiving and explaining my queer identity and androgynous dress as parts of who I am. There is something empowering and agentic about feeling like you are being 'who you are' when 'who you are' is subject to disapproval and discrimination because it is not the status quo. However, I am also critical of this justification of self. I believe that it is most comfortable for me to understand my gender fluidity and queerness as innate because Western society justifies the normalization of the gender binary and heterosexuality as connected, and 'natural.' This perspective reflects Butler's concept of the heterosexual matrix. The perceived correlation between dichotomous gender and heterosexuality is so embedded in people's lives that gender and sexual fluidity are perceived as abnormal. Therefore, by understanding what makes me 'different' as also 'natural', or who I am, allows me to have more legitimacy to face discrimination. I am still working through my own contradictory position in this debate, because although I feel that I have a sense of self, I also strongly identify with notions of fluidity and agree with both Butler's and Goffman's arguments that people do not have fixed/stable 'self'

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underlying their daily performativity. How do I make sense of the ‘self’ that I understand as an explanation for my thought processes and emotions? Perhaps this ‘sense of self’ is so convincing because like my participants, I am also embedded in highly gendered contexts, and a neo-liberal, capitalist society that encourages me to think of myself as an individual. Overall, we see this tension throughout my thesis in the narratives of my participants as they also navigate how they understand themselves and their social identities in their gendered contexts.

Finally, through her focus on the heterosexual matrix, Butler (1990) argues that gender performance is important to the reproduction and normalization of heterosexuality. Unlike many other scholars who deconstruct gender, Butler understands gender as inherently woven with heterosexuality. With there being a clear discursive distinction between a feminine woman and a masculine man, we understand them as complimentary, or as opposites that fit well together. Therefore, a clear gender divide perpetuates the normalization of heterosexuality. Perceived as what is ‘natural,’ everyone and everything is considered to be heterosexual until proven otherwise. What is not heterosexual, then, is associated with abnormality and deviance. The maintenance of non-heterosexuality as ‘other,’ is also what continues to centre heterosexuality as the norm.

Engaging with Goffman and Butler

In this section, I begin by briefly suggesting common ground between Goffman and Butler through my own interpretations and readings of each theorist. Next, I discuss specifically how I will be using Goffman and Butler in my work. Butler shares theoretical aspects with Goffman despite some of the differences in the ways they conceptualize the self. While Butler has critiqued Goffman’s work for being heterosexist (Brickell, 2005), both scholars support the argument that socially constructed distinctions and categories, such as heterosexual/homosexual and woman/man, are not natural or

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inherent differences that exist in someone's core identity. Instead, both Butler (1990) and Goffman (1959) take up an anti-essentialist position and argue that socially constructed categorizations are reinforced by the repetition of normative everyday language and practices, and are underpinned by broader power relations, dynamics, and structures (Brickell, 2005). Butler goes further (1990) to suggest that these power dynamics enable the continuous privileging of certain identities (i.e. white, middle-upper class, male, cisgender) and performances that are collectively understood to be more 'normal,' 'authentic,' and 'legitimate' than others, perpetuating the structural discrimination towards certain socially constructed identities. Finally, Butler (1990) and Goffman (1959) both agree that people come to understand their 'sense of self' through these routine social processes and everyday performances of 'self.' As I understand, where they differ is on their perspective as to whether or not there is a difference or distinction between the concept of a person's sense of self, and their acting or socialized self.

When I started forming my research questions, I was very interested in how my participants would respond to questions that were informed by Goffman. In my own working experiences, I have often found myself experiencing role distance, where I have thought that the performance expected of me is inconsistent with who I am. I was curious to know if Goffman's concepts of role distance and role embracement resonated with my research as well. Goffman has also guided me to question the extent to which a person considers the sincerity and authenticity of what they wear to work in relationship to their sense of self. Further, I also draw on Goffman to think about an individual's time at work as a series of performances, and to investigate the discursive meanings and differential impacts of uniforms and dress codes as the costume workers must wear for their performances. I conceptualize a person's workplace to be a front stage, through which they perform a socialized self to their colleagues, customers, and employer. I also wondered if individuals consciously and subconsciously manage the impressions they leave on others at work through their actions and interactions, including the way they dress. Do my

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participants consciously dress a certain way for interviews, performance evaluations, important meetings, and customer service jobs? If so, how do they navigate such decisions around impression management? I also conceptualize dress codes to be a form of impression management in which employers (and peers, colleagues, and customers) attempt to control how customers perceive their employees through appearance rules and expectations. The employees following these dress codes must navigate employers' expectations of them, societal pressures/ norms, and the messages that their clothing and appearance communicates to others about who they are.

Butler's work has also become significantly useful for my project in problematizing normative practices of enforcing dichotomously gendered dress codes and workplace dress codes which reinforce socially constructed ideas about gender appropriateness. Using Butler allows me to dismantle normalized dress code expectations which reinforce dichotomies of men/women and masculine/feminine. Further, I engage with Butler to critique the ways in which dress codes perpetuate a sexist double standard between working men and women. I also use Butler to address the heterosexism and maintenance of heterosexuality underlying many working environments. Overall, Butler allows me to explore my data in ways that recognize the connectedness of gender and heteronormativity.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

Within this literature review, I address several bodies of scholarly work that are relevant to my research. I begin by critically navigating literature that emphasizes the importance of employees' appearance at work, and explore arguments that describe the overall functioning (intention and consequences) of various workplace dress codes. Next, I present literature that focuses specifically on women's' experiences with dress codes. In the following section I compose a snapshot of the research that has already been done on queer individuals' experiences with navigating the labour market and various workplaces. This includes discussions of identity management, heterosexist work climates, disclosure of sexual orientation at work, and career choices. This section will help to contextualize 'the workplace' as my site of research by discussing the power dynamics and social relations that many queer employees are navigating in their workplaces. Finally, I will argue the relevance of this workplace context to the issue of appearance norms and workplace dress codes for the purposes of my study.

Importance of Appearance at Work

In general, dress codes are a form of arbitrary exercise of employer (and capitalist) power in the workplace. In the labour market, dress codes can also influence the culture and branding image of an organization (Peluchette & Karl, 2007). Employees are often 'the face' of an organization and are therefore considered to be a visual representation of their workplace (not of themselves). Additionally, dress codes can be about safety (i.e. distinguishing an employee from non-employee, wearing non-slip shoes, wearing hairnets in cooking areas for hygiene). Through interviewing medical professionals on their perceptions of dress codes, Pratt and Rafaeli (1997) found that the concept of 'appropriate attire' is layered with various expectations and meanings that can reflect an organization's values, as well as individual employee status within the organization (i.e. doctors wearing different uniforms than nurses,

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medical professionals wearing different uniforms than administration, different appearance standards for men/women regardless of same occupation). Dellinger (2002) conducted a case study of workers' understandings of dress norms in relation to their understandings of 'personal' versus 'work identity.' She argues that many workers engage in "business drag," in which workers feel that their workplace uniform does not reflect the way in which they would typically present themselves in other parts of their lives (p. 13). Goffman (1959) would likely suggest that Dellinger's understanding of 'business drag' supports notions of 'role distance,' in which people feel that elements of their work 'performance'—specifically the way in which they are expected to dress—are insincere to their sense of self, and/or inconsistent with how they perform their 'self' in other contexts. For many employers and employees, dress codes—and the idea of 'professional attire'—support the expectation of 'asexual neutrality,' and "signals a split between work and home, work and play, work and individual personality" (Dellinger, 2002, p. 9). Dress codes also generally function to remove communicators of individuality from employees' appearances (Dellinger, 2002; Hall, 1993; Peluchette, Karl & Rust, 2006; Pratt & Raeli, 2002). Pratt and Raeli (1997) argue that all uniforms and dress codes are tools for exercising control over a workforce, which limits the illusion of 'personal choice' that many people believe they have when it comes to clothing. Pratt and Raeli (1997) go further to say that many workers are likely to experience a tension between needing to belong (assimilate and conform to workplace appearance standards) and needing to express their own individuality. Might this suggest another tension between people knowing they should perform their 'socialized self' and the awareness that it does not necessarily feel authentic? Interestingly, employers will sometimes also use dress codes to motivate and reward their workers (i.e. casual dress-down days as a reward) (Peluchette & Karl, 2007). This suggests that many individuals perceive the notion of 'liberation' or temporary 'relief' from a uniform, or of certain dress code expectations, positively.

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Through a study on perceptions of corporate workplace attire, many American graduate students express the belief that their workplace attire will affect their likelihood for praise and promotion (Peluchette, Karl & Rust, 2006). Similarly, Peluchette and Karl (2007) write that workers may purposefully manipulate their appearance because they believe it will alter others' perceptions of them and their job performance—echoing Goffman's (1959) conceptualization of 'impression management.' It is not unusual for people to put this 'impression management' into practice when they are going to be interviewed. Most individuals go to interviews in the hopes of being chosen for the job position, and likely have some concerns as to how they are perceived by the interviewer. Many individuals know that they should 'dress to impress' for an interview. A person's understanding about the importance of gender 'appropriate' dress and workplace 'appropriate' dress is likely to shape their decisions around what to wear to an interview, and to work on a daily basis, before a dress code or uniform is even introduced.

Bellezza, Gino and Keinan (2014) explore perceptions of nonconformity in the workplace and argue, "in both professional and nonprofessional settings, individuals make significant effort to learn and adhere to dress codes, etiquette, and other written and unwritten standards of behaviour" (p. 35). Belleza, Gino, and Keinan (2014) more specifically examine how people react to—and perceive—nonconforming dress and behaviours in workplace environments. They find that in some cases, failing to conform to employers' dress expectations ('rule breaking') can be perceived positively as a "signal of status" to their peers in demonstrating individuality from colleagues, and autonomy from employer control. However, this form of 'rule breaking' can also risk the worker's job security, and result in a negative perception from others. Belleza, Gino, and Keinan (2014) suggest that there is a "range of acceptance" for observers' perceptions of nonconformity—if the 'rule breaking' is too radical or socially unacceptable then it is more likely that the perception will be negative (p. 50). Importantly, this range is

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also likely to differ across various workplaces (i.e. serving food in a restaurant versus office administrative work). Participants of another study on workplace dress suggest that conforming to workplace appearance norms is necessary to avoid negative opinions of others, and potential job loss or discipline (Peluchette, Karl and Rust, 2006). Peluchette, Karl, and Rust (2006) argue that the practice (whether subconscious or otherwise) of altering the presentation of ‘self’—in the hopes of controlling a positive perception from others—continues for individuals throughout their working lives in pursuit of promotions, positive job evaluations, and a sense of belonging. Therefore, expectations around workplace appearances become important for employees to meet in order to increase their likelihood of having positive working experiences and to avoid the negative consequences of dressing ‘inappropriately’ for work. Hence, meeting workplace appearance standards and carefully managing one’s appearance in general may be a more significant piece of a worker’s day-to-day life than someone might think.

Women & Dress Codes

Research that explores dress codes in the workplace has a strong focus on exploring sex-specific or gendered appearance standards. Some organizations enforce different dress codes for men and women by making a division between ‘male uniforms’ and ‘female uniforms,’ and/ or enforcing uneven appearance standards based on gender (i.e. possibly same uniform requirement, but additional expectations for women to wear makeup, wear jewelry, and style their hair). Many authors agree that gendered dress codes focus on controlling women’s appearances in ways that sexualize them and emphasize the importance of them being considered ‘attractive’ (Dellinger and Williams, 1997; Hall, 1993; Skidmore, 1999). Several scholars also support the argument that dress codes, in both work and school, tend to reflect societal stereotypes of traditional gender presentation and reproduce dominant

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discourses about how women should look and present themselves (Brower, 2013; Hall, 1993; Pomerantz, 2007; Raby, 2010; Skidmore, 1999).

In a study of table servers, Hall (1993) found that work organizations tend to divide job tasks, uniforms, and (define) job performance by gender. Hall (1993) observed that in many restaurants, the employers and customers treated the male servers very differently than the female servers: male servers were generally given more respect and authority, while female servers were often sexualized by employers, colleagues and customers, and were assumed to be less intelligent than their male counterparts. Through case study analyses, Skidmore (1999) argues that clothing and appearance expectations in the workplace reproduce traditional discourses of gender and sexuality, as policed by employers. In one case, female nurses in the UK were required to wear hats as a part of their uniform that served no practical function. This differential appearance standard worked to delegitimize the status of the female nurses as visually distinct from the male nurses and doctors (Skidmore, 1999). Dellinger and Williams (1997) conducted 20 in-depth interviews with women in various workplaces, and found that the majority of women wear makeup to work as a part of their daily routine. Even though none of these women were specifically told to wear makeup to work, it was considered to be an “unspoken job requirement,” and is described as the minimum effort required for women to look ‘presentable’ in public spaces (Dellinger & Williams, 1997, p. 163). Dellinger and Williams (1997) argue that the pressure on women to wear makeup to work (applied ‘correctly’) contributes to the gendered hierarchy in the workplace between men and women. Additionally, participants in this study express two main opinions: that it is their ‘choice’ to wear makeup to work, and also that they would anticipate negative attention if they decided not to wear it (Dellinger & Williams, 1997).

Makeup, along with additional appearance expectations for women such as styled hair, fit of clothing, and footwear, continues to be carefully monitored and ‘policed’ by employers in the name of

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business. Brower (2013) argues that dress codes function as a method of surveillance for doing gender ‘properly,’ implying “women needed monitoring to ensure an appropriate appearance” (p. 495). ‘Attractiveness’ is often used to sell products or services, and therefore women are often held to unattainable discourses of white, middle-class, Western beauty standards (Dellinger and Williams, 1997; Hall, 1993; Skidmore, 1999) Arguments which challenge gendered dress codes are usually dismissed by employers and others as trivial “because they seem to fit within our notions of how people ought to behave, and because they appear to reflect legitimate employer concerns in running a business” (Brower, 2013, p. 499). Put differently, gendered workplace dress codes may not be understood as problematic by those who are accepting of gendered appearance expectations that are normalized outside of work as well. To refer again to the example of makeup, employers and employees might not consider expecting women to wear makeup as ‘wrong,’ because societal expectations of beauty already expect women to wear makeup as a part of their daily self-presentation (Brower, 2013). Brower (2013) contributes to the conversation of the gendered double standard of workplace dress codes, stating, “women are judged on job performance and appearance, men on their work” (p. 499). In this way, dress codes perpetuate heterosexist discourses of gender by narrowly defining how women can be both ‘professional’ and ‘gender appropriate’ in the workplace, often by normalizing their sexualization and feminization.

It is important to note that women often experience dress codes before their working lives, as young girls in school. Pomerantz (2007) and Raby (2010) draw attention to the conflicting messages young girls receive about their bodies from school dress codes, adults, their peers, and the media. Women learn from a young age that there are either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ ways to present themselves, and their appearance may be considered by others to be just as important as their education or job performance (Pomerantz, 2007). In a series of focus groups surrounding the topic of ‘school rules’, Raby (2010) writes that many adolescent girls become frustrated with the gendered double standard that is

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inherent in most school dress codes. Through school dress codes, many young girls learn to be highly critical of their own appearance (and what messages it might send to others), and learn that it is appropriate to ‘police’ the clothing and appearance of other girls in the way that the institution does (Raby, 2010). Young girls also learn that clothing and appearance are closely linked to ideas about reputations and stereotypes, placing an importance on dressing in ways that prioritize the comfort and perceptions of others. Raby (2010) argues that school dress codes reproduce discourses around ‘gender appropriateness,’ and highlights the need for more spaces in which girls can talk about, question, and resist these institutionally enforced appearance standards. In my own research, I am interested in similar themes. Specifically, I explore the ways in which queer, androgynous-dressing women feel they are able and/or unable to resist unfavourable workplace dress codes in various contexts.

As previously stated, dress codes tend to reflect societal assumptions about ‘appropriate’ sexuality and gender expression (Brower, 2013; Bowring & Brewis, 2009; Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Dellinger, 2002; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Skidmore, 1999). Both feminist and queer movements have challenged the gender binary and what it means to “‘look like’ a man or a woman” (Hillman, 2013, p. 156). Gender bending and androgyny are understood by many as a form of women’s liberation and resistance to traditional gender presentation (Hillman, 2013). Hillman (2013) argues that androgynous dressing has allowed many women to access certain occupations (i.e. trades), while restricting access to other forms of work that require women to dress in a traditionally feminine way. Brower (2013) calls this the ‘double bind’—some jobs encourage women to “not dress or act overtly feminine” in order to be taken seriously, while other jobs might require hyper-feminine self-presentation (p. 494). Hillman (2013) and Brower’s (2013) arguments suggest that women have to navigate competing expectations in the labour market. In some cases, androgynous appearances are welcomed in the workplace, or expected in certain occupations (i.e. trades, jobs that are stereotypically understood as

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masculine, or ‘for men’). In contrast, many workplaces encourage or demand traditionally feminine appearances for women.

Overall, women receive conflicting messages about how they should be ‘appropriately’ and ‘professionally’ performing their gender at work. As Butler (1990) suggests, particular ways of ‘performing gender’ are understood as more legitimate, authentic, and normal. These are privileged over others through normalized and repetitive processes, such as workplace dress codes, which support notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ ways of ‘doing gender’ as a woman (Butler, 1990). Dress codes often have more extensive and specific rules for women’s appearances than for men’s, reinforcing the idea that women need to be just as concerned about their appearance for work as they are with their job performance. Further, these uneven expectations reinforce dichotomous notions about gender. These dichotomous, uneven expectations also perpetuate the power dynamic of women being dominantly understood as inferior to men, and the ‘othering’ and ‘invisibility’ of gender fluidity and non-binary identities. Dress codes which rely upon ideas about ‘gender appropriateness’ also suggest forms of fear mongering from employers and a broader capitalist culture, which have women complying with appearance expectations they are uncomfortable with in order to avoid negative attention or consequences in the workplace. Women are also encouraged and expected to emphasize their ‘attractiveness’ at work in order to sell products and get more tips. Implicit and unspoken in this expectation, is the disturbing heterosexist assumption that women should anticipate being sexualized by men at work, and dress themselves specifically for the heterosexual ‘male gaze’ so that they (or their employers) can benefit from it. These notions of attractiveness are socially constructed through dominant discourses and hierarchal understandings of gender, class, age, ability, race, and ethnicity. As the review of literature in this section suggests, workplace dress codes are a tool for regulating dominant ideals about women’s self-presentation at work.

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Queer Women & Dress Codes

Research on androgynous-dressing queer women is rare. Those studies that exist suggest that androgynous-dressing queer women experience negative reactions and skepticism from colleagues. In Bowring and Brewis' (2009) research on Canadian gay and lesbian workers, 'Andrea' felt that her androgynous appearance is the reason why her heterosexual colleagues excluded her from workplace interactions and social events. 'Bernice' also believed that her coworkers treat her differently depending on the way she dresses, which varies from 'really butchy' to skirts and dresses (Bowring & Brewis, 2009). Another participant suggested that there is an increasing acceptance for lesbians in the workplace, but that it is conditional and dependent upon whether or not they also uphold heteronormative ideals of behaviour and appearance (Bowring & Brewis, 2009). Dellinger (2002) argues that many women will purposely dress more feminine for job interviews because they believe it will result in more favorable perceptions and outcomes. Peluchette, Karl and Rust (2006) describe this behaviour as 'self-monitoring,' which "refers to the extent to which individuals attempt to exercise control over the way they present themselves to others" (p. 48). These arguments also support Goffman's (1959) theory of 'impression management,' and suggest that queer women have a significant awareness and consciousness about their appearance and whether or not they conform to traditionally gendered appearance norms and expectations at work.

Studying the importance of appearance norms for lesbian and bisexual women, Huxley, Clarke, and Halliwell (2014) identify that dressing 'butch' and/or 'androgynous' is considered by many women to be the traditional lesbian look and stereotype for queer women. Participants in Huxley et al.'s study report a dissonance or tension between "looking the part; and resisting the 'look,'" suggesting a consciousness that queer women may have about their appearance in resisting both normative femininity and lesbian stereotypes (Huxley, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014, p. 210). As Western society has become

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increasingly accepting of queerness, androgynous dress styles are both intentionally and unintentionally used by some queer women to communicate a non-heterosexual identity with other queer persons, and the world at large (Huxley, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; Skidmore, 1999). Importantly, I reject the assumption that androgyny is a synonym for masculinity; rather, androgyny ‘blurs the line’ that is so frequently ‘drawn’ between masculinity and femininity. Queer women who dress androgynously are more readily perceived as non-heterosexual, while women that dress more traditionally feminine often ‘pass’ as heterosexual (Blair & Hoskin, 2015; Huxley, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014). Huxley, Clarke, and Halliwell (2014) write, “despite awareness of increasing diversity in appearances, the women described how conformity to ‘traditional’ lesbian styles still enabled others ‘in the know’ to recognize lesbian identities,” suggesting that many queer women find value in being able to ‘recognize’ a shared queer identity with other women (p. 212-213).

Particular hairstyles (short or asymmetrical), jewelry, tattoos, body piercings, and clothing styles have specifically been understood as communicators of non-heterosexuality for queer women within many communities in the West (Huxley, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014). Some queer women view these ‘cues’ as an intentional form of resistance to traditional gender norms (Huxley, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014). Some refuse to subscribe to feminine appearance norms due to a preference for more comfort and overall productivity, which many dress code rules do not prioritize for women. Further, personal taste and preference in clothing and style is likely to also be an important factor. Regardless of a woman’s reasons for dressing androgynously, an androgynous appearance typically results in queer women being “more visible to straight people and therefore more vulnerable to hostility” (Huxley, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014, p. 214). Skidmore (1999) supports this contestation and argues that heteronormative society increases the need for queer people to be strategic with their appearance in negotiating whether or not they wish to ‘conceal’ their sexual orientation. Clair, Beatty, and MacLean (2005) agree that the

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normalization of specific visual cues such as clothing can decrease the stigmatization of a person or group, and argue that lesbians who dress traditionally feminine are more likely to ‘pass’ and therefore more likely to avoid homophobic stigma and discrimination.

However, in a qualitative study of 146 femme-identified individuals, Blair and Hoskin (2015) suggest that queer women who dress and present their ‘self’ as femme/feminine are also likely to experience homophobia because of their ‘stealth’ status. The common assumption that ‘passing’ feminine-dressing women are heterosexual (because they do not align with lesbian appearance stereotypes) often results in people reading queer femme women as ‘safe’ and therefore they do not censor their homophobia. Interestingly, Samuels (2003) highlights similarities between ‘passing’ or ‘stealth’ feminine lesbians and the experiences of people with nonvisible disabilities to emphasize the existence of unique barriers and experiences of individual and structural discrimination for people with invisible identities. For instance, Samuels (2003) argues that many femme ‘stealth’ lesbians experience mockery, discrimination, and marginalization (even within queer communities) because their identity as a lesbian is questioned and understood as less legitimate than lesbians who present androgynously or more masculine. In comparison, people with nonvisible disabilities are often challenged on routine actions such as using an accessibility parking spot because there are not obvious markers of a disability present (i.e. a wheelchair) (Samuels, 2003). Further, Samuels (2003) argues that many people with nonvisible disabilities are “being denied benefits and accommodations because their nonvisible disabilities are perceived as minor or imaginary” (p. 246-247). These arguments are useful in deconstructing notions of passing ‘privilege,’ emphasizing the correlation between appearance norms and the legitimacy given to ‘visible’ identities.

I will again acknowledge that an employer’s control over their employees’ appearance at work (in ways that perpetuate discourses of ‘appropriate’ gender presentation) is an issue for both

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heterosexual and non-heterosexual workers. As Brower (2013) argues, “parallels exist with non-conventionally gendered heterosexuals and dress codes. They, too, must deny who they are to conform to employment norms” (p. 496). For example, Brower (2013) analyzes the case of Ann Hopkins (a heterosexual, cisgender woman) who was denied a promotion in an accounting job because she presented her gender ‘incorrectly.’ Ann’s employer had an “insistence on traditional gender conformity” and advised her to style herself more femininely, and change the way she walks and talks (Brower, 2013). In this case, Ann’s employer did not have a positive perception of her gender performance at work, and put her job at risk. This is not the only case in which employers have demonstrated intolerance for gender ambiguity or androgyny, regardless of the individual’s sexuality. Schilt and Westbrook (2009) present another two case studies in which employers were insistent upon traditional ‘gender appropriateness.’ One transgender man was forced to remove his earring at work by his employer in order to conform to the men’s dress code after transitioning, even though he had worn it for years at the same workplace when he was perceived as a woman (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). This employer perceives earrings to be feminine, and therefore only appropriate for women to wear at work. Another employer would not let a transgender man wear the men’s uniform until he started taking testosterone so that he would ‘pass’ ‘appropriately’ in the uniform (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). These two cases also demonstrate the importance that some employer’s place upon their employees performing gender ‘correctly,’ as well as intolerance towards androgynous dressing/ presentation.

These bodies of literature help to form an understanding of the research that has already focused on gendered dress codes. I have discussed the relevant work of other scholars to further contextualize the functions and consequences of dress codes for women in workplace environments, and highlight the complex and contradictory ‘messages’ that dress codes send to working women about their appearances and value in the workplace. Further, I have included discussions of androgynous dress and differential

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treatment, tensions with 'lesbian stereotypes', and self-monitoring, to suggest the issues that queer, androgynous-dressing women may navigate in various workplaces in relation to their appearance.

Queering the Workplace (LGBTQ+ Experiences Within the Labour Market)

In this section I compose a snapshot of the scholarly work that has already been done on queer individuals' experiences with navigating the labour market and various workplaces (beyond issues of workplace appearances and dress codes). I include discussions of identity management, heterosexist work climates, the disclosure of sexual orientation at work, and career choices. This section will help to contextualize 'the workplace' as my site of research by discussing the power dynamics and social relations that many queer employees are concerned about navigating in their workplaces. Finally, I will argue the relevance of this context to the issue of appearance norms and workplace dress codes for the purposes of my study.

There is a small, but growing body of literature in academia that focuses on LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning) individuals' experiences with their workplaces, and with the labour market in general. Even though progress has been made in North America in terms of protecting the human rights of queer individuals, prejudice, discrimination and violence still occur in spite of legal protections and workplace protective policies (Brooks & Edwards, 2009; Croitoru, 2015; Guiffre, Huxley, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; Dellinger & Williams, 2008; Ragins, Cornwell & Miller, 2003; Ryan-Flood, 2004; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). *Discrimination* is a practice of unequal treatment that is complex, and is perpetuated and experienced in a variety of ways. In the workplace, discrimination can be widely recognized and overt, such as hate speech and refusal of service, or it can be subtler in the form of micro-aggressions (i.e. an employer making assumptions about a worker's capacity to work based on their gender, race, and/or age.) (Stanford, 2008). Therefore, discrimination

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can be “direct, indirect and multiple” (Gidro, 2016, p. 66). Bowring and Brewis (2009) write, “By 2007 Canada had outlawed any formal discrimination between heterosexuals and homosexuals,” but attitudes and behaviours are not entirely bound by legislation (p. 362). Most recently in 2017, Bill C-16 was passed in Canada which prohibits any discrimination against gender identity and gender expression. Bowring and Brewis' argument suggests that discrimination against non-heterosexual employees can still take place (regardless of legislative protections), just in more covert ways. In my research, discrimination is discussed as experiences of inequality that can never be independent of broader power relations such as structural oppression, violence, economic exclusion, and visibility politics. I discuss forms of discrimination that are structural, normative, and go well beyond the individual and affect groups of people in both direct and indirect ways.

One prevalent form of discrimination is heteronormativity. *Heteronormativity* is the normalization (and assumption) of heterosexuality. “Institutionalized, normative heterosexuality regulates those kept within its boundaries as well as marginalizing and sanctioning those outside them” (Jackson, 2006). This term is often used in conjunction with the term heterosexism. *Heterosexism* refers to exclusionary assumptions, practices and behaviours that create privileges for heterosexuality and treat non-heterosexuality as ‘other,’ ‘inferior,’ or ‘wrong’ (Buddel, 2011). Buddel (2011) argues that “heterosexist dispositions, whether conscious or subconscious, permeate all aspects of GLB [gay, lesbian, bisexual] existence; and consequently, GLB individuals develop an ‘othered’ sense of self” (p. 133). This concept surfaces throughout my thesis as a significant factor that shapes non-heterosexual peoples’ experiences with navigating their workplaces, and reflects dominant power relations.

Several authors agree that work environments are often characterized by heteronormativity and heterosexism, which maintain assumptions about heterosexuality being ‘normal’ and ‘respectable,’ while non-heterosexual identities are perceived as ‘other’ and inferior (Bowring, 2009; Buddel, 2011;

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Ragins, Cornwell & Miller, 2003; Ryan-Flood, 2004; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Waldo, 1999; Willis, 2009). Stanford (2008) argues that women—especially those who are racialized, immigrant, migrant, and/or non-heterosexual—are disproportionately concentrated in precarious employment due to prejudice, assumptions and discrimination. ‘Precarious employment’ refers to certain types of jobs in the labour market, which typically pay a minimum wage (or less), have little job security, and have no benefits or opportunities for promotion (Stanford, 2008). Therefore, queer women (especially those who are also racialized, immigrant, migrant) are more likely to be working jobs that have low wages, no benefits, and little job security or opportunity for promotion in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts (Stanford, 2008).

Several scholars agree that being ‘out’ as non-heterosexual at work can often be perceived as a threat to a person’s professionalism or authority (Brower, 2013; Priola, Lasio, De Simone, & Serri, 2014). As previously mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, discourses of professionalism perpetuate the idea that workplaces should have asexual neutrality, or a separation of sexuality from one’s work life (Dellinger, 2002). Dellinger (2002) suggests that this argument is selectively applied to LGBTQ workers, and that “it is assumed that they bring sexuality into their workplace, as opposed to the workplace itself being (hetero)sexualized” (p. 11). Put differently, the ‘queerness’ and ‘otherness’ of LGBTQ workers is more visible than the normalization of heterosexuality within the labour market, which is mistaken as sex ‘neutral.’

Researching heterosexism as a source of job stress for GLB workers, Waldo (1999) finds that frequent experiences of heterosexism in a work environment can be detrimental to the job satisfaction, job performance, and overall wellbeing of non-heterosexual employees. Queer individuals can become desensitized to the frequency of heterosexist language, homophobic slurs, and verbal abuse in their work environments (Ragins, 2003; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, Waldo, 1999; Willis, 2009). The frequency of

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heterosexist language and actions in a given workplace can be a chronic stressor that underpins their working lives, regardless of whether or not they are ‘out’ at work (Ragins, 2003; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Waldo, 1999; Willis, 2009).

The issue of disclosure or ‘coming out’ in the workplace is complex, and has been the subject of several studies. Many LGBTQ individuals will choose against disclosing their sexual orientation in the workplace due to fears of stigma, discrimination, and harassment (Brooks and Edwards, 2009; Brower, 2013; Priola et al., 2014; Ryan-Flood, 2004; Waldo, 1999). Queer workers’ perceptions of how accepting and safe a workplace is can be influenced by the demographic makeup of their colleagues and management as well as the treatment of racialized workers and other minorities in that environment (Brooks & Edwards, 2009; Ragins, 2003, Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Willis, 2009). For example, in a heteronormative work environment, the presence of queer colleagues and/or management is likely to increase feelings of safety and support for queer workers in comparison to workplaces in which they might feel more alienated as the only known queer employee (Ragins, Cornwell & Miller, 2003). Studying the impact of race and gender on workplace disclosure, Ragins, Cornwell and Miller (2003) also found that while lesbians and gay men were equally as likely to be openly queer at work, “gay people of color disclosed their sexual orientation to fewer people at work than their White counterparts” (p. 67). They suggest that experiences of sexism and racism influence one’s perceptions of workplace diversity (and safety), which can shape individuals’ decisions to disclose a queer identity at work (2003). Specifically, many queer employees measure the safety of a given workplace by noticing whether or not colleagues laugh at ‘gay jokes,’ are familiar with language around LGBTQ issues, and whether or not LGBTQ workers (and their partners) are invited to social events (Brooks & Edwards, 2009). Overall, LGBTQ workers’ decisions to disclose their sexual orientation in the workplace are

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usually dependent on a variety of intersecting factors that help to measure the overall safety, inclusion and equity of an environment (Brooks & Edwards, 2009).

Among those who do not come out, Ryan-Flood (2004) argues that a lot of energy is required from non-heterosexual workers in order to maintain “assumptions of heterosexuality” at work, including lying about their relationship status, switching the pronouns of a same-sex partner, and censoring almost all conversations for anything that would associate them with queerness (p. 27). While not explicitly discussed in Ryan-Flood’s research, I presume that this type of self-editing may also include a heightened awareness (and possibly changing) of their appearance and dress in relation to gendered appearance norms and stereotypes, whether out or not. In a study of US case law, Brower (2013) discusses the tendency of both closeted and ‘out’ LGBTQ folks to minimize the ‘queer’ aspects of their lives in order to make their coworkers more comfortable. For example, a lesbian employee may choose not to bring her partner to work events or discuss her relationship in daily conversations so that “her coworkers do not have to face directly her relationship or her lesbian identity” (Brower, 2013, p. 493). Priola et al. (2014) state that there is a “climate of silence” for queer people in heteronormative work environments due to a fear of discrimination and isolation from management, colleagues, and customers (p. 490). Engaging in daily practices that ‘hide,’ ‘minimize’ or ‘closet’ a person’s sexual identity can lead to “conflicting relationship demands” in a queer person’s life (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005, p. 79). This can be due to the individual trying to keep a good rapport with their colleagues (i.e. through minimizing relationship status and queer identity) while also trying to maintain a healthy personal life (i.e. partner may not be happy with the minimizing of their relationship) (Clair, Beatty & Maclean, 2005). Clair, Beatty, and Maclean (2005) also suggest that “situations force individuals to make quick strategic decisions about self-presentation regarding an invisible identity” (i.e. listing emergency contacts, including same-sex partner in benefits package) (p. 79) Queer workers learn

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to navigate the labour market through making decisions about the visibility of their queer identity in ways that will manage the perceptions of others, as well as their own safety in the workplace.

LGBTQ participants in a variety of studies report a desire to be open about their sexual orientation in their work life to avoid many of the aforementioned self-editing practices involved with hiding their sexual orientation (Bowring & Brewis, 2009; Brooks & Edwards, 2009; Ragins, Cornwell, & Miller, 2003; Ryan-Flood, 2004). Clair, Beatty and MacLean (2005) suggest “people experience a feeling of authenticity when they can be fully ‘themselves’ in public” (p. 79). However, there is usually a spectrum of how ‘open’ someone is with their sexual orientation, as a result of the heterosexism and discrimination people experience and this will influence how ‘out’ they are in different spaces (Buddel, 2011). This careful navigation and presentation of self in different contexts also disrupts normative gender by emphasizing how extremely fluid and relational gendered interactions can be. While some queer people may perceive themselves to be ‘out’ in every aspect of their lives, many individuals believe they have to manage different levels of openness across family, friends, and colleagues. (Bowring & Brewis, 2009). Buddel (2011) complicates the dichotomous language of being ‘out’ versus ‘closeted,’ and suggests that these dynamics will typically shift across one’s lifetime depending on the contexts of their relationships. Bowring and Brewis (2009) suggest that this results in the fracturing of queer people’s identities where they must manage presenting themselves differently (as someone who is queer and non-queer) depending on where they are, and who they are with. In the context of a workplace, this can include being ‘out’ to some colleagues, and not to others. Bowring & Brewis, 2009 argue that “the energy invested in fracturing their identities would be much better spent doing their jobs” (p. 369). In a study of lesbian and gay workers in Britain, Ryan-Flood (2004) found that “being open about sexual identity at work not only necessitated the awkwardness of repeatedly coming out, it required frequently confronting people’s prejudices” (p. 28). LGBTQ participants from several studies report that ‘coming

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out' at work can lead to interrogations from coworkers with personal questions that assume an expectation of sexual openness from queer workers (Bowring & Brewis, 2009; Guiffre, Dellinger, & Williams, 2008; Willis, 2009). This emphasizes the argument that 'coming out' is not a one-time event that results in only positive outcomes, but rather that disclosing a non-heterosexual orientation is rarely a single 'coming out' moment, and is usually a multiple and complex experience that occurs frequently over the course of a queer person's lifetime.

While Brooks and Edwards (2009) suggest that disclosure is likely based upon LGBTQ workers' perceptions of the overall safety of a given workplace, Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons (2012) argue that LGBTQ workers' perceptions of a work environment can also influence their early career choices. They argue that LGBTQ individuals may "anticipate discrimination in the labor market" and "they may also lower their initial career expectations such as starting salary expectations and a greater willingness to accept less-than-ideal jobs" (p. 335). Ryan-Flood (2004) also suggests that gay and lesbian workers are more likely to choose career paths and workplaces that are perceived to have "a more tolerant, open-minded environment" (p. 4).

This section provides some context and background regarding existing research on queer workers' experiences within the labour market. Discussions of heterosexist work environments, perceptions of safety, and disclosure contribute to an understanding of the main issues and workplace dynamics that queer workers are navigating. This literature suggests that career 'choices' for queer workers (including disclosure) are often influenced by their perceptions of the safety and diversity of an environment. Given this context, I argue that it is reasonable to question the role that dress codes might play in contributing to one's perception of an 'accepting' workplace environment. How might dress codes shape career choices, and consequently have the potential to narrow labour market possibilities for

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queer, androgynous-dressing women? How much do queer women shift their presentation of self to meet dress code appearance standards?

Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods

I begin this chapter by discussing how I explore reflexivity and a post-positivist approach as a qualitative researcher. Next, I outline my process of participant selection, including the criteria which made a person eligible for the project. I also discuss my method of data collection and data analysis. Finally, I explain the ethical considerations I had in conducting this research, including the necessity of informed consent.

Qualitative Reflexivity

I approached this research project and data with my own assumptions and subjectivities. These subjectivities have informed the choices I have made regarding my research interests, research design, participant criteria, data collection, and analysis. I acknowledge both the strengths and limitations inherent in my own positionality as I attempt to be reflexive with the ‘choices’ I have made throughout conducting this research. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) write, “Reflexivity is a process that helps researchers to consider their position and influence during a study, and it helps them to know how they have constructed and even sometimes imposed meanings on the research process. (p. 76) In this thesis, I include some reflexive writing that gives voice to my own personal experiences with workplace dress codes as a queer woman who dresses androgynously in day-to-day life. While I did not include myself as a participant in this study, my own personal experiences became relevant as they resonated with those of my participants. My own experiences with navigating workplace dress codes also explain my initial interest and passion in this research topic.

As introduced above, symbolic interactionism and feminist queer theory significantly inform this project by encouraging me to embrace the messiness, fluidity, diversity, and queerness that inevitably emerge in the process of my research as I explore the meaning and messages communicated by clothing

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and workplace dress codes. My methodological approach also challenges positivism in a way that reflects Goffman and Butler. Positivist approaches emphasize the boundaries of the scientific method, reproduce hierarchal relationships between the researcher and the researched, and insist “upon researcher neutrality and objectivity” (Lather, 1992, p. 92). My approach contrasts with the traditionally hierarchal valuation of knowledge production by rejecting the assumption that my own knowledge or method of knowledge production is any more valid than that of my participants. I also understand my participants to be the experts on their own lived experiences. Therefore, open-ended interviews fit well within my conceptual framework and allowed my participants to determine the direction of their answers, and our conversation, in ways that were meaningful to them. Further, my data analysis is shaped by the thoughts and ideas of my participants, even when they did not align with my own. Positivists also assume that there are essential truths that can be discovered and that are separate from any individual or notion of self. Queer theorists challenge such claims of essential truths, and the generalization of research data to wider populations (Nash, 2010). I do not attempt to uncover any essential truth that can be simplified and generalized for all queer, androgynous-dressing women, but rather recognize that there are always multiple truths and that each person has their own intersectional experience and narrative. My feminist approach is also post-positivist as I emphasize the importance of acknowledging subjectivity and reflexivity (Lather, 1992). Resonating with my theoretical approach, my methodology challenges positivist approaches to research.

Engaging with both Goffman and Butler in my approach also informs my theoretical exploration of Goffman’s concepts throughout the thesis, such as role embracement, role distance, impression management, and the socialized self—as terms that are not mutually exclusive, or fixed but rather fluid, socially constructed concepts that likely shift along with context and social relations. Goffman’s theoretical perspective shapes the way I view the subjectivity of persons/participants for the purposes of

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my research project. I believe that this theoretical framing allows space for my participants to explore how they understand their sense of self in their own terms. The ways in which my research participants perceive their sense of self is relevant in many discussions surrounding the relationship they have with the clothing they wear to work, and their decisions around impression management.

Heckert (2010) argues that interview-based research can be an opportunity for the researcher and interviewees to co-construct knowledge in ways that are reciprocal. This process of storytelling can provide a space for give and take between researcher and participant—the giving and receiving of stories and sharing information, and the giving of listening. I aimed to follow this model and develop processes of knowledge production that were co-constructed between my participants and myself, while acknowledging that several shifting relational factors (location, day, time, power dynamic) shaped our discussions (Gorman-Murray, Johnston, & Waitt, 2010). The knowledge we produced together should be not be viewed as fixed or final, as our conversations could shift in emphasis or structure at another time. For instance, my participants' views may not be the same in the present as they were when we did the interview. Therefore, I write about the conversations with my participants in past tense because they happened in the past, and write in the present with their thoughts and beliefs—as they articulated them—because they experienced them in present tense within the context of our interview. I also wish to challenge the 'insider versus outsider' status of myself as a researcher. Dahl (2010) argues that as researchers, "we are never fully at home nor fully outside of the community we aim to study" (p. 154). While I am also a queer woman who also dresses androgynously, I cannot assume that my participants experience and navigate workplaces and dress codes in the same ways that I do, or that we have similar world views just because we have these things in common.

An intersectional approach is necessary when exploring individual and collective experiences of discrimination. *Intersectionality* is a process of examining the "dynamics of difference and solidarity of

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sameness” to explore politics of (in)visibility, power and privilege (Cho, Williams Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013, p. 785). Intersectionality values multiple and intersecting understandings of knowledge production, and recognizes that single axis analyses of identity politics and social phenomena will have a limited ability to fully understand the complexity of oppression and discrimination, and a limited ability to create significant solutions. I use an intersectional approach to consider how participants’ multiple social identities shape their experiences of workplace dress codes. Further, I explore how structural forms of oppression, inequality, discourse, and broader power relations, intersect with these individual experiences.

Throughout my research, I embrace the lessons I have learned from other queer theorists and methodologies. Queering research means being comfortable with not knowing everything, delegitimizing boundaries, and resisting categorization (Browne & Nash, 2010). In the next section, I explain the criteria and process which guided my participant selection.

Participant Selection

For the purposes of this study, I had three main criteria guiding my participant selection. The first is that my participants must be comprised of individuals who self-identify as women and as queer. The second criterion is that my participants must also dress androgynously in day-to-day life (including those who regularly vary their dressing preferences between masculine and feminine norms), outside of workplace norms and expectations. I believe that the perspectives of this population are distinct from those who dress in predominantly feminine attire. For example, in instances where women have to wear a ‘women’s’ work uniform that is highly feminine, an androgynous-dressing woman may perceive this appearance standard differently than a woman who is already comfortable with dressing femininely in their everyday life (of course there is a wide range of highly feminine appearance standards). The third

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main criterion for participant selection is that the individuals had to have experience with paid, legal, employment in the Niagara region. Importantly, I distinguish legal workplaces from work that is not legal (i.e. sex work) because the state regulates legal work very differently from other forms of work. I chose not to focus on any specific type of workplace or industry so that my sample was not limited in that sense, and so that I could get a more comprehensive understanding my participants' experiences with dress codes throughout their entire working lives.

I used 'snowball sampling' to gather my participants, which is when a researcher uses their own networks to find contacts who meet the criteria of a study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Additionally, I asked my participants, thesis supervisor and committee to pass on information about the project to other contacts who might be suitable for the study. Those contacts were given my contact information in case they were interested in participating in the project. I created a description of my research and of myself as a researcher to distribute—by email—to potential participants (See Appendix C). I also made an email script for myself to follow so I could ensure I communicated with all participants in the same manner (See Appendix B). Using this strategy, I gathered a small population size of six participants who met the criteria for my study (see Table 1). I ended up having a white majority of participants, and most of the women were in their 20s.

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Table 1: Participant Pseudonyms and Areas of Work

Participant Pseudonym	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	Areas of Work
Alona	White	28	Education, Hospitality Industry, Food/Restaurant Industry, Social Care
Taylor	White	44	Healthcare, Retail, Industrial Work
Jill	White	35	Education, Retail, Food/Restaurant Industry, Creative Arts
Morgan	South-Asian	23	Office/Admin, Nonprofit Organizations
Raegan	White and Middle-Eastern	22	Food/ Restaurant Industry
Paula	White	24	Education, Retail, Office/Admin, Outdoor Maintenance

Method of Data Collection

I conducted semi-structured, in-person, in-depth, individual interviews with each participant in a mutually agreed upon setting in the Niagara Region. Some interviews took place in participants' homes, while others took place in public libraries, or quiet cafes. In a semi-structured interview, a few questions are pre-set in order to guide the conversation, generally moving from broader questions to more specific ones (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). All of my questions were open-ended so that participants could answer in a variety of ways, and to allow for follow-up questions (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Every interview concluded with me asking each participant if there was anything else they would like to add to our conversation that they may have forgotten or that did not come up from the prompts of my Interview Guide (See Appendix A). Participants were encouraged to contact me if they had additional thoughts that arose after our interview. All interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device.

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Method of Data Analysis

Before I began the transcription process, I decided upon pseudonyms for each of my participants, which I use throughout this thesis (See Appendix B). I transcribed my interviews verbatim (every word and sound) for the opportunity to work closely with my data. Once I completed each transcription and removed all identifiers, I sent each one to the interviewee to review. This was an opportunity for my participants to read through my transcription of our conversation to make sure it accurately reflected the narratives that they wanted to convey. My ethical considerations in this process are discussed in the next section.

Next, I manually coded my transcriptions. Coding is when researchers begin to notice and make note of patterns of behaviours, language, and experiences, and convert them into themes (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This is a part of the research project in which my role as a researcher is very significant because I decide which information is ‘important,’ and which can be ‘cut’ (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Overall, I analyzed how participants spoke about their own narratives (i.e. any emotions they expressed and what they emphasized as important), and the ways in which they understood their own experiences. I looked for how participants collectively (directly or indirectly) answered my primary and secondary research questions. Further, I analyzed each participant’s interview as a whole narrative in order to understand how each person understood their ‘self’ at work, and the ways in which workplace dress codes might shape their relationship with their work, workplace, and workplace ‘performances’ (i.e. role embracement, role distance). My theoretical perspective—concerned with Goffman and Butler’s conceptualizations of performing the ‘self’—informed how I understand and characterize participants’ sense of self in relation to their experiences with workplace dress codes in this thesis. Butler’s work also reminded me throughout the research process to recognize how gender fluidity is regulated as well as the contradictory perspectives amongst my participants for a more nuanced and reflexive analysis.

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Across participant interviews, I also paid attention to how participants talked about getting dressed for work in regard to the time and energy they put into thinking about their appearances at work (self-work), and the awareness or consciousness they might have about dressing in ways that would result in being assessed favourably by others (impression management). When similar strategies or contexts of impression management arose across multiple participant interviews, for example, this would be identified as a theme (i.e. engaging in impression management strategies for interviews). When identifying themes, I concentrated on noting patterns across interviews, and also noting exceptions in specific interviews. In practice, this looked like me writing broad descriptive themes/notes in the margins of my transcriptions (i.e. “binary dress codes,” “misgendering,” “impression management”). Once I compiled a collection of themes, as well as outliers (interesting and unique data that could not be compared with other participants’), I organized them into ‘larger theme’ and ‘smaller theme’ categories. The larger theme categories were comprised of ideas and experiences that were present across all or nearly all of the interviews, which would need their own sections within my data analysis in order to properly explore how each participant approached the subject. In comparison, there were smaller themes that stuck out as significant to some of the women, but were perhaps less consistently present across all of the interviews. Once I was able to identify and organize these themes, I explored how the data compared and contrasted with my original research question(s) and review of relevant literature as I wrote my data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout my project, there were several considerations and challenges I worked through in order to ensure the quality and integrity of my research. My main ethical focus was to respect the narratives and confidentiality of my participants. While ‘sexual minorities’ can be perceived as a

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vulnerable population, my research questions were not intrusive. I did not perceive there to be significant emotional consequences for anyone participating in this study. While I anticipated that issues such as disclosure, discrimination and mental health could come up, the focus of my interviews was structured around questions more specific to self-presentation, dress codes, and work environments. Prior to the interviews, participants were given an ‘informed consent’ package, which outlined information about my study, the expectations for their participation, as well as their rights as a research participant. For example, they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence, were assured that their comments would remain confidential and that all documents would be kept in a secure location. The informed consent packages were distributed to each person in advance of the interview via email so that they could review it on their own, and ask any follow-up questions before we met. In person, they were given the package to read through again, and sign. The informed consent package also informed the women that I would be the only person with access to their contact information, and that I would personally be transcribing their interviews. Knowing this could potentially result in my participants feeling like they could be more honest and vulnerable with me in our conversations (Petrova, Dewing & Camilleri, 2016). Further, my thesis supervisor and I were the only persons with access to the transcriptions, and all identifiers were removed from my transcriptions prior to my supervisor gaining access to them. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) argue that it is important for participants to be able to remain anonymous even to those who know them. This is especially important for the participants in my study, who identify as queer, because public knowledge of their queer identity without their consent could put their safety at risk. Also, tight queer community networks suggest that one could more easily identify a queer person’s identity from a few identifiers than if it were a heterosexual population sample.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis: Setting the Scene and Exploring the Challenges

I begin by exploring the relationship between my participants' queer identities, and their preference to dress androgynously. I also introduce the theme of 'wearing myself,' as a concept that is linked throughout the rest of the thesis. Next, I discuss the many various challenges that my participants have faced in workplace settings which are underscored by dominant discourses of heterosexism. This chapter finishes with me exploring the ways participants have felt about these challenges they face at work, and the amount of energy they spend thinking their way through them.

Queer Identity and Androgyny

This section focuses on illustrating the significance of the relationship between a woman's queer identity and dressing androgynously, as articulated by my participants. The women I interviewed all felt as though clothing, along with other appearance factors such as tattoos, piercings, and hairstyles, are tools for self-expression. They also recognized that dressing androgynously could be an empowering way to express their individuality, in resistance to dominant societal discourses which normalize women who dress in ways that are traditionally feminine as most appropriate, normal, and acceptable. In this section I explore participants' preferences to dress androgynously, and how this has been shaped by the discovery and/or journey of their queer identity. I also discuss the significance of androgynous aesthetic cues in terms of being able to 'read' and recognize other androgynous women in the LGBTQ+ community. Further, participants felt it is important for them to be able to wear what they feel 'naturally' more comfortable in, what they feel they look good in, and clothing that reflects how they view themselves. One participant referred to this as "wearing myself." Finally, I discuss generally why these women dislike women's clothing, and why menswear feels like a better alternative to many of them for functional reasons as well.

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Relationship between queer identity and androgynous dress.

The women I spoke with all perceived there to be a strong positive correlation between their queer identity, and their preference to dress androgynously. Several of the women explained that their clothing choices have been directly shaped by the discovery of their own queer identity, and their level of acceptance with that discovery. Paula said:

I was not very comfortable with my sexuality at that point so I was just wearing like your typical womenswear...My queerness and my sexuality is where I started to present myself differently. There are obviously heterosexual women and non-queer identifying women who dress masculinely, but I think that mine kind of directly matches up to that identity and where it came from.

Paula's reflection on her past self suggests that her level of acceptance for her own sexuality has played a role in her willingness to dress in ways that have challenged the status quo. Morgan also said that she understands her androgynous appearance to be an expression of her queerness. She firmly stated, "I'm queer and this is just a part of that. This is how I'm dressing because this is who I am." Hillman (2013) also suggests that gender bending and androgyny can be understood as a form of women's liberation and resistance to traditional gender presentation.

While dressing androgynously is still problematized by many queer women as the stereotypical and 'traditional lesbian look,' many value being able to recognize a shared queer identity with other women through appearance/aesthetic cues (Huxley, Clarke & Halliwell, 2014; Skidmore, 1999). Examples of queer aesthetic cues for women include particular hairstyles (short or asymmetrical), jewelry, body piercings, and particular clothing styles which are readily associated with 'lesbian stereotypes' (Huxley, Clarke & Halliwell, 2014). For my participants, dressing androgynously was also described as significant in communicating a queer identity which could be recognized by other queer folks. This was important to them because of the marginalization and alienation that they often feel as

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queer women. Jill explains, “When I came out, you know as a teenager, it was for survival. You kind of had to look queer or else it was easy to get missed.” Taylor also strongly articulated this point. She said, “For me I feel like my dress is part of being queer... I think that’s another way we help read each other too, right? Maybe more so than for straight people. Especially with androgynous dress people there are these subtle cues that we rely so heavily on to reach each other and to see each other in the world.”

Overall, being able to ‘read’ each other in terms of queer ‘visibility,’ was established in these interviews as an important part of queer culture and navigating the workplace as a queer person, reflecting pre-existing literature.

“Wearing myself.”

The women I interviewed all agreed that clothing can be used as a tool to express their individuality, and communicate to others ‘who they are.’ As Rubenstein (2018) suggests, “To signal connectedness and to distinguish themselves from others...people adopt styles of dress to express their particular, distinct identity. In making these choices, they demonstrate their awareness that a style or mode of appearance has meaning” (p. 8). My participants also emphasized how important it was to them to be able to present themselves in a way that is comfortable. ‘Comfort’ came up often throughout the interviews as a term to discuss the practicality, functionality, and material of various types of clothing. However, ‘comfort’ was also used by my participants to describe their emotional relationships with their clothing. Jill referred to instances where she had a positive and comfortable relationship with the clothing she wore, as “wearing myself.” Jill expanded, “I wear what feels comfortable and what I feel looks good on me and my body type and allows me to do what I need to do in a day. I wear clothing that feels like it looks like what I look like on the inside. I don’t know how else to describe it.” These women explained that what has felt most reflective of ‘who they are,’ and what has been most comfortable to

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wear, is typically clothing that is labelled as ‘menswear,’ or a combination of both menswear and womenswear. These clothing preferences are what my participants and I understand to be ‘androgynous dress.’ Alona stated:

I just feel so much more comfortable with the style that I’ve kind of cultivated over the years...it kind of shifted back and forth between femininity and masculinity, and I tried to find some sort of balance for it, but I just found like I always felt more myself when I was wearing the traditionally more masculine clothes.

Here, the way Alona described her experiences of feeling more like herself when she dressed androgynously, resonates with Goffman’s ideas around a person’s sense of a core self and also suggests that her ‘style’ has shifted in coordination with her changing sense of self.

Some of my participants also described dressing androgynously as empowering, as wearing clothing assigned ‘for men’ is contradictory to the feminine appearances that are normalized for women. “A person’s attire can indicate either conformity or resistance to socially defined expectations” (Rubenstein, 2018, p. 3). Taylor said, “It can be a way to express your individuality in a way that I think is kind of cool. It made me feel as a queer person... that people know that I’m queer when I [wear] my own clothes to work. Which I think is also, for visibility, really important.” Here, Taylor was also articulating her belief in that what she wears to work can communicate messages about her sexuality. This is a theme that came up across each interview, and will be discussed in more detail in the section titled Impression Management. My participants also discussed the concept of ‘wearing myself’ as one that exists on a spectrum of self-expression that is fluid, and shifts along with time and context. Several of the women said that they do not always dress in menswear, and/or do not always dress androgynously, but that it is important to them to be able to be fluid in terms of their clothing and gender presentation on a day-to-day basis. As Jill explained, “I think for me the way I wear myself fluctuates a bit and so it’s more comfortable for me to be able to just decide that day.” Interestingly, this framing of fluid self-expression challenges the concept of a stable, unchanging ‘self,’ as Butler does (1990).

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However, many of my participants also expressed that wearing clothing that is comfortable, which accurately reflects ‘who they are,’ is important to them. This perspective is supported by Clair, Beatty and MacLean (2005) who suggest that “people experience a feeling of authenticity when they can be fully ‘themselves’ in public” (p. 79). Here, there is a tension present within participants’ understandings of self which reflect both Goffman’s ideas about an authentic sense of self, and Butler’s notion of a fluid sense of self that creates a continuous narrative for a person’s ‘individuality,’ but has no actual fixed-self beneath it all. Many participants voiced contradictory perspectives on whether or not they understand their sense of self to be something that is fluid and shifting, or something that is stable and consistent.

The women I spoke with also suggested that ‘wearing themselves’ as queer, androgynous women can be a hurdle in many typical employment moments associated with getting, having, and keeping a job. They suggested certain career paths and jobs are more appealing to them when the dress codes allow for women to “wear themselves,” and dress androgynously. In comparison, they often avoid jobs with dress codes that are more rigid. As Ryan-Flood (2004) suggests, queer workers are more likely to choose career paths and workplaces that are perceived to have “a more tolerant, open-minded environment” (p. 4). Social justice fields, non-profit organizations, education and ‘the arts’ were identified by participants as career settings that are more likely to have these qualities. Jill has preferred to work in ‘the arts’ industry, because it values and encourages individuality, diversity, and expression. She explained, “I think that’s what attracted me to the entire industry, is the idea of expression. I work in an environment where you can wear whatever you want. So that’s definitely the draw. I’m lucky, but I also think I gravitated towards it for that.” Generally, career paths have been more appealing to participants when they align with their dress code needs, and when discrimination is not an anticipated problem. Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons (2012) argue that when queer individuals anticipate these forms of discrimination, “they may also lower their initial career expectations such as starting salary expectations

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and a greater willingness to accept less-than-ideal jobs.” Stanford (2008) argues that women in general—especially those who are racialized, immigrant, migrant, and/or non-heterosexual—are disproportionately concentrated in precarious jobs due to prejudice, assumptions, and discrimination. ‘Precarious employment’ refers to certain types of jobs in the labour market, which typically are characterized by low wages, no benefits, no opportunity for promotion, and little to no job security (Stanford, 2008). Given this context, scholars argue that workers believe having an ‘acceptable’ appearance, and assimilating to workplace norms, is very important for their ability to get a job and keep it (Peluchette, Karl & Rust, 2006; Belleza, Gino & Keinan, 2014; Yoshino, 2014).

My participants suggested that interviews can be stressful because of similar concerns about discrimination and prejudice in regard to their queer identity and/ or androgynous dress. Implicit within interview expectations, are heterosexist discourses and assumptions as well. Some workers do not feel like they can ‘wear themselves’ and still get hired, so the ‘best self’ that they present in an interview is highly informed by what they think the employers are looking for. Therefore, when participants have considered what they are going to wear and how they are going to present themselves to potential employers, they have been concerned with managing their visible ‘difference’ (i.e. queerness, gender non-conformity). Most of the women I spoke with have put a lot of thought into how they present themselves for interviews, and to what degree they will present their androgynous appearance and/or aesthetic cues that are associated with queer stereotypes that could ‘out’ their sexual orientation and potentially affect the likelihood of getting hired. There are various decision-making processes involved with participants managing the messages that their appearance communicates to employers during interviews, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter Six.

Once participants have been successfully hired, they said that they have often still felt a lingering anticipation that someone at their work (i.e. manager, customer, colleague) might have an issue with

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their queer self-presentation, and that this could put their job at risk even when there are protective legislatures in place. For example, Yoshino (2014) argues that many workers are hesitant about becoming involved with LGBT groups in their workplace “out of fear that belonging to such a group would negatively affect career prospects” (p. 18). Alona explained:

I feel like even if I can be presenting super confident throughout the school day, it's pick up time when a parent comes in and they introduce themselves to me...I worry that they're looking at me like hmmm...I always kind of worry that they're going to be conscientious about it, because there are some ignorant people in the world and I don't feel like being a catalyst for a parent coming in and being like I don't want my kid working with that homo, because I don't have the job security for that. So there's always that concern that maybe I'm too masculine, I look too queer, I look too gay.

Alona's statement suggests a consistently present and underlying concern that the parents of the children she teaches will view her negatively. She also said that she would feel very uncomfortable with dealing with explicit homophobia in her workplace because as a supply teacher, she does not have the same job security that a teacher with a long-term contract would. If her appearance and sexual orientation at a school were too controversial for the parents, Alona believed that she would likely not be hired there again. Jill did not share these concerns in her teaching job, until some parents vocalized their homophobia once Jill started 'wearing herself' more at work. Jill felt that her androgynous appearance resulted in a lack of respect from many of the parents because they assumed her to be queer from her clothing and overall appearance. Jill explained, "I've had a parent say that I would make their kid queer." Once one parent said this, Jill was immediately concerned that other parents would also think and feel that way about her. Ultimately, Jill felt discouraged and frustrated by parents' homophobia, and ended up quitting that job because she felt she could not progress within the organization as long as she continued to 'wear herself.'

Regardless of legislative protections, my participants' stories illustrate deep concerns about their job security. Described within these stories as well, is the role of workplace dress norms in shaping these

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experiences of explicit and anticipated homophobia. These narratives suggest that normalized discourses of professionalism and gender continue to perpetuate what is considered ‘acceptable’ and ‘normal’ to wear to work, while women who wear themselves androgynously—and are more readily perceived as queer by others—are often scrutinized for their difference, and are less likely to be seen as a ‘professionals.’ To recall from my literature review, Belleza, Gino, and Keinan (2014) suggest that there is a “range of acceptance” for peoples’ perceptions of nonconformity, and that if the ‘rule breaking’ is too radical or socially unacceptable, it is more likely that the perception of the person will be negative (p. 50). These arguments, in combination with my participants’ experiences, suggest that for some employers, colleagues, and customers, queer women who dress androgynously and ‘wear themselves’ are outside their ‘range of acceptance’ for what is considered appropriate for a workplace appearance.

Dislikes about women’s clothing.

While my participants embrace menswear for various personal reasons, they were able to agree on many reasons why they dislike most womenswear. In general, they argued that womenswear is often more form-fitting, and revealing, which plays a role in them feeling hyper-feminine and sexualized when wearing women’s clothing. Clothing created specifically for women tends to be fitted in order to emphasize women’s curves. However, this does not reflect the needs and desires of all women—especially not those of my participants, who may want to present their body in different ways. Paula noted, “I want to order the men’s ones instead of the women’s ones because I find them so much more comfortable and like the women’s one tries to accentuate the fact that you have hips and curves and stuff, whereas like I just want a boxy, like straight up and down shirt, with longer sleeves.” ‘Boxy’ options that do not accentuate curves, as Paula suggested, are much harder to find in women’s departments, which is why she has learned to find clothing in the men’s department which better suits

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her needs. Some participants noted that they have actively avoided jobs that require such clothing.

Taylor explained, “I’ve never chosen a job that requires me to wear a skirt because there’s no frickin’ way that I would ever be able to do that, even as a younger person—my younger self.”

Womenswear also does not work well for all women’s body types. Some of my participants suggested that they have had negative feelings about their bodies when they have worn women’s clothing because womenswear seems to be designed to only fit certain body types well (i.e. slim and slender bodies). As Alona stated, “Female clothing for me is not functional based on my body type, and I don’t feel attractive in it.” Raegan refers to her colleague’s experience to articulate this point:

If I were to put myself in the shoes of the other girls I work with, there’s this one girl who is busty to say the least, so with a V-neck she has to wear, and the size that she is—she’s petite everywhere, but her chest. The shirt shows a lot of her chest and it’s very revealing, and she feels uncomfortable with that, but that’s the only style of shirt they had so it’s not very accommodating for those who want to be a little bit more conservative in their workplace.

Some uniforms end up forcing women to be more ‘revealing,’ and show more skin than they want to because there are no other options provided for them that actually fit their body proportions properly.

Womenswear that does not fit properly can also restrict women’s range of motion for the tasks they need to do in a typical work day. In general, the tops are less functional for common movements such as bending over, reaching up to get something, and even sitting or moving quickly. Jill stated that “it [womenswear] limits the roles that you can do, technically. It’s not efficient.” Paula said that she wears womenswear on some occasions, but that it is just generally uncomfortable to wear for long periods of time. She explained:

I find women’s business wear and like professional clothes, a lot of times are really uncomfortable. Just like almost exhausting to have to put on because I’m like...this is going to be so tight on me all day. Like blouses do look good when I’m looking at the outfit objectively, but to have to sit and stand in this all day, this is going to be pulling on my arms. I’m going to be sweating through it because it’s so tight on me, and the pants...you can’t bend over because you don’t want your underwear to show because the shirts are not flexible. Versus the days where I would be wearing like my men’s shirts and either a looser women’s pant or a men’s pant all

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together, and I'm like ugh I'm going to be so comfortable today. I'm going to look professional, but I'm going to feel like I can move, and feel comfortable and good in my skin.

This powerful quote articulates the contrast between the negativity associated with womenswear for Paula, in comparison to her positive experiences with wearing menswear, and 'wearing herself.' For all of my participants, men's clothing often provides solutions to many of the issues they experience with women's clothing. As Alona described, "men's clothes are so much more practical. They have bigger pockets, they are cozier, not confining, and they are way cheaper than female clothes."

To summarize, womenswear is strongly disliked by my participants because it is typically form-fitting and emphasizes their curves and femininity. Women's clothing is also tailored towards thin body types, which can negatively affect a person's body image. Women's clothing is strongly disliked for being impractical and very confining in ways that restrict a person's ability to do basic tasks in the workplace. Womenswear also restricts their ability to present their bodies in more androgynous ways, and often prevents them from feeling comfortable and confident in their clothing and overall appearance.

Workplace Settings and Challenges

In this section I discuss various themes that I identified within the interviews workplace expectations with regards to dress codes. First, I discuss how participants described dress codes that were often segregated into dichotomously gendered categories (i.e. male/female uniforms). I explore a variety of issues brought forth by participants which problematize this categorizing of dress, and critique it as an extension of mainstream Western culture which dominantly only recognizes and normalizes two genders in binary opposition. As a key example, I unpack how my participants felt about being assumed to require a 'female' uniform when they started a new job, as happened to me.

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Next, I look at the concept of professionalism. Often dress codes are understood in terms of professionalism, which is meant to indicate a certain standard of acceptable dress that they need to meet. In general, my participants and I agreed that professionalism is a subjective term that can be interpreted in many ways, but that is still loaded with implied and stated expectations that exaggerate gender. I then discuss the ways in which my participants distinguish and navigate the dress expectations of professionalism in formal versus less formal (more casual) workplaces. Importantly, I follow this discussion with sub-sections that explore intersections along lines of class and race. I question whether or not standards of professionalism are accessible to all—regardless of socioeconomic status, and the extent to which the visibility of class hierarchies is perpetuated through the enforcement of standardized uniforms. My participants also suggested that dress codes are shaped by white, middle-class beauty norms. I analyze the cultural bias within workplace dress codes and discuss the invisibility of racialized workers in imaginings of professionalism. I also explore the difficulty that some of my participants had in thinking through intersections of race.

Next, I discuss other implicit and informal expectations of employers, colleagues and customers which exaggerate and regulate gendered dress expectations, including a discussion of ‘misgendering’ as a key example. I follow this by questioning the framing of the workplace as a sex-neutral environment, and critique this discourse as a hypocritical and heterosexist expectation that maintains heterosexuality as the acceptable norm while queerness is deemed a taboo topic that should not be evident in the workplace. I then discuss the visibility politics of professionalism, and explore my participants’ suggestions that dominant ideas around gender, sexuality, and race can influence how ‘suitable’ they are to be working with the public—as perceived by others.

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Binary uniforms and dress code expectations.

Both feminist and queer movements have challenged the gender binary and what it means to “look like a man or woman” (Hillman, 2013, p. 156). However, many dress codes are still organized into segregated gender categories—men vs women—and reflect societal assumptions about ‘appropriate’ sexuality and gender expression (Brower, 2013; Bowring & Brewis, 2009; Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Dellinger, 2002; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Skidmore, 1999). Men’s uniforms tend to include looser shirts, looser pants, and a few rules about shoes, belts, and beard trimming. In contrast, binary uniforms for women tend to include more fitted tops and bottoms (sometimes skirts and dresses) and many additional specifications about hair, makeup, and jewelry. Such patterns were experienced by my participants. For instance, Alona’s hotel job had a uniform protocol binder provided in training, which included specific examples of how to dress appropriately—all segregated into female/male sections. She described it as “an outdated manual that was clearly from like the early 90s.”

All of the women I spoke to were critical of workplaces that enforce such binary uniforms.

Raegan argued:

I think it’s wrong for companies to designate certain uniforms for girls and boys. I think it’s a tool we use in capitalism, in business, in consumerism, to satisfy the mainstream needs of people with money, and what they want to put their money towards. I think it’s just to meet a certain image, and I think it’s wrong and I think it should change. I do believe it comes from a capitalist agenda where people want to be able to sell the most of their products, and people who bend the rules of society’s dress codes can have a negative consequence in terms of capital to a company, which is horrible.

Similar arguments to Raegan’s arose within the other interviews as well, in which participants were critical of how companies have found ways to benefit from the gender-specific marketing of products (i.e. BIC pens for women, Kinder eggs for girls).

One participant, Paula, discussed her frustrating experience with the enforcement of binary dress expectations in a retail environment. I describe this story in detail as it is a strong example of gendered

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dress regulation. Paula was working in a trendy clothing store, and was told by her manager that she had to wear the clothing of her gender. Paula explained:

When we first started working there we got free clothes and I was excited because that was when I started introducing menswear into my wardrobe so like I got a men's tank top and a women's kind of baggy boyfriend jean. On my first shift, I was wearing my men's tank top with my jeans and my manager was kind of like...oh you have to wear the clothing of your gender. It was super weird, because she just assumed that that was a rule. I don't think necessarily that they were mad about me dressing that way, but it was like a sales perspective. They were like you know, you're a woman, we want you to be wearing the more female looking outfits so that you can sell to other women.

Paula was critical of her manager's assumptions that female customers are only ever interested in buying women's clothing. Paula also got the impression that her manager believed customers would view her as less approachable as a female employee in men's clothing. It ended up that there was no rule in the company's manual about wearing the clothing that corresponds with your gender so Paula was able to wear any clothing combinations (of menswear and/or womenswear) that she wanted. However, there were other experiences she had within that workplace which suggested a rigid and gendered binary environment. For instance, every month the employees would have access to discounted merchandise that they could order through the store's catalogue. Interestingly, there were two separate catalogues—dividing the clothing by gender—and she was only ever given the female one to look at and order from. Paula also described a memorable experience with a customer whose binary views reinforce the mentality of her manager:

I'd have moms come in there and be like "oh I need a flannel for my daughter," and I'm like "to be honest I find the men's ones way comfier because the women's ones pull in spots that you don't necessarily want when you're just wearing a comfy shirt." And they're like "well yeah, but that's men's clothes." And I'm just thinking, what's wrong with you? It's not like there's a barrier and you can't like walk over to that side of the store. They're right beside each other.

Overall, Paula was left with the impression that this workplace was not supportive of women dressing androgynously, and that many customers' attitudes reflected the rigid gender norms that her manager was trying to enforce.

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Raegan said that she purposefully does not apply to clothing stores that divide men's and women's departments because:

I'd likely be placed to work in the ladies' department and helping ladies with their style even though I'm not as educated about that as I am in terms of men's clothes. I would assume they wouldn't want a female to guide the men who shop primarily in the men's department of what they should and shouldn't wear. So it does impact where I think I would be considered in a job.

Raegan's comments underscore that people may avoid applying to certain jobs because the labour processes (i.e. job tasks) in certain workplaces are organized according to rigid gender roles, rather than being based on each worker's individual experience and skill. Some participants argued that other jobs such as food service and bartending are quite rigid in terms of binary gender norms as well, and encourage women to have traditionally feminine appearances. Jill stated that "especially in bartending it's this thing where as a female, the more feminine that you dress, the more likely you are to get tips or have good customers and all that stuff." These normalized understandings of what servers and bartenders should look like have not only shaped how my participants view the world of work, and certain jobs, but have also influenced the way they see themselves, what jobs they can be successful in, and where they feel like they will or will not belong and 'fit in' as an employee. As Butler (1990) would argue, the distinctive binaries of men/women and masculine/feminine which are reflected in dress codes perpetuate the naturalization and normalization of heterosexuality as well. Her concept of the heterosexual matrix is most obvious in work environments such as bartending, where division between dichotomously gendered dress codes is clearly linked to the expectation for women to appeal to heterosexual men, and thus the perceived relationship between women's femininity and heterosexuality is reinforced. Since androgynously-dressed queer women challenge binary and heterosexist gender norms, it is not surprising to me that my participants would avoid workplaces which are perceived to hire and organize workers according to rigid gender roles. They also wanted to avoid negative reactions from coworkers, customers, and employers, and avoid feeling negatively about themselves. Importantly,

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being able to make decisions around which jobs to apply for, and which to avoid, based on dress codes, is a privilege that not every person has. For example, if a person is struggling financially, they are more likely to prioritize any form of income over their own personal comfort—especially if they also have dependents. This issue is explored further in the section titled: Financial Security.

In a study of table servers, Hall (1993) found that work organizations also tend to divide job tasks and (define) job performance by gender, reinforcing the idea that men and women are fundamentally different from each other, and also unequal. Rubenstein (2018) argues that women “have traditionally been given a weaker social position than men, and the mere act of wearing women’s clothes situates the person in a subordinate role, validating male dominance” (p. 10). The women I interviewed all agreed that binary uniforms perpetuate a double standard between men and women, a perspective I will explore later in more detail.

Another common issue that came up in our conversations is several of my participants have been given the women’s uniform by their employer/manager, when their preference would have been the men’s uniform. Jill said, “I’ve worked in places where they’ve just ordered me the women’s shirt under the assumption that that would be what I would choose.” Assigning uniforms based on gendered assumptions also implies that it is the employee’s responsibility to advocate for their own clothing needs and preferences. Raegan stated, “I was never given the male uniform option on my own terms. It was just expected of me to wear the women’s one until I fought for it.” This issue is of concern to both my participants and I, because not everyone will feel able or confident enough to ‘fight’ for an option that feels better for them. Further, even when an employee is comfortable advocating for themselves, it does not mean that the request will be granted by their employers, or that an accessible/equitable alternative will be readily available to them. For example, Alona was automatically given the ‘women’s uniform’ top at one of her workplaces, and when she asked her manager if she could have the men’s top instead,

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she was told, “we can dig one out of the back.” Her manager was receptive to the request itself, but there was only one alternative shirt available that was several sizes too big. Neither shirt was a welcome or equal option for Alona. Alona elaborated, “We’ve since gotten new uniforms and they automatically just gave me the guys shirt this time and I was like I respect you.” Therefore, providing multiple, equal options for employees to choose from can encourage positive relationships with employers/management for queer women who prefer to ‘wear themselves’ by dressing androgynously.

Double standard of dress codes.

Dress codes can often be characterized as a double standard—with significantly more rules for women, which often prioritize their ‘attractiveness’ to consumers/customers who are assumed to be primarily heterosexual men. In contrast, the expectations for men are lower, with less rules overall and a minimal focus on overall appearance and attractiveness. Women are often expected to wear a certain amount of jewelry, makeup, and accessories even when it is not verbally communicated to them by employers. The ways in which women style their hair, and specifications around the fit of their clothing are also common regulations within dress codes. This can be frustrating for women who realize the rules for men are less rigid and fewer in general. My participants agreed that the expectations for men are much more simple and functional, such as tuck in your shirt, and wear black shoes. They also suggested that expectations for men have fewer specifications around fit or style. Paula stated, “The guys can wear a range from their own personal styles, like skinny jeans to loose baggy jeans, which I also think men get away with those kinds of things more so in general.” My participants also suggested that the enforcement of dress codes by employers can be highly subjective, as women are more likely to be sent home or experience negative consequences for dress code violations than their male counterparts. As Taylor said, “It’s always the women who seem to be regulated more than the men.”

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Brower (2013) argues that dress codes imply different purposes for men and women at work, and suggests that “women are judged on job performance and appearance, men on their work” (p. 499).

Skidmore (1999) agrees that clothing and appearance expectations in the workplace reproduce dominant discourses of gender and sexuality, as policed by employers, which reflect the gendered double standards of wider society. The women I spoke with were able to identify several ways in which the double standards within dress codes reflect gendered expectations.

The unspoken expectation for women to wear makeup in all public spaces (including work) is a topic that came up frequently within my interviews. Paula explained that “it’s not explicit, like you must wear makeup, but it’s this implicit thing that we know we should.” Dellinger and Williams (1997) argue that the pressure placed on women to wear makeup to work—applied ‘correctly’—contributes to the sexist hierarchy in the workplace between men and women. Additionally, women in their study express two main opinions: that it is their ‘choice’ to wear makeup to work, and also that they would anticipate negative attention if they decided not to wear it. My participants suggested that body hair removal is also an integral and unspoken expectation of ‘professionalism’ for women. Women’s leg hair, armpit hair, and/or any facial or arm hair that is darker than that of their skin colour is expected to be removed. Paula agreed, “unshaved legs wearing a skirt, on a woman, is like a no-no.” These unspoken expectations about women’s bodily presentation are further examples of gendered regulations which reinforce feminine appearances as the most appropriate, professional and normal way to present oneself as a woman in the workplace.

These uneven expectations reinforce and normalize dichotomous notions about gender—that men and women are more different from each other than they are alike—all while only formally recognizing two gender identities. Brower (2013) argues that dress codes function as a method of surveillance for doing gender ‘properly’ in the workplace, implying that “women need monitoring to

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ensure an appropriate appearance” (p. 495). Double standards in workplace dress codes also perpetuate the power dynamic of women being dominantly understood as inferior to men, and the ‘othering’ and ‘invisibility’ of gender fluidity in general as well as non-binary gender identities. Butler (1990) suggests that the prioritizing of certain gender performances through normalizing and repetitive processes, such as workplace dress codes, also normalizes particular ways of ‘performing gender’ as more legitimate, authentic, and normal than ‘other’ performances (i.e. women who dress androgynously).

All of the women I spoke with referenced their childhood and made comparisons to their out-of-work experiences in order to describe gendered double standards that they have experienced in other contexts of their lives. Many participants participated in more feminized sports such as dance, skating, and gymnastics. These activities were memorable to participants because there was a lot of pressure within the sport’s culture to dress and look feminine, along with the idealization of thin, ‘feminine’ body types. Participants’ families also seemed to come up as a source of pressure to dress in a feminine manner in order to feel accepted, and like they belong. Raegan had often experienced pressure from her family to wear skirts and dresses in order to ‘look pretty’ at family social events. One participant, Taylor, also remembered facing significant resistance from her parents regarding her desire to present herself in less traditionally feminine ways. There were times when Taylor would refuse to wear a dress to church, and would put on pants. Her parents would then force her to change, telling her that “this is what you wear to church as a young girl, and we wouldn’t want to ruffle feathers.” The expectations of her parents, along with the church’s culture of traditional discourses of gender resulted in Taylor having experiences with challenging authority figures and gender norms at an early age. Taylor told me, “I had an incredibly strict dress code for going to church. I have to wear patent leather shoes, you know with the buckles? And socks or tights and a dress...every Sunday for many, many, many years until I finally got my parents to chill and I was able to wear pants, and I was the first girl in my church to wear pants.”

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Alona articulated a similar binary expectation of gendered dress within her Catholic school. She described wearing her school uniforms as a memorable time in her life, where she had to navigate many gendered expectations. Alona explained, “I did go to Catholic school, and there’s kind of like that expectation that when you’re a female, that you’re gonna wear the kilt.” Instead, she purchased the men’s uniform, which she felt much more confident and attractive in. She described the pressure to wear the kilt as something that was largely implicit from her peers and teachers: “There was times things were commented upon, but it was never really enforced. Just strongly suggested that I do the alternative.” Elementary, middle, and high school dress code rules were heavily critiqued by other participants as well. They recalled times when they or their female peers were sent home because of their shorts were ‘too short,’ or the straps on their shirts were one inch wide, instead of two. Participants acknowledged that these school dress codes were subjectively and primarily enforced on the girls, a double standard that was unfair. Many of these rules are explained by the justification that girls’ bodies can be distracting for young boys, and even male teachers. Implicit in these school dress codes, is the suggestion to young girls that their bodies are sexualized by men, and that their ability to present themselves ‘appropriately’ in public spaces is more important than their education (see Pomerantz, 2007; Raby, 2010). Overall, my participants’ reflections on their past experiences with dress code expectations are examples of experiences participants have had with navigating binary, gendered dress expectations well before they entered the workforce. The workplace is often not the first or only institution or context in which queer women try to navigate expectations around dress which are highly specific and reflect a gendered double standard.

Gendered professionalism: looking the part.

Professional dress, or professionalism, refers to certain discourses about which attire is most

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appropriate to wear in the workplace. These expectations can be implied and/or explicitly stated.

Dominant perceptions about what is considered professional have become normalized in Western culture, even though discourses of professionalism are highly subjective and socially constructed.

Dominant discourses of what it means to ‘look professional,’ were quickly identified by the women I interviewed. To dress ‘professional,’ typically indicates someone should have clean, flat/neutral garments (in terms of colours and patterns), that do not have any holes or rips. Professionalism is also usually (but not always) about dressing in ways that are conservative, and gendered. When I asked my participants what they think it means to dress professionally, similar images popped into their minds of women in pencil skirts, blouses, and heels, and men in suits. Paula stated:

If you were to Google professionalism, it would always give you like a men’s version, and a women’s version. There would be like a man and a woman beside each other and the woman would most likely be wearing a type of pencil skirt to the knees, heels, and like a blazer and a blouse—is probably the standard. And then men’s is always a suit.

Another participant, Morgan, took a university course that held a workshop on ‘how to dress professional’ for interviews and the workplace, which also reinforced these gendered norms. This input supports my argument that implied and stated expectations about professionalism often exaggerate gender.

Bellezza, Gino and Keinan (2014) state, “in both professional and nonprofessional settings, individuals make significant efforts to learn and adhere to dress codes, etiquette, and other written and unwritten standards of behaviour” (p. 35). Beyond societal pressures and mainstream discourses around gender and workplace ‘appropriateness,’ the power dynamic which typically characterizes the relationship between employers (who decide upon dress code rules) and employees is one of class conflict—in which an employer has authority over the workers (Stanford, 2008). As Rubenstein (2018) argues, “exercising authority, wielding power, differentiating the sexes, and arousing sexual interest are all facilitated by the employment of categories of clothing signs” (p. 9). Again, this suggests that

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discourses of professionalism, as reflected in dress codes, are tools for employers to exercise control over their workers, and that this form of control is often effective in preventing queer women who dress androgynously from wearing themselves.

Formal vs less formal dress code expectations: navigating the hypervisibility of gendered difference.

Evident within my interviews, was a shared feeling of stress associated with more formal working environments, which require a person to ‘dress up’ for work. Workplaces that are more formal or upscale are more likely to hyper-feminize their employees, as the ways in which women can ‘dress up’ and dress ‘professionally’ are both narrowly defined within Western society and its workplaces. Some of my participants associate formal jobs with not being able to ‘wear themselves.’ In this context, some participants described their ‘self’ as something that is stable, consistent, and at risk with more formal dress code expectations. It is not necessarily that these women are explicitly told that they cannot dress androgynously, but they suggested that the social pressure is higher in those contexts. Jill related her experiences with formal dress codes to her experiences with bathing suits, where the binary expectations and norms are also quite obvious. She perceived these to be unfair binaries that she has always had difficulty navigating as an androgynous woman. In general, Jill said that she makes decisions about what she will wear to formal workplaces and events—and whether or not she feels comfortable to ‘wear herself’—based on the people she thinks will be there, and an evaluation of how comfortable she thinks she will feel those people.

With more casual dress codes, there are many more options than the dress/suit binary. As Taylor put it, “If you can work in a place that’s more casual, then you can get away with more. Whereas like the business professional, it’s harder to dress androgynously in dress clothes because for women it tends to

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be dresses or skirts and heels.” Paula discussed further that the visible differences between menswear and womenswear is also less obvious with casual dress. For instance, she explained that a woman wearing a men’s cardigan and men’s button-down shirt would not look extremely different from a woman who wears the same articles of clothing, but from the women’s department. My participants felt as though they have difficulty ‘fitting in’ when formal clothing is the expectation, because women who dress androgynously are visibly ‘different’ in comparison to the majority of the women around them who follow the status quo and dress in traditionally feminine ways. Alona said:

It makes it a lot more obvious that I’m wearing guys’ clothing. I feel like I’m kind of being forced to make that choice. Do I feminize myself and probably feel like crap every time I go to work because I don’t feel good in my skin? Or do I put this image out there and hope to god nobody has an issue with it?

Paula worked in a less formal environment, but expressed that she would often choose to wear a dress to work social events (i.e. Annual Christmas party), even though she is less comfortable wearing one, in order to avoid ‘making a statement.’ She stated, “If men are wearing suits and ties and women are wearing dresses...I don’t go to events like that very often. It’s definitely a statement [to dress androgynously] because it’s different from what all the other women are wearing.” Jill, Alona and Paula were all describing their increased difficulty with navigating the gender binary at work when there are formal dress expectations, and suggested that they often sacrifice their own comfort in order to visibly ‘fit in’ and avoid potentially negative consequences for standing out.

Some of the women I spoke with have even avoided jobs just because of the formal nature of its work environment and dress code. Alona expressed that she is grateful to be working at a lower-end hotel job, because higher-end hotels require women working at the front desk to wear skirts, dresses, and heels, and “no job is worth that” for her. Raegan argued that her androgynous appearance is more “suited” and accepted in working environments that have less formal dress codes. Raegan told me that she has consciously chosen not to apply to jobs with formal workplaces because of this. She anticipated

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that in one way or another, her androgynous appearance would become an issue and that there would be prejudice from customers, and discrimination on the job or in the hiring process from employers.

Raegan described her avoidance of formal jobs as a strategy to protect her self-esteem—something she has felt could be negatively affected if there were scrutiny about her appearance. She also acknowledged that the workplaces which are less formal, and more appealing to her, also tend to be the jobs that are lower-paying, with less job security, no benefits, and little room for promotion. Overall, the women I spoke with highlighted less formal dress codes and working environments as preferred over formal ones, but the precarious nature of ‘casual’ workplaces is a significant ‘downside’ to less formal jobs, in spite of them being potentially more appealing to populations who require accessible, flexible dress codes.

Economic barriers to looking ‘professional,’ and meeting dress code expectations.

In this sub-section, I argue that discourses of professionalism—along with dress code expectations—aim for a gendered, middle/upper-class image. I also question the affordability of these expectations. One participant, Jill, put it bluntly: “They are trying to dress up poor people for sure. That uniform dresses everybody up so that they’re at a certain standard.” She suggested that asking all employees to wear a suit to look professional does not work to remove the prestigious hierarchy that can be associated with more subtle class indicators, such as brand names and labels. Another participant, Taylor, also suggested that there is a visible class difference between those that wear standardized uniforms and those that wear their own clothing to work in the area where she lives. She said, “It’s often workplaces that don’t pay you very much that require these uniforms,” and these workers are very visible as working-class employees in comparison to the people who walk to work in their own clothes. Therefore, standardized uniforms may eliminate some aesthetic indicators of socioeconomic status between individual workers, but do not eliminate the subtler ways in which class still becomes visible at

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work. Paula also discussed class privilege, and argued that many expectations of ‘professionalism’ have to be learned through the culture a person is immersed in, and through their own personal networks. She expressed:

What does dress professionally mean? I think it also means to dress to a class standard—like upper class. It’s like there’s levels of what people’s professionalism is and people are judged based on that. You have to know all the ins and outs, and you’re taught that through your socioeconomic status, and it’s all those things with going to a job interview and knowing the right handshake and right eye contact.

Here, Paula identified that the subtleties of professionalism are not readily accessible to all, and that you are more likely to meet gendered, middle/upper-class expectations of professionalism if you are already middle/upper-class, and have exposure to those networks and cultural norms. Garcia (2015) writes that notions of class or social class are beyond the basic wealth, and income or assets that a person has. He argues that class is also associated with discourses of prestige and social status, and the power and privileges that come with it. I am suggesting that the concept of looking professional at work has much more to do with evoking prestige than the importance of wearing a particular form of specific attire to work, and that certain performances of gender, (hetero)sexuality and race have become dominantly associated with such ‘respectable’ class status and the performance of whiteness.

Another theme that came up within this topic, is the affordability of ‘professionalism.’ My participants agreed that not all workers have the ability to afford the subtleties (i.e. brand names, accessories, hair and nails done) which indicate the intersections of gender and class that employers prefer. Alona stated:

You might not be able to afford something that looks more professional in their eyes. To look the part. And that’s what employment security is all about—looking the part. Not everyone has the same opportunities. Like if I was well off, I’m going to strut in there wearing presumably like a higher end name brand sort of outfit and attire, and I can afford the better-quality things. But if I’m already struggling to make ends meet, me being able to afford the nicer kind of outfit just for the interview alone, likely not gonna happen.

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This is particularly relevant in terms of the expected accessories that feminine professional dress requires, as this gendered expectation can work to make a woman's socioeconomic status more visible. When I asked my participants if standardized uniforms could help with the affordability of workplace dress expectations, there were mixed responses. Paula argued that the frequency of items worn, and the physical wear (and tear) of clothing are also indicators of class that would be less noticeable if all employees within a given workplace were wearing the same things. She explained:

Not everyone can afford to have a whole different wardrobe just to have on hand if you ever need a professional job. And it's noticeable if you're wearing the same clothes every day. When you don't have the type of dress code where you have a uniform, people notice what you're wearing and how many times you're wearing things and you can't wear the same outfit every day. That goes back to even school dress. Those kids that were wearing the same clothes every single day...people talked about that stuff and there was a judgement factor there.

In contrast, Taylor recognized that this could still be an issue with standardized uniforms in workplace settings, school settings, or otherwise. Taylor compared workplace uniforms to school uniforms, which are also intended to be equalizers of class. She described how her classmates would augment the uniforms (i.e. tailor them, stylize them) which reinforced notions of class in more subtle ways, and that the aging and repetitive wear of clothing became more obvious when everyone was dressed the same. Taylor believed that "it almost made it more visible...The class division. You can see through the cracks." Jill made similar arguments, and thought that requiring employees to buy their uniform could have various consequences for workers depending on their class and financial status. Jill expanded, "Sometimes I think that enforced uniforms are helpful for some people, and then in other's it's really not. Like you know in some classes you have people where their entire first paycheck is going towards paying for that uniform." However, she also argued that uniforms could potentially be helpful in the sense that less clothing would need to be purchased for the job.

This section explored how more middle/upper class expectations exaggerate a certain kind of performance of gender that distinguish class differences and can be used to regulate and categorize

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workers. This section also emphasizes the importance of intersectionality in understanding queer women's experiences with workplace dress codes.

White beauty norms upheld through discourses of 'professionalism.'

In this sub-section, I further my intersectional analysis by discussing how white gendered beauty norms are also prioritized within dress codes through expectations that reflect Western culture, including rules about hair, and a white-washed definition of professionalism. I thus further my analysis of professionalism in ways that do not "treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). The problematic construction and enforcement of workplace dress codes cannot be neatly categorized into discriminatory experiences of either racism, sexism, classism or homophobia. Instead, the narratives of my participants can be most accurately understood through acknowledging the intersections of their gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and age in informing their experiences in multiple, complex ways (Garcia, 2015). I also discuss the difficulty that some of my participants had in thinking through intersections of race, their white privilege, and the relevance of these subjects to the topic of workplace dress codes. Importantly, these discussions demonstrate the interweaving of race and gender in queer androgynous women's experiences of workplace dress codes.

Evidence from my literature review and my interviews, suggests that dress codes are racially biased and are constructed with white, beauty norms as the imagined and idealized employee image. For instance, Onwauchi-Willig and Barnes (2007) argue that dress codes "are intended to regulate appearance in a way that situates certain negatively stereotyped ethnic expressions of identity as unprofessional, unusual, and not belonging in the workplace" (p. 1). This argument was echoed by my participants in their discussions of the normalization of whiteness, the invisibility of racialized bodies

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and cultures within dress codes, prejudice against non-white cultural hairstyles, and perceived racial bias in hiring practices. In spite of legal protections which aim to hold workplaces accountable in terms of treating all people equally, racism and racial prejudice still exist. For example, studies report that Muslim women who wear religious attire to work (i.e. a hijab) experience discrimination within their workplaces in spite of protective legislation (Ali, Yamada & Mahmood, 2015). This is an example of how the norms of both race and gender are intertwined. Some of my participants argued that the normalization of white bodies and white beauty norms within discourses of professionalism automatically placed non-white bodies and beauty norms in the category of ‘other’ or ‘less/un-professional.’ Alona suggested, “In general there’s a certain image that a lot of our business leaders in the world are white, and I think there’s an issue with that because they’re not...they’re kind of out of touch. They’re in touch with their own white world and how that fits for them. So they make up dress codes based on these sort of interpretations.” Put differently, the normalization of whiteness and Western beauty norms as additional gendered expectations within discourses of ‘professionalism’ generally go unchallenged, and unquestioned by white workers and employers. Alona believed that many of the people who decide upon dress code rules are white, and therefore argued that their rules and expectations reflect the idealization of white beauty norms. Paula also noted that what is considered appropriate and professional for the workplace can greatly differ depending on geographical and cultural context. Employers’ evaluations about whether a person is dressed in ways that are (culturally) appropriate for work are informed by their assumptions and prejudices about all other perceived aspects of the person’s identity as well, such as their sexual orientation, gender performance, and age.

The importance to employers of assimilation to white beauty norms is implicit within many dress codes. Further, there are other cultural factors that can affect someone’s appearance at work which are typically invisible within dress codes. For instance, dress codes rarely outline how women who wear

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hijabs should present themselves at work. This was an example used by several participants. Alona elaborated:

I can't imagine how difficult it could be to go for a job interview and wear your hijab and worry that they're going to look at you right away and think no way am I going to hire you. Because the hijab wasn't even in the dress code for my job. There was no indication of how that would work. It didn't say like okay women tie your hair up this way, and oh if you wear a hijab make sure it's like black. Like there was never a conversation because it's never tailored to everyone.

The invisibility and lack of acknowledgement of cultural/religious garments creates the illusion (and possibly reality) that no women who wear hijabs, for example, have been hired at that workplace before.

Alona argued that equitable dress codes should outline these kinds of guidelines alongside other normalized expectations around hair and dress. On this topic, Jill stated, "I think they don't imagine anything outside of it [white beauty norms] and then they're like 'oh whoops I guess that doesn't really work for everybody.' I don't think a lot of people have had to think about it when they write the rule books." The process of creating dress codes rarely includes the imagining of racialized women as potential workers. In turn, a certain kind of gendered whiteness becomes the normalized priority for a person to assimilate to while 'other' workers become the afterthought. Much of the research that has been done on workplace dress codes has also addressed 'women' as a universal group, and discusses sexualization in the workplace as something that is experienced by 'women' in very similar ways. To focus on 'women's' experiences with sexualization through workplace dress codes, and not specify the complexities that exist across intersections of race within the larger category of 'women,' does not take into consideration that there may be multiple experiences, difficulties, and perspectives for various groups of women on this subject that cannot be generalized. Crenshaw (1989) argues that the term 'women' is meant to be representative of all women, but is usually used in the imagining of white women only. She suggests that this practice perpetuates the erasure of racialized women's experiences as invisible, or as an afterthought of inclusion.

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In another example, hair specifications for women within dress codes tend to communicate that the hair on someone's head needs to be 'well-kept' in order to appear 'professional.' However, 'well-kept' in many cases seems to be a synonym for 'white-person-looking-hair.' Alona had some valuable arguments on this topic:

It's your straight, simple, either tied up or like flat, straight hair. This is the ideal of professionalism that has been engrained in us. So when we look at these other people of colour and they don't have the conventional white person look, we want them to. So we expect them to straighten their hair. We expect them to do these sorts of things.

In comparison, cultural hairstyles such as dreadlocks, and box braids are often viewed as too 'extreme' or 'alternative' for the professional workplace. Alona expanded:

There's so much toxic learning that needs to be unlearned because when we look at things like dreadlocks, it's like the Rasta culture and we look at it like it's loosey-goosey and fun when it's just more practical for people of colour's hair. Like they have tight knit hair so it's suitable and much more manageable, and it's part of their culture. But if a black woman came in to apply for a job and she's got her dreads, and it doesn't matter not neat, tailored, and professional they look—even if she was wearing a top of the line suit—she is still going to be viewed as alternative...versus Cindy Loo Who off the street who is white with a conventional blonde bob.

Raegan thought that these 'alternative' hairstyles can also "impact where you can be suited to in society and how far you can go in terms of business." She described the experience of her relative who is black, and wears their hair in dreadlocks. Raegan's relative has consciously chosen to work in artistic jobs instead of the 'professional sphere' because their hairstyle is more accepted within that field of work. This example suggests that such racial prejudice and discrimination might affect employment opportunities and barriers for racialized workers in general, when professional norms align with gendered white beauty norms. This racist prejudice also intersects with classist discourses around the importance of demonstrating social status and prestige.

Raegan also recognized that her own experiences of dress codes and the larger workplace would probably be much different if she did not benefit from white privilege. She stated, "I am able to blend in as a white-identifying person so I don't struggle with that [discrimination based on race], but if I had a

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short afro on my head instead of a faux hawk, I think that would play a big role.” Raegan also argued that women’s body hair is perceived as ‘unprofessional. She said, “Using my own perspectives and people in my family...anyone in Middle Eastern countries, we’re a lot hairier. You can even consider hair grooming to be a factor in one’s appearance. Like we grow moustaches very well, our arms are quite furry, and those things are seen as like dirty or not as well-kept.” Here, Raegan identified that while there is more of an explicit expectation that the hair on women’s heads should be ‘well-kept,’ and that the grooming/removal of body hair is often an additional unspoken expectation of women in the workplace and in everyday life. This was a point that my participants who felt inadequate in discussing the topic of race, were more comfortable in echoing—with the grooming and removal of body hair being a gendered expectation of women of all races. However, Raegan was specifically suggesting that racialized women are held more accountable to this expectation of ‘professionalism’ than their white counterparts. The uneven expectation and enforcement of body hair removal thus highlights the intersection of race with gender as a distinguishing factor in women’s experiences of workplace dress codes.

Finally, participants suggested that there are prejudices in hiring practices that are concerned with gendered assumptions about workers’ race and culture, which are based on such generalizations and stereotypes. Morgan explained:

I think especially for South-Asian women, we are all kind of mistaken for Muslim women. So when we’re not wearing a headscarf, they are kind of like thrown off, and everyone just assumes we are from India so there’s all these assumptions, like that we are taught to cover our skin all the time.

Morgan argued that assumptions around South-Asian women being inherently more shy and submissive, and being taught to cover their skin, for example, affects hiring processes as these assumptions can influence employers’ opinions regarding who is best ‘suited’ for various jobs. Morgan’s argument is critically intersectional as she suggests that an employer might choose against hiring a South-Asian

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woman for a job which requires women to show more skin based on these gendered and racialized assumptions.

The majority of the women I interviewed self-identified as white (with the exception of one woman who identified as South-Asian, and one woman who identified as half-white, half Middle-Eastern descent) and admitted difficulty in thinking through intersections of race. They perceived their difficulty with the subject to be related to the largely white population in the Niagara region. Three of my white-identified participants felt that the intersection of race is something that they had not experienced and therefore could not speak on. Paula stated, “It’s not something I’ve ever talked about and to be honest a lot of the workplaces I’ve worked in, were primarily like white Euro background staff.” Interestingly, when I asked participants to consider how discourses of race may be implicit within dress codes, they had difficulty in thinking through the normalization of their own whiteness in comparison to the ‘othering’ of racialized bodies. Taylor admitted, “I’ve never had to think about it.” Taylor justified that she lives in an area which does not force her to think, question or challenge her own whiteness, along with other forms of covert racism within her workplace. These women were extremely aware of the gendered nature of the dress codes in their workplace, but had not thought much about race. They were unable to see and think across different forms of discrimination that they felt were more detached from their personal experience. This suggests that employers likely have difficulty in thinking across intersections of race as well, which could explain why most employers prioritize white gendered beauty norms in dress codes and ignore the possibility of racial and cultural differences in their imagining of professionalism. The three other women I spoke with did have some critical insight in this area. Morgan’s intersectional experiences as a racialized, queer woman were woven throughout our entire interview and she articulated several times that all of her identities intersect and are not mutually exclusive. Raegan, who identified herself as half-Middle Eastern said that most of her experiences

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reflect her white privilege as a fair-skinned person. Alona, who identifies as white, was still able to be quite critical of her own white privilege, and of racist hierarchies and norms within workplace discourses of professionalism, even though her working narratives did not reflect discrimination based on her race.

To summarize, the notions of professionalism, which are implicit within most dress codes, are also concerned with employees' ability to perform norms of whiteness, gender, and class. What is considered 'professional' is highly subjective, gendered, and influenced by class and culture in ways that can be discriminatory. As Onwauchi-Willig & Barnes (2007) strongly words, "There is an ever-present likelihood that some part of an employer's decision to control the appearance of employees is designed to mitigate or downplay identity differences that the employer may find objectionable due to negative, racialized, perceptions of particular styles" (p. 1). This suggests that racialized workers have yet another set of challenges that undermine their ability to wear themselves at work.

Other informal and implicit expectations from employers, coworkers, and customers.

In this section, I shift my focus away from deconstructing discourses of professionalism within workplace dress codes to look at informal and implicit cues from employers, colleagues, and customers that police workplace dress norms, such as: body language, staring, gossip, passive aggressive comments, questioning over appearance choices, and the presence/lack of positive reinforcement. These types of more subtle communications were identified by participants as important in shaping their experiences of dressing androgynously at work as a queer woman.

Some employers do not explicitly outline any dress code rules. In some cases, a simple direction is given, such as 'dress business casual' or 'dress professional.' With these kinds of vague dress codes, unspoken appearance standards are left for employees to interpret on their own. As Morgan stated about

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her job in an office, “I was never told what to wear, what to anything. I just kind of gaged the situation and would alter my appearance going in as a result.” Paula agreed that vague and unspoken dress codes are “harder to navigate because you have to be able to mimic what’s around you. Those environments are harder when it comes to wanting to dress androgynously sometimes because you are kind of making a statement, right? There are so many unwritten rules, and you just have to know them or be taught by somebody who already knows them.” Participants suggested that they have paid attention to informal cues such as employers’ and coworkers’ reactions to their appearance in order to figure out what was considered most acceptable to wear. Such reactions can be described as negative reinforcement and positive reinforcement.

Most of my participants agreed that they get negative attention (i.e. stares, judgement, and questions) for dressing ‘differently’ (androgynous), and more positive reinforcement for when they dress in more traditionally feminine attire. Morgan summarized the reactions she gets from others when she wears menswear:

I get that same kind of like negative reaction. Just kind of you know, like stares and things like that, and questions, like “oh I like your shirt,” but almost like wanting me to say more about it. I think the opposite side of that is when I present really feminine and wear a lot of makeup and stuff and they’ll be like “oh nice!”

I found that this point really resonated with my own experiences as well. It is not necessarily only the presence of negative reinforcement that deters someone from ‘wearing themselves,’ but the consistently positive reactions that occur when you do *not* wear yourself, for example, when you are being told you look great only when your makeup is done, and being primarily complimented on your appearance when you dress in a feminine manner. Raegan also described being frustrated by a general lack of positive reactions and reinforcement for her androgynous appearance. She described a memorable and “shocking” scenario where an elderly woman (customer) complimented her on her short haircut, and she was so happy “just to hear that from someone who is older and grew up in a different time.” Raegan was

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much more used to ‘older’ folks judging her and criticizing her for her androgynous appearance. Raegan elaborated, “I’m shocked when customers acknowledge my appearance in a positive way...it happens to the other girls all the time, but me rarely.” Overall, the positive and negative reinforcement—from employers, colleagues, and customers—of participants’ appearance in the workplace seems to be significant in shaping how comfortable they have felt in dressing androgynously.

Jill also described her experience with working at a call centre where her employers made arbitrary decisions around what was considered ‘acceptable,’ even though the job never required her to be visible to the customers or public. After getting management’s approval, Jill dyed her hair bright pink but was then told it was too extreme and she had to get rid of it immediately. Soon after, her employers made an official rule about which colours women could dye their hair. However, there were no rules about women’s hair length. So, Jill described, “I shaved my head and they didn’t like that either cause then I had a hairstyle that was typically assigned to males.” Her coworkers also teased her about her shaved head, and assumed that she was either dared to shave her head, or lost a bet. Jill’s coworkers made it clear to her that they could not believe a fully shaved head was a legitimate or desirable choice for her, or any woman to make. While at first there were no explicit rules around what she could do with her hair, Jill’s employers’ and coworkers’ reactions made it obvious to her that they did not approve, and that she was pushing unspoken gender boundaries.

The role of peers/coworkers seemed to be significant for each of my participants in shaping their experiences of workplace dress codes. Clearly, coworkers’ reactions to androgynous dress, and their attitudes about gender norms and sexuality can all act as the informal regulation of the status quo. My participants suggested that workplace gossip is a normalized part of work culture, through which workers’ appearances are frequent discussion topics. In our conversation, Taylor reflected upon a

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workplace dynamic where she felt at odds with her female coworkers because of the way she dressed, and felt that her coworkers primarily saw her as ‘different’ and ‘less of a woman.’ She explained:

I can think back to just a few years ago when I had a different position that required me to not wear the uniform and I had to wear my own clothes. I worked with, like, really girly girl women, and I remember getting a lot of flack from them because of how I dressed, and that was really uncomfortable.

In some cases, Jill’s coworkers explicitly voiced their disapproval, and in others she felt “that feeling of scrutiny when you walk in and you’re looked at to the top of your head and bottom of your feet.” Taylor believed that the differential treatment she got from her coworkers was a combination of her looking different from them, and not having stereotypically ‘feminine’ interests (i.e. makeup) that were related to dress and appearance. For example, her coworkers would want to shop for clothes online together during their breaks, which Taylor had no interest in participating in. As a result, Taylor felt alienated from her coworkers because she was not traditionally feminine like they were.

Overall, my participants agreed that dress codes can be easier to navigate when there are no written rules, because there can be a lot of flexibility and room for challenging informal and unspoken expectations. However, informal and implicit forms of regulation also allow for employers to engage in arbitrary decision-making (i.e. making new rules when it is convenient) as employees have nothing in writing to point to as backup. Further, the flexibility provided by an informal and less strict dress code, can still be difficult to navigate because there are no explicit rules to follow, bend, or break. As articulated by the women I spoke to, this leaves employees with the responsibility of interpreting what is expected of them on their own, as well as dealing with the many forms of informal regulations and cues they receive from employers, coworkers, and customers.

The conversations I had with my participants suggest that women who dress androgynously also experience ‘misgendering’ as part of these informal processes, as clothing can challenge and disrupt people’s normative and binary understandings of gender. To misgender someone is to refer to someone

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“using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, that does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify” (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). My participants suggested that they get misgendered because other people see men’s clothes and immediately assume that a man is (or should be) wearing them, especially if the woman also has short hair, which is read as masculine as well. Further, they express that androgynously-dressed women can “confuse” people and make people uncomfortable because they cannot identify the person’s gender at first—or maybe even second—glance. Encouraged I am sure by Western society’s pattern of categorizing almost everything by gender (i.e. clothes, toys, behaviours, and activities), people feel they need to be able to read, judge, and classify others, and therefore they feel uncomfortable when they are unsure of someone’s gender (Butler, 1990; Wood, 2012). In Western culture, one learns how to behave, speak and interact in ways that are shaped by this gender binary (Wood, 2012). Therefore, when someone’s gender is ambiguous, it perhaps makes others question how they should interact with them.

Jill discussed her experiences with being misgendered by her clients at work: “I guess if I really thought about it [her androgynous appearance], it probably challenges a lot of how other people see me. I’ve gotten responses like ‘are you supposed to be a guy or a girl?’ I guess it’s confusing, but for me it’s not confusing.” Jill described these statements from clients as coming from a place of curiosity, but also of entitlement. Many people believe that it is their right to know what gender someone identifies with, and that it is never an intrusive or unnecessary question to ask. Taylor also described her experiences with being misgendered in a workplace where all workers wear scrubs. In this job, where she worked with and took care of elderly clients, Taylor had multiple clients refuse to go to the bathroom with her around because they were convinced she was not a woman. She explained that “Initially it was really off-putting, and now I think it’s hilarious, right? Now I think okay, right on. That’s cool. I just try to respect where they are and I’ll try again the next day.” Taylor has developed coping mechanisms over

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time so that she can handle these scenarios with humour and patience. However, this is not true for everyone, nor should it be necessary for one to learn how to ‘handle’ these frustrating and upsetting situations with patience at all times. Taylor also brought up her experiences of being misgendered by strangers in bathrooms, stressing how significant memories of this issue have been for her. She stated, “Like the number of times I’ve had people tell me that I’m in the women’s bathroom, right? Like I know that, but they feel the need to tell me. I’m like great I’m in the right spot then.” Being confronted in women’s bathrooms about their gender identity was a shared experience among several of my participants. In these scenarios, the people who are doing the misgendering and confronting are implying that they know more about a person’s gender identity—and where they belong and do not belong—than the person in question does. These situations also reinforce Butler’s (1990) argument that certain performances of gender are reinforced as more legitimate and appropriate than others through daily, repetitive behaviours and norms.

Alona said that she has been misgendered in almost all of the jobs she has worked. She suggested that over time, she has become almost desensitized to the frequency of being misread as a man due to the combination of her androgynous clothing and short hair. At a desk job, Alona said it was common for customers to call her “sir for pretty much every occasion.” Importantly, she told me that she does not mind these incidences too much, as long as people are using “respectful terms.” Alona also described instances where she has been misgendered by her colleagues. When working as a supply teacher, Alona would have ‘first day of work’ interactions with colleagues and administrative staff who did not know anything about her. She described, “There’s kind of a look I get when I first go into an office and I’m like okay I’m here, I’m supplying. They kind of give me this look and they give me the once over and then they have to do the ‘hmmm...Alona?’ Because they’re not sure if I’m actually Alona or like Allan.”

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Those who most explicitly misgender Alona, and are the most vocal with their questions about her gender and appearance, are the children she works with. She explained:

Working at the school presents its own set of problems because a lot of the time I'm working with small children who instantaneously view me as a boy because I have short hair and I'm wearing clothes that daddy wears. Especially when you're a supply and you're going to new schools all the time, so these kids aren't familiar with you. And the first question, especially from grades three and down is "are you a boy or a girl?" So that's a conversation where I used to get kind of flushed and embarrassed. Now I'm like this child is genuinely not sure. I'm just gonna answer the question so I'm like "I'm a girl, but I get it, I have short hair. Why do you think I look like a boy? Well you dress like one. I'm like yeah but do I look good?" And half of those children say, "yeah you look good" and I'm like "thanks!"

In these descriptions of being misgendered at work, Alona acknowledged the frequency of children questioning her gender as a result of her androgynous appearance, and her consequent discomfort. Alona has learned to accept her young students' innocence and curiosities around her gender presentation, and also said that she has developed coping mechanisms (i.e. humour) to deal with being misgendered at work. However, having her gender questioned at multiple workplaces (and also outside of workplace scenarios) on a regular basis can be extremely frustrating for her, and reinforces her perception that the majority of society thinks she is performing her gender 'incorrectly.'

As explained through the experiences of the women I spoke with, incidences of misgendering both inside and outside of the workplace are not uncommon for queer women who dress androgynously. Several participants suggested that they have come to anticipate these incidences the more frequently that they happen. To be addressed with incorrect pronouns, or confronted about whether or not they are in the 'correct' bathroom on a regular basis can take an emotional toll on some individuals, and can negatively shape someone's experience of a workplace. Interestingly, participants have learned to navigate these issues in a variety of ways, such as through humour and/or education. It seems as though they engage in spontaneous impression management to minimize their internal feelings about being misgendered, and decide to instead present a response that reflects their 'socialized self' and does not

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further challenge the status quo. Overall, the misgendering of androgynously-dressed women by employers, colleagues, and customers functions to further (and informally) regulate and ‘police’ ‘normal,’ ‘appropriate,’ gender performances. In contrast, women who choose to dress traditionally feminine continue to be normalized and typically do not have their gender performances questioned.

The workplace as sex-neutral environment and the normalization of heterosexism.

This section has focused on the patterns and effects of formal and informal dress code expectations in terms of gender and also intersections between gender, class, and race. The conceptualization of the workplace as a sex-neutral environment is another example of formal, informal, and implicit expectations that emphasize gender and sexuality. For instance, in general, to be ‘professional’ implies that workers should not talk about their personal lives (i.e. romantic relationships), sex lives, or their sexuality in general. As Dellinger (2002) suggests, to ‘look professional’ is meant to signal “a split between work and home, work and play, work and individual personality” (p. 9). However, this expectation of workers being sex-neutral is not enforced equally. Butler (1990) would suggest that dominant workplace dynamics reflect the normalization and ‘invisibility’ of the heterosexual matrix; the seemingly natural and complimentary relationship between binary gender performance and heterosexuality. In this section, I discuss the normalization of heterosexism at work, and the hypocritical framing of non-heterosexuality as what is ‘deviant’ and ‘inappropriate.’ I also explore how the sexualization and objectification of women by employers contradicts this very notion of a sex-neutral workplace.

Heterosexuality is very visible within many workplaces through everyday language and behaviours. For instance, it is not uncommon for workers in heterosexual relationships to talk about their partners and use pronouns of the ‘opposite gender,’ to bring their partners to work socials, or to have

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pictures of their families on their desks. These displays and expressions of heterosexuality are considered ‘normal,’ and therefore are not challenged as things that would be inappropriate for the workplace. In contrast, these same everyday behaviors are sometimes policed by employers and coworkers as unacceptable for the workplace when they are engaged in by non-heterosexual employees. Dellinger (2002) supports this argument that a sex-neutral workplace is selectively applied to LGBTQ workers, and that “it is assumed that they bring sexuality into their workplace, as opposed to the workplace itself being (heterosexualized)” (p. 11). The ‘queerness’ and ‘otherness’ of LGBTQ workers is what is considered inappropriate, while the normalized presence of heterosexuality is mistaken as a sex ‘neutral’ environment. Consequently, queer workers are silenced as their lives and relationships are framed as ‘deviant,’ ‘taboo,’ and ‘inappropriate for work,’ while heterosexuality is relatively unquestioned as the ‘acceptable’ norm. Such heterosexism is well-documented (Bowring, 2009; Buddel, 2011; Ragins, Cornwell & Miller, 2003; Ryan-Flood, 2004; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Waldo, 1999; Willis, 2009). LGBTQ participants in a variety of studies also report a desire to be open about their sexual orientation in their work life rather than self-editing to hide their sexual orientation (i.e. changing pronouns of partner) (Bowring & Brewis, 2009; Brooks & Edwards, 2009; Ragins, Cornwell, & Miller, 2003; Ryan-Flood, 2004).

Two of my participants, Alona and Paula, had worked as primary school teachers and shared many stories with me that spoke to the double standard of heterosexism in their workplaces. Alona explained that as a teacher, “you’re not really supposed to talk about your personal life, and you should put emphasis on the child. But every single teacher in this school has a picture of their family on their desk, and they reference them often.” Alona had an experience where she got in trouble from her employers for sharing her queer identity with a student who directly asked her if she was gay, after confiding in Alona that she was also gay. Alona believed that this student felt confident enough to ask

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this because her androgynous appearance aligns with stereotypes of gay women, and so the student likely assumed Alona's answer to her question. Alona answered her student's prompt honestly, but felt that this then hindered her ability to get further work from that employer. She described:

I was suddenly pulled into a meeting with my union rep and everyone from HR. I was completely thrown under the bus, and they were like "oh you can't talk about that kind of stuff with kids." In that moment, and for the next few months I was very aware that I was queer. And obviously I'm always aware that I'm queer, but in that particular scenario I thought to myself, does this hinder me from getting any more positions with this board? And I feel like to some extent it did because I have not since gotten a call for one of those positions.

Heterosexual workers are privileged in the sense that if their sexuality is questioned, answering honestly does not usually put their jobs at risk, or affect their likelihood for promotion. Alona did not feel that HR could protect her in this situation, and felt that she was particularly vulnerable as a queer worker because she did not have any long-term contract or job security. Paula agreed that "teaching is such a closeted job," and that there is a heterosexist double standard within teaching environments. She explained:

You're not supposed to talk about your personal life even though every straight teacher is like "me and my wife did this this weekend"—kind of thing. I for sure did not meet like any queer teachers in both the schools I did a student placement with. Like at least very privately queer, but not very out or vocal about themselves. So there's almost like a culture of ignorance, like they just don't even talk about it.

As a result, Paula chose to not be open with her queer identity in her teaching jobs. She anticipated that she will continue to be cautious with her disclosure at work until she has a position with more job security and protections. Paula also suggested that queer identities, and sexuality, are socially constructed as inappropriate and taboo for children specifically, which makes teaching environments with young kids even more difficult to navigate as a queer teacher. She stated:

It's all about a hierarchy of beliefs, and whose beliefs are the most important. It's all the stakeholders, like the parents, the communities as a whole, Canada as a whole, like how are we teaching our children? As soon as there's children involved it's like your dating life, your social life, your values, are all under more of a microscope than other people's, because people will talk about that teacher that's spewing beliefs that are too liberal, or ideas that are too radical.

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Children are viewed as in need of protection from explicit discussions of sexuality in general, but especially from forms of sexuality which deviate from the norm (i.e. queerness). In this conversation, Paula also made references to how controversial it has been to get queerness represented in any classroom curricula, e.g. in lessons on healthy relationships, diverse families, and sex-ed.

Even though someone's sexuality is supposed to be kept separate from the workplace, women are often objectified and sexualized through dress expectations, as I have discussed earlier in this thesis. Gendered dress codes focus on controlling women's appearances in ways that emphasize the importance of them being 'attractive' (Dellinger & Williams, 1997; Hall, 1993; Rubenstein, 2018; Skidmore, 1999). Dress codes which frame women's attractiveness at work as a priority that is equal to or more than that of their work performance, objectify women, and indicate that women are primarily valued as sexual objects/beings that can coerce heterosexual male consumers to spend more money.

Several of my participants argued that some employers hire their employees based on a subjective level of 'attractiveness' that they perceive will be appealing to a consumer base—which is assumed to be primarily a male (heterosexual) gaze. Interestingly, three women used the example of Hooters—a well-known sports bar/restaurant that hires 'sexy women' to serve food and drinks in skin-tight tank tops and shorts—to discuss this topic. Hooters is open about sexualizing the women who apply to work there for the purpose of making money. The employers require women to submit a headshot upfront, and as Raegan puts it, it is well-known that "the females have this direct purpose. You are purposely hired to sell your body to attract the male gaze into here so they can buy our shitty chicken wings and cheap warm beer." The phrasing of her point was humorous, but accurate in that women are hired primarily according to their level of perceived attractiveness. My participants implied that most other restaurants and bars have the same intentions, but are just less obvious about it. Raegan had even witnessed her managers using Facebook profiles as a screening tool for applicants' appearances. She

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told me, “I’ve overheard my managers [say that] upon receiving a resume, they’ll do a Facebook search of them based on appearance before they even call for an interview to see if they’ll match. There’s very dirty tricks that are used behind the scenes in terms of hiring practices and who even gets a call.”

My participants argued that employers play a significant role in normalizing and encouraging women to prioritize their attractiveness over comfort and practicality at work in order to make money and make a living. Morgan stated:

I always think about that, especially if it’s a bigger chain or something...like how this organization is doing the same thing everywhere and making it okay. Normalizing this kind of dress or these kinds of situations, right? Where women have to literally maybe be uncomfortable, right, in what they’re wearing in order to make money and make a living. I definitely always think beyond that and think about how that organization is kind of playing into things like stereotypes and objectifying women because it’s the easiest thing to do, right?

Morgan continued to argue that requiring employees to wear skirts, dresses, and heels at work cannot be justified functionally beyond the objectification of women for profit. Morgan also viewed the issue of employers’ control over how much of a woman’s skin is showing (or not showing) as “invading someone’s personal choice.” My participants all agreed that dress codes generally reflect the employer’s values, and can be indicators of the ways in which employers view women, and their broader opinions around gender, sexuality, race, class, and professionalism. Taylor reflected on a time when she left a chain restaurant once she saw and confirmed (by asking one of the servers) that the women working there were required to wear short black skirts to work. She left the restaurant because she felt that the dress code communicated the heterosexist values of the employers, and did not want to be a consumer of their business. Taylor told me, “They must think that it’s appropriate to get women to be scantily clad at a workplace. It makes me feel like they don’t value women, right? And women are just visual objects to be seen. I don’t want to be consuming that or supporting a business that forces their workers at work to dress that way.” Importantly, Taylor was not placing shame or blame on the women who wear those skirts to work, but rather she was critical of employers who make wearing skirts mandatory. Taylor’s

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experience suggests that dress codes which require women to wear form-fitting and revealing clothing can lead to a loss of business from critical consumers, and a tense relationship with their employees who are not comfortable with the hyper-feminine or hyper-sexual appearance expectations.

These examples clearly suggest that workplaces are not sex-neutral environments. It is contradictory that many employers expect a sex-neutral workplace, when the environment is actually very much about women being presented as sexy. Organizations play into stereotypes and objectify women because it is the normalized default, and perhaps believe that it is the easiest way for a business to make a profit. These discourses also continue to normalize heterosexism in the workplace by assuming a heterosexual male gaze as the main customer demographic. These assumptions are normalized by discourses which problematically conceptualize women as always enjoying and embracing feminine beauty norms. Women who dress androgynously, and do not primarily enjoy or embrace feminine beauty norms, in itself, challenge this.

One participant, Morgan, was also critical of the intersection of race with the sexualization of women through dress codes. She touched upon her own experience as a South-Asian woman, and discourses of Orientalism, which focus on “Western ways of perceiving, understanding, and representing the “Orient” that are founded upon the material reality of unequal power relations between the West and the East and upon the belief in the essential difference between the two” (Yoshihara, 2002, p. 3). Yoshihara (2002) argues that this difference often associates “the powerful West” with “virile masculinity, and the subordinate East with passive femininity” (p. 4). Asian women are assumed to be more submissive, less assertive with their sexuality, and are taken less seriously than white women (Yoshihara, 2002). Kim and Chung (2005) argue that this stereotype of Asian women has become a normalized, and commodified image that is used by marketing and advertising campaigns to sell

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products. Morgan believed that this stereotype of Asian women is perpetuated by dress codes which sexualize Asian women in the service sector. She explained:

There's this assumption that South-Asian women and Asian women are very submissive, very shy, and don't talk to a lot of people. And with a serving job I think women are often told to dress a certain way or act a certain way with certain customers in order to make more money and get more tips, that sort of thing. So when you get someone who is stereotypically fetishized for being submissive, who is also wearing a low cut shirt, who is also in heels, who is also serving you—literally serving you, it's kind of hard not to go there. And this is just a reinforcing of racist stereotypes, you know what I mean?

Morgan argued that race and gender interweave to contextualize a person's performativity, highlighting again the necessity for an intersectional approach to understanding and analyzing experiences of dress codes.

To summarize, the workplace is often conceptualized by employers, employees and customers as a sex-neutral environment. This argument is often unevenly used as a justification to delegitimize queer workers' identities while heterosexuality remains a normalized dynamic of workplace culture. My participants also believed that many employers—whether consciously or not—rely on the sexualization and objectification of women through workplace dress codes as a strategy to increase their profit margins. My participants were not only critical of dress codes and their implicit discourses of gender, sexuality, race, and class, but of the employers who create and enforce them. To be sexualized and hyper feminized at their place of work, for the purpose of being viewed as sexy to heterosexual, male consumers, directly contradicts the conceptualization of the workplace as a sex-neutral environment.

Visibility to public.

A less discussed, but still significant theme that came up within my interviews, is that my participants felt their androgynous appearance—in combination with other factors such as sexual orientation, and race—potentially affects how 'suitable' they are perceived to be to be working with—

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and to be seen by—the public. While employers have not explicitly stated this to my participants, they have still gotten the impression that their androgynous appearance, queerness, and/or race have impacted the organization of their workplace, and/ or their opportunities.

In some of their working experiences, my participants got the impression that women who appear more feminine, and dress in ‘women’s clothing,’ are considered to be more suitable for public/customer service work. In a sales/retail environment, Taylor noticed that her and her female coworker—who both wore the ‘men’s uniform’—happened to be hired to work in the back of the store while their coworkers—who dressed traditionally feminine—happened to be placed at the front of the store where most interactions with customers were handled. Taylor described that “there was a divide between the front and the back, right? So the front, the women who dealt with more of the customers who came into the store and stuff, they wore skirts with like the girlier tops.” Raegan also felt that her androgynous appearance was a consistent barrier for her in terms of getting promoted to a ‘front of house’ position in the restaurant she worked in for several years. Typically, many years of experience in a workplace qualify people to be great candidates for promotion, especially in the restaurant business where the turnover rates of employees are much higher than in other jobs due to the precarious nature of the service sector (Stanford, 2008). She had to “fight” with her bosses about the promotion for over a year, and felt that she only got the opportunity in the end because she had been working there for a while already and had a certain level of pre-existing respect from her coworkers. Raegan explained:

It took me a year of constant fighting to get the position at all. I wasn’t told why, so I can only assume based on what I knew that how I dressed was a factor, and because I was only seen in the kitchen with short hair and no makeup or anything that they just saw me as someone that wasn’t suited to be seen by the public.

When Raegan was finally given the opportunity to work in the front of the house, she made an effort to subscribe to more traditionally feminine appearance norms, such as wearing a full face of makeup and more form-fitting bottoms. Raegan described the shocked reactions of her workmates during her first

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shift for the new position: “Until I had my very first shift in the front of the house I swear my managers’ and the servers’ jaws dropped because they didn’t think it was possible for me to even look professional in a sense and to be in a place where I greet our guests that come in.”

Morgan was also critical of the division and organization of employees along lines of race within one of her working experiences. She noticed that her white coworkers had more face-time in general with the public, and that the employees who worked in the upstairs department and had more contact with the public, happened to all be white or lighter in complexion, and also all dressed in ways that coincided with traditional gender norms. Morgan identified this issue as colourism. Colourism refers to “prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group” (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). Morgan described that “even the way the office was structured you could see the kind of difference, you know. I think a lot of people argue it just happened to be this way, but most of the people of colour were in the back room where people couldn’t see us.” She explained that her race can intersect with her androgyny to make her seem like less of a suitable and approachable person to be dealing with the public in the eyes of her employers. In Morgan’s words:

It ends up also affecting the work that I do in that you know, if I am wearing men’s clothing one day and I come in and it’s very obvious that I’m wearing men’s clothing, maybe they won’t get me to talk to as many people because it’s pushing the norm a little bit, and I’m already a person of colour.

Here, Morgan’s positioning as a racialized, queer, androgynous woman all intersect to inform her understanding of the differential treatment she experiences at work.

These stories are clear examples of the rigid gendered and racialized expectations which exist in many workplaces, which not only shape people’s ideas around who is most suited to do what forms of labour, but also who is most suited to be seen by the public as employers engage in a problematic, normalizing form of impression management. These practices perpetuate the normalization of white

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femininity as more ‘acceptable,’ ‘professional,’ and ‘attractive,’ than other performances of gender and self, and speak to which bodies are deemed by society as most ‘appropriate’ to be seen.

Overall, the women I spoke to described many issues that they have with getting, having, and keeping a job. There are multiple employment moments in which my participants have felt significant pressure to dress femininely in order to meet the demands and expectations of their employers, colleagues, and even customers. Participants’ awareness around needing to present their gender, race, and class in a particular way in order to be perceived favourably suggests the relevance of Butler’s arguments around performative, shifting notions of gender and ‘self’ as they reflect the broader discourses and systems of power that they are embedded in. It also makes sense, as Goffman argues, that workplaces are conceptualized as the ‘front stage’ in which people are more conscious of ‘playing the role’ as an employee. It is these performances of the ‘socialized self’ that workers present to employers in interviews, which become normalized through daily repetitive interactions and practices (Goffman, 1959). Participants worry that disrupting these normalized patterns can put their jobs at risk, threaten their workplace relationships, and affect the likelihood of them being hired for jobs in the first place.

Feeling/ Effects/ Othering

This final section of Chapter Five expands on the workplace challenges facing queer women who dress androgynously, and explores the consequences of these challenges in terms of how they deal with them. All participants at some point have felt ‘other’ in their workplace and have been conscious about being a minority that ‘looks different,’ and therefore being judged as ‘different.’ They were able to identify with feelings of inner turmoil and otherness, and agreed that a lot of energy goes into continuous decision-making around impression management. In this section I discuss themes of inner turmoil, thinking energy and decision-making processes, and otherness.

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Inner turmoil and worry.

Some of the women I interviewed expressed an underlying concern and worry about never knowing who has prejudice towards them, and a consistent anticipation that others will have negative opinions or perceptions of them because of their androgynous appearance and/or queer identity. The general concern of these women is that “sometimes people tolerate because they have to, not because they want to” (Yoshini, 2014, p. 18). Alona expressed feelings of uncertainty and worry around not knowing if the verbal and body language cues from her coworkers and the broader public are responses to her androgynous appearance, or to other factors. Feeling like she has been looked carefully up and down every time she enters a new school as a supply teacher, Alona was uncertain of the extent to which this has to do with her being a stranger to them and/or her androgynous appearance. Alona has never been directly asked to wear a skirt or dress to work, and has always had the option of wearing pants. Since she has not been certain of the reasons behind her colleagues’ differential treatment, Alona explained that the alienation she feels from her coworkers, is “more like an internalized feeling.”

As they are aware that their androgynous appearances do not align with dominant discourses of gendered, Western beauty norms, some of my participants said that feeling ‘different’ has negatively affected their self-esteem. Importantly, as Jill noted, there are challenges with both ‘dressing the part’ and ‘wearing herself,’ but for very different reasons. Since there is also a societal pressure felt by participants to dress femininely and look a certain way, they have tolerated feelings of discomfort to fit in, to not challenge, to make money, and to ultimately prioritize making everyone else around them more comfortable. Jill explained that “it was super uncomfortable, but you just sort of take it. So is standing on your feet, right?” This suggests that some women put up with all of their negative feelings about being feminized and sexualized through workplace dress codes, in order to avoid the negative

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backlash for failing to assimilate to workplace appearance norms. The ‘issue’ of looking ‘different’ can be an even more significant stressor for participants who know that their work day is already going to be stressful for other reasons. For instance, Jill stated that dressing androgynously can be “too much pressure on top of everything else.” She continued to explain that if a person is working a job “where performance anxiety is part of it, it’s like the last thing you want to think about is anything but getting through what you have to do.”

In the end, however, Jill preferred to dress androgynously. She stated, “I think I’m more aware now of people noticing me looking androgynous, but it doesn’t make me as uncomfortable. Whereas on other days [when dressing the part] I’m just too busy being stressed out about it. It doesn’t feel accurate so you’re always trying to sort that out.” When Jill gets stared at for looking androgynous (and standing out as ‘different’ from other women), she anticipates that she is at least being perceived and judged for ‘who she is.’ In comparison, Jill has found that she is also stared at a lot when she dresses more femininely for a workplace, and is uncomfortable with this because she is being misjudged—as her appearance in this case does not reflect how she sees herself. In these scenarios, Jill explained that she wishes she could tell the people who try and ‘figure her out’ when she is in feminine clothing that she changes as soon as she gets home from work. My conversation with Jill illustrates her desire to be understood for ‘who she is,’ even if people perceive ‘who she is’ to be unprofessional, and problematic. Jill’s understanding of her sense of self resonates strongly with Goffman’s analysis (1959), as she described a clear distinction between when she is ‘wearing herself’ or ‘dressing the part,’ and also described concerns about being misjudged, reflecting ‘role distance.’

My participants shared complex feelings and thought processes about being treated differently by others, which can lead to uncertainty about their workplace relationships, and stress around why they are being treated differently or negatively in the first place. The women I spoke with had sometimes

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internalized the negative responses they had gotten to their androgynous appearances, and then felt negatively about themselves as well. Therefore, they are left navigating these feelings of uncertainty and isolation, in isolation.

Thinking energy and decision-making processes.

While the previous section explored the inner turmoil of participants as they have navigated through workplace settings and challenges, this section focuses on the amount of thinking and decision-making that participants have engaged in in order to work through this turmoil on a regular basis and to decide how to best perform their ‘self’ at work. Participants of my study argued that they spend significantly more energy than their heterosexual counterparts on trying to decide what to wear. They suggest that they may sometimes change their clothing on a day-to-day or hour-to-hour basis. I asked my participants why their decision-making processes might be different from those of heterosexual women who dress androgynously. The disclosure of a queer identity was identified as a key difference between the two demographics. Paula answered:

If you’re a heterosexual woman and you prefer to dress more masculine, you’re not having those conversations about like are people going to know this aspect of my personality [queer identity], because you don’t have that aspect of your personality. Like “I don’t have a queer haircut, I just have my hair this way and it doesn’t have anything to do with my identity.”

In navigating decisions around what to wear, participants think about their context and the people they are coming into contact with during their day. While one of my participants said that she feels confident now in wearing whatever she wants and when she wants, the rest of my participants have considered the following questions on a regular basis: What is the safest for me to wear? What will be considered the most appropriate for my workplace? Will ‘wearing myself’ affect how others treat me? How ‘visibly queer’ do I want to be at work? Who am I going to see today and how open am I with these people about my sexual orientation? Will I be more comfortable ‘fitting in,’ or looking ‘different’? For my

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participants, workplaces have been much more enjoyable when these questions have held less weight, so that they can be more relaxed, confident, and less concerned about the potential backlash of ‘wearing themselves.’ Instead, they could just focus on their work.

The thought processes that my participants weigh when making decisions have been different even, they think, from those of queer women who do not dress androgynously. Paula shared:

You just have to make so many more decisions than other people have to make, and you have to think about so many more opinions and factors with what clothes go on your body than someone who doesn't feel natural dressing that way, because there are people who just naturally appeal to the clothing that's been assigned to their gender, and they don't even have to think about that. You have to think about overall societal values of what's okay and what's not okay, and you're having all of these internal conversations that nobody even knows that you're having necessarily. Are people saying things behind my back? Is there a bias in hiring? Or is there a bias that people are treating me differently? There's not explicitly saying I don't like the way you dress, but are they treating me differently because of that? Even if maybe they aren't thinking about me at all.

While some of Paula's statements may be applicable to queer women as a general group, she identified that queer women who are comfortable with dressing in primarily feminine attire in day-to-day life and at work would not experience dress codes in the same ways as women who dress androgynously. While most queer women might share concerns about being sexualized through dress codes, they are not necessarily going to be as concerned with being expected to—or being required to—wear women's clothing at work, or even have the gendered dress code binary on their radar as an important issue.

Overall, the women I spoke with have spent a lot of extra energy on these decision-making processes in order to simultaneously manage their own comfort, the comfort of others, the messages that their appearance sends to others, and their safety. As Jill described, “It takes a lot out of your daily thinking so that you can just do your job better. Like I think it does affect people's ability to do their job really well—to have to be distracted by feeling uncomfortable or wondering how they're presenting themselves or trying to present their body a certain way because the clothing they're wearing sucks.”. Further, queer women usually have various levels of openness with their colleagues (i.e. they could be

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‘out’ to some colleagues, but not others) which they must consider (Buddel, 2011). If dress codes were less focused on discourses of professionalism that are highly informed by binary notions of gender, “the energy invested in fracturing their identities would be much better spent doing their jobs” (Bowring & Brewis, 2009, p. 369). I will explore the issue of managing queer visibility, and the strategies used to navigate all of these decision-making processes in more depth in Chapter Six

Otherness.

In every interview I conducted, a theme of ‘otherness’ was shared by each participant. The general lack of other androgynous women and other queer people in their workplaces led to feelings of isolation, as they became hyper-aware that they were a visible minority in their workplace, and were likely viewed as ‘different’ by other people. Dress codes play a significant role in reproducing androgynous women as ‘other’ in the workplace while women who dress more traditionally feminine are positively reinforced as normal, professional, and attractive by dress code rules and expectations. Dress codes which enforce a gender binary thus highlight the ‘otherness’ of women who do not neatly fit into the gendered categories outlined by employers and public discourse. Alona argued, “I understand why dress codes are a thing because it’s supposed to set you apart and make you part of a team. I get that, but I think in certain scenarios it forces me to have that otherness, and that otherness is an inescapable thing for me as an androgynous person.” Participants also suggested that their peers at work ‘police’ their appearances, which can make them feel alienated from their colleagues. When Taylor talked about being criticized by very feminine female colleagues at work for being less “dressed up” than them, she said, “it felt awful. It felt like I was in some prospect, more alien. And I already felt alien from them for many other reasons, right? Like in terms of views on the world, and the importance of helping others. Like our perspectives are so very different, and then the dress made it even worse” Other queer, androgynous-

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dressing women have felt similarly isolated from their peers because of the way that they dress (see Bowring and Brewis, 2009).

Even shopping for workplace attire in men's clothing departments was identified by participants as an 'othering' experience as it reminded them that they are challenging the gender binary. For example, Jill has often forgotten that the clothing she wears and buys for work is typically assigned to the 'opposite gender,' until she has gone shopping and has seen the clothing physically divided into gendered sections. Paula also stated that she dreads shopping for work clothes in the men's department because the clothing store employees often treat her differently in comparison to if she were to be shopping in the women's department. In the women's department, Paula argued, employees greet her, offer promotions, and are constantly asking if she needs help. In contrast, Paula said that her presence in the men's department is usually ignored by employees. She explained further:

It's not fun. You just feel like you're walking in the dark almost... You don't have anyone helping you and like that makes going to those formal events or formal workplaces all that much more stressful because you're like I have to do this all by myself. Or I cop out and get a dress because I still feel somewhat comfortable doing so.

Put differently, Paula felt that she has not been treated like a regular customer because she crosses gendered boundaries. As a result, Paula's shopping experiences for menswear have been associated with negativity, and feelings of 'otherness'—to the point where she has worn a dress that she is much less comfortable in, to avoid the awkwardness of her feeling 'invisible' as a customer when her interests have not aligned with normative, gendered, consumer practices.

Another woman I spoke with described navigating feelings of 'otherness' at multiple intersections of her life. Morgan argued that her queerness is not necessarily accepted in her cultural community, and that her brownness is not always accepted in her queer community. For her, some form of erasure and otherness—whether it be along lines of race, culture, gender, or sexuality—is always present. She explained:

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I've been thinking a lot about how we negotiate our identities for the comfort of our communities. I dress differently when I'm at home with my parents, when I'm in a straight relationship, and when I'm in a queer relationship...So when I think of dressing flat, I think of that as the safest option.

Being a racialized woman has impacted how Morgan makes decisions around her appearance and clothing, because she is aware that she is already visibly 'other' as a South Asian woman before she even gets dressed for work. Therefore, she explained that has been more conscious of presenting herself in ways that assimilate to white, Western, beauty norms in situations where she knew she would likely be one of the only people of colour. Morgan's statements suggest her awareness of people's "range of acceptance," as she feels she needs to minimize either the visibility of her queer identity or cultural identity to be accepted by either community (Belleza Gino & Keinan, 2014). However, Morgan also stated that she experiences privilege as someone with a more ambiguous racial identity because there are not as many negative connotations or stereotypes with being South-Asian in comparison to more hyper-visible representations (i.e. of black women). She argued:

I think it ties into a colourism issue because you're kind of seen as...okay you're a person of colour, but you're not black, you're not Indigenous, you're not Muslim, so you know, in a sense more privilege comes with that, like when we're thinking of it as a spectrum. So I think I have a bit more freedom in what I can wear, and how I can perform my gender through clothing and things like that.

In spite of this privilege, Morgan expressed overall that her experiences of feeling 'othered' in the workplace are intersectional, and that she has often sacrificed her own comfort for the comfort of her communities.

Feelings of worry, uncertainty, exclusion, and 'otherness' emerged as dominant patterns across the story-telling of my participants, as effects of the workplace challenges (i.e. discourses of professionalism, interview expectations, binary uniforms) faced by queer women who dress androgynously. In the next Chapter, I explore the strategies and tools that my participants use to cope with these feelings.

Chapter Six: Data Analysis: Things That Help

The previous chapter worked to describe and analyze participants' experiences with workplace settings and dress codes. This chapter explores the things that help participants to navigate the challenges and feelings associated with workplace settings and dress codes. Goffman's concept of impression management is useful in explaining the thought-processes associated with these strategies. I also explore how my participants describe and make sense of their relationships with the clothing they wear to work in ways that are informed by my theoretical perspective. Overall, participants suggested that having more financial and emotional security, peer support, and a diverse and accepting work environment can make a positive and significant difference in their experiences.

Strategies, Tools, Coping

As articulated in the previous chapter, my participants expressed that it is important to them to be able to 'wear themselves' than to 'dress the part.' However, clearly many workplaces do not prioritize their employees' self-expression, and are more concerned with the overall aesthetic and values that their employees portray through their dress. In this section, I begin by discussing the ways in which dressing for work has been experienced as wearing a 'costume' or 'drag' by my participants, connecting to Goffman's concepts of role distance and role embracement. Next, I discuss the significant theme of impression management as my participants try to navigate the risks associated with dressing androgynously at work, and being read immediately as queer. Finally, I explore the very detailed decision-making processes involved with impression management, and the significant role that queer visibility (and the desire to pass as straight) has in making all of those decisions.

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Dress codes as ‘costumes’: role distance and role embracement.

My participants described their relationships with the clothes they wear to work in multiple ways. While dress codes may sometimes be rigid in terms of comfort and options, some of my participants have managed this by perceiving their work clothes as primarily performative. Put differently, some participants have been comfortable with not always ‘wearing themselves’ in the workplace, and have viewed their workplace dress as just another part of their workplace performance, and another version of themselves. For example, Morgan explained that she is content with performing her gender and ‘self’ according to various shifting contexts, and she rejects the notion that this means she has a lack of self or identity. Morgan argued, “It’s all part of that spectrum, and because I’m more diverse in terms of gender presentation and stuff, I think that’s all different parts of me and that’s okay with me. It’s not me being confused or lost.” She expressed that she enjoys the flexibility of the clothing she owns, because she can adapt to the various expectations people have of her within her multiple communities. Morgan expanded, “When I look at my closet...such a range of clothing that’s there. I think those are the things that I consider to be costumes, and depending on where I’m going and what I’m doing I need to make sure I have the right costume, right? And sometimes that can change three or four times in a day.” Here, Morgan also emphasized that clothing can be a tool for her to navigate people’s various expectations of her which change multiple times throughout one day, given different workplaces, settings, and people. Morgan seems to have a sense of herself as more shifting and fluid, which has allowed her to think about dressing as something that similarly shifts by context rather than it being an experience of presenting a false sense of self. While multiple ‘costumes’ may be enjoyable, comfortable, and primarily performative for Morgan, she still suggested that some of these workplace performances feel sincerer to her sense of self. This notion connects Morgan’s perspectives to Goffman’s (1959), as she touches upon his concepts of role embracement and role distance.

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In contrast to Morgan, Taylor has found clothing to be a protective front that can help her navigate feelings of difference as an androgynous queer woman in the workplace. She worked at a job in which workers were required to wear a standardized uniform (i.e. scrubs), and described the dress code positively as a form of armour, or a boundary between her work life and out-of-work life:

I like it actually, because I feel like I perform at work, and that work is just a small part of who I am. I like my job, but it really emotionally can be quite taxing and so partly when I put on my uniform it's like it's my armour. And then when I get home and I can take it off, then it's like a clear delineation of like now I'm done work and the armour can come off and I can relax...It's just another version of me, and it formally sets a boundary.

Taylor's understandings resonate with Goffman's analysis of front and back stage self-presentation, as she described her clothing as a public face/armour for 'front stage' performances which is then taken down or off at the end of the day when she is 'backstage.' It is also likely that Taylor had positive experiences with this particular uniform because scrubs are somewhat gender neutral.

The women I interviewed suggested that gendered, rigid dress codes often required them to dress and perform their self in particular ways in order to be socially acceptable. However, they did not perceive their appearance to be accurate or consistent with their sense of self. To connect further to Goffman's conceptualization of 'role distance,' "clothing that is too big, too tight-fitting, too small" prevents people from feeling 'whole,' and at ease, and can give the person a sense of insignificance because it just does not feel right (Rubenstein, 2018, p. 8). For instance, Jill explained: "In wearing really feminine clothing, or even sometimes in wearing really masculine clothing, I feel more like it's Halloween I guess. Like it's a costume. It's not necessarily bad, but it's certainly a bit detached from who I am and how I would normally present myself." While Taylor found comfort in wearing scrubs to work, she also expressed that she would have a lot of difficulty if she were working a job in which she was required to wear tight fitting, feminine clothing. She said, "I don't think I could do it actually. I'd feel like I was in drag." In this context, Taylor seemed to be using the term 'drag' to express how

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uncomfortable and ‘not herself’ she would feel if she were required to wear womenswear to work. ‘Drag’ implies impersonation, and taking on a persona. As articulated in my literature review, Dellinger (2002) argues that many workers engage in “business drag,” in which workers feel their workplace uniform or appearance does not reflect the way in which they would typically present themselves in other parts of their lives (p. 13). The concept of role distance was very relevant for both Taylor and Jill’s stories. Goffman’s concepts of role distance and role embracement are useful in thinking about how connected someone feels to their workplace performance, and the synergy between their sense of self, and the messages that they believe their clothing is communicating to others.

The word choices of ‘Halloween costumes,’ and ‘drag,’ suggest that some queer women who dress androgynously have felt disconnected from their workplace performances due to dress codes which prevent them from expressing their sense of self at work. Participants also suggested that they have chosen between various forms of costuming, according to shifting contexts, which they evaluate through consistent decision-making processes and navigate with impression management strategies. I was interested in whether participants’ understandings of the self and how they manage workplace dress would resonate more with Goffman or Butler’s approaches for thinking about the self. For some, Goffman’s concepts such as impression management and role distance resonated very well, implying a self-conscious understanding of themselves as sometimes wearing a costume that was different from how they generally see themselves. Others seemed to understand their self as something more fluid and embedded in context, thus seeming to understand themselves in ways that better resonated with Butler.

Tension: fitting in versus standing out.

In addition to the tension present within some of my participants’ understandings of the self in relation to workplace performances, I have also identified a tension within participants’ thought

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processes around navigating these performances. In explaining their decision-making processes for when getting dressed for work, the women I interviewed expressed conflicting desires to want to fit in and to stand out. Sometimes, my participants have enjoyed standing out as an androgynous person, and as a visibly queer person. They have embraced and enjoyed being different in many contexts of their lives. However, they also acknowledged that being visibly different can result in negativity, such as discrimination, being stared at, judged, and associated with negative queer stereotypes. When choosing how to present themselves in the world, most of my participants suggested that they have weighed these pros and cons of fitting in and standing out in order to decide which performances are the most comfortable, and safe for them. Alona explained, “I like the pros of being able to teach people to be a little bit more open minded, but on the other end of things I don’t always want to be that person because you risk the backlash of it.” Alona has had inner conflict over this issue, between the choices of conforming to women’s appearance norms and feeling safer, versus taking a risk by ‘wearing herself’ in order to feel good about herself at work, and risk the negative backlash. She expanded, “It’s a pro and a con though, because on one hand I don’t necessarily want to be ousted when I’m out places because you don’t know how people will react to that because you never want to put yourself into a risky situation, but on the other hand, I kind of like being different.” Here, concerns about homophobia and prejudice towards non-normative expressions of gender were identified again as a part of these decision-making processes.

Importantly, participants have consistently chosen between fitting in and standing out according to each situation and context that they have been in. As Taylor described, she has navigated this tension on a continuous basis depending on “who is around, how I’m feeling and what kind of day I’m having.” Therefore, decisions around whether or not to ‘wear themselves’ can also be based on whether the person feels mentally and emotionally prepared to deal with any backlash or confrontation that may

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arise around their androgynous appearance and/or queer identity in the workplace. As Pratt and Rafaeli (1997) argue, workers are likely to experience a tension between needing to belong, and needing to express their own individuality. The notion of ‘individuality’ in itself comes back to a theoretical argument which suggests a distinct, stable sense of self that can be expressed. Participants draw on their sense of individuality to navigate these decision-making processes around whether or not they feel they can ‘wear themselves’ by engaging in repetitive impression management strategies according to context.

Impression management.

A useful concept to describe the strategies used by participants to navigate workplace settings and challenges is Goffman’s (1959) theory of impression management, as they would minimize their own sense of self, and perform their socialized self instead in order to minimize conflict, and increase the likelihood of being perceived positively by others. Goffman (1959) also suggests that people feel more of a pressure to perform impression management practices when they are in a ‘front stage’ environment—such as the workplace. For instance, Dellinger (2002) argues that many women will purposely dress more feminine for job interviews because they believe it will result in more favourable perceptions and outcomes. This idea was supported by most of my participants as well, and will be discussed shortly.

In Yoshino’s (2014) study of ‘covering’ in the workplace, 55% of respondents stated that their organization/workplace had a cultural expectation that employees should ‘cover’ and be concerned with lessening and neutralizing indicators of difference. Yoshino’s concept of covering is similar to Goffman’s concept of impression management, and speaks to the work and energy people put into minimizing marginalized identities in the workplace (i.e. downplaying race and cultural heritage, wearing North American fashions). Clearly, my participants put a significant amount of thinking energy

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into deciding how they want to present themselves in the workplace. They also suggested that they sometimes choose against ‘wearing themselves’ in order to fit in and avoid negative reactions and/or consequences at work. When these women have decided to ‘wear themselves,’ in spite of anticipated potential backlash, they have still often engaged in much more subtle processes of impression management such as making decisions around colours, accessories, hairstyles, and fits of clothing which they believed could positively influence how others perceive them.

Impression management is a normalized, strategic practice that people have engaged in as a form of coping and armour that is not new to Western society. Referring to the early 19th century, Rubenstein (2001) states, “When one lived and worked among strangers rather than among family members, there was a need to protect one’s self and one’s inner feelings. Wearing the expected mode of dress enabled individuals to move easily among the various spheres of social life” (p. 3). This argument supports my participants who view clothing as a tool to navigate the various contexts of their lives, and avoid discrimination. School dress codes imply to young girls that they need to learn to be conscious, and highly critical of their own appearance and the messages it may send to others (Raby, 2010). They learn from a young age that it is appropriate to ‘police’ the clothing and appearance of their peers in the way that the school institution does, and learn to dress in ways that prioritize the comfort and perceptions of others. I suggest that these early experiences with school dress codes, in combination with other socializing agents such as family, peers, and the media, shape the ways in which young girls learn to navigate dress codes in their working adult lives as well. Employers also encourage, and engage in impression management through the enforcement of dress codes which attempt to control for positive perceptions of their employees through the regulation of gendered, racialized and classed appearance norms. One prominent place where we see impression management is during the interview process.

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In the previous data analysis chapter, I discussed the concerns that queer, androgynous-dressing women have when it comes to the interview process. Here, I discuss the impression management strategies that my participants use both consciously and subconsciously to navigate those concerns. The decision-making processes involved with impression management vary depending on the individual, the job they are applying to, and the way that they perceive their potential working environment. Paula stated:

If I'm applying to something more traditional like teaching or like a traditional retail space I'm probably going to dress more feminine versus like say I was applying to a hipster coffee shop. In those situations they are maybe even looking for the alternative. So you're almost picking your spaces. Will being myself hinder me in this situation, and do I put on a face and then eventually deal with that afterwards?

For Paula, the way that she has dressed for an interview has been in direct relationship with what she has thought each employer was looking for in terms of employee appearances. Overall, my participants expressed the belief that they are more likely to be perceived positively and get hired for the job if they dress femininely. Jill explained:

I dress more female I think, more femme than I would normally. Again, because it's just easier and anyone who goes into an interview room removes all the other stuff right? Like you want to present the best version of yourself which I think in a lot of ways gets translated into the least confusing. It's the easier way to get through, to not really challenge people too much.

As implied in Jill's statement, participants have wanted to minimize any aspect of their appearance that may distract employers from their qualifications, or negatively overshadow the impression left on the interviewer. They argued that it is easier for employers—especially in scenarios when they are interviewing a lot of candidates—to hire those who meet the basic requirements and are 'less risky' in comparison to those who have more of a 'controversial' appearance (i.e. gender ambiguous/androgynous, more readily perceived/read as queer).

Participants made many other decisions about their appearances for interviews in attempts to have their qualifications stand out to employers more than their androgynous appearances. Alona

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explained that she always tries to add feminine details to her otherwise androgynous appearance. She has put less product in her hair, and has styled her short haircut so that it lays flat, instead of spiked up. She has chosen lighter coloured clothing, instead of her go-to black wardrobe favourites. She has even replaced her usual spike earring gauges with a pair that has crystals. In all of these decisions, Alona explained that she adds “feminine little flourishes and touches so it’s like even if I look masculine, there’s still that association with femininity...I soften myself for the general public in an interview because I want a job.” Jill also said she will “overcompensate in small ways that are kind of ridiculous,” such as wearing eye makeup, or wearing an underwire bra instead of a sports bra or binding her chest. Raegan also shared her thoughts on how she has prepared herself for interviews: “I dress more femininely for interviews. Also how I style my hair can change. I have short hair, and I will choose to wear it more down and relaxed. My makeup is a big factor. Even small things like whether I have nail polish on or not...I might do to show that I am a well-kept woman.” Concerns about hairstyling were voiced by all of the participants who have very short haircuts, because long hair is associated with traditional femininity and heterosexuality, while women with short hair are more readily associated with lesbian stereotypes, and are more likely to be misgendered as well. Racialized respondents in Yoshini’s (2014) study of ‘covering’/impression management, also discuss straightening their hair as a necessary practice for interviews, in order to minimize their ‘otherness’ and assimilate with white, hair and beauty norms for fear that they will not be hired if their hair is styled with its natural texture. In addition to things like clothing colours, hairstyles, and accessories, participants have also been conscious of covering up any ‘queer tattoos’ for interviews, such as an equals sign which is popular amongst the LGBTQ+ community, because they thought this could affect their likelihood of being hired as well.

Interestingly, most of the women I spoke with were conscious about what their appearance may imply to employers about their personality traits in regard to their suitability for the job. Some of the

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participants felt as though androgynous, queer women are often associated with characteristics of aggressiveness and rule-breaking, and are viewed as intimidating and less approachable. One strategy to counteract these stereotypes and assumptions is for a person to tailor their voice so that it is higher in pitch, so that they seem more agreeable and less threatening. Alona stated, “I feel like when you can present yourself as a softer, and a little bit more approachable, you’re like a team player, you’re charismatic, you’re charming, they can talk to you.” Similarly, Raegan said that when she dresses androgynously, that people think she is “more masculine, or more tough, more butch, quote unquote.” To counteract this, Raegan has worn makeup. She explained, “As soon as I have makeup on it’s kind of like erased by that...like oh at least I have a soft pretty face. It always saves me from being this tough, like hardened masculine figure.” Other participants also used makeup to ‘soften’ their androgyny.

As Raegan suggested:

I feel like I have a larger expectation to make sure my makeup is done really nicely to have that feminine looking face. The approachable face, quote unquote. If I were to go with no makeup, I think that would make a huge difference in terms of my performance at work and how my managers and bosses view me. Meeting the expectation to wear the makeup and at least have the feminine face saves me from completely being ostracized.

Strongly worded, Raegan argued that presenting some normalized aspects of traditional femininity, such as applying makeup, make her more palatable and approachable to employers, coworkers, and customers. Morgan explained that she prefers to wear more daring and colourful makeup, but that she can only do so in spaces where she feels comfortable to express herself. In contrast, she has worn ‘flat,’ neutral, and minimal makeup for most workplace contexts, and especially for interviews, so that she does not push those unspoken boundaries. This decision-making has been particularly important to Morgan because she is already conscious of being different as a racialized queer woman. Since Niagara is a very white geographical demographic, Morgan has also anticipated that the likelihood of her employers, colleagues and customers being white is also high, and therefore her competence as an

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employee is likely evaluated through a lens that already perceives her as ‘other,’ without additional ‘differences’ such as risky makeup choices.

Taylor’s perceptions did not neatly align with those of the other participants on this issue of careful self-presentation in interviews. She said that she always ‘wears herself’ to interviews because she refuses to alter her appearance for any context at this point in her life. Taylor stated that ‘wearing herself’ in interviews allows her to be more comfortable and confident, and that this has seemed to work out in her favour. However, she contradicted herself when she explained, “I’m cognizant about when I get my hair cut, to make sure it’s not cut too short, because with the haircut and this sort of androgynous uniform [scrubs] at work it makes it more difficult for people to read me.” Interestingly, she also noted that she has primarily applied to jobs requiring post-secondary education in comparison to jobs that are based more on looks (i.e. retail, sales). For instance, if someone is applying to be a server, restaurants may still conduct behind-the-scenes Facebook profile searches to evaluate the person’s ‘attractiveness’ because the belief that ‘attractive’ women are the most successful servers is reinforced within that industry. In contrast, Taylor suggested that in an interview for those applying in the medical field, interviewers may be more concerned with where they received their education and qualifications, for example, to decide between applicants – this is a reminder that credentials and class matter.

For queer women who dress androgynously, making it through the interview process can seem like a big obstacle that they must overcome. As aforementioned, most attempted to minimize the visibility of their androgyny and queer identity for an interview by dressing more femininely. Participants identified that the first few weeks on the job is also a crucial time period for leaving a positive impression on one’s employers and coworkers. My participants voiced concerns again over controlling the messages that their appearance and clothing sends to others during this time. Morgan has managed her appearance “to make sure that I’m not pushing boundaries before I’ve even introduced

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myself or before people have gotten to know me because I think that's something that what you wear or what you choose to wear can do...introduce you before you do." For participants, this practice still also included hiding tattoos. Overall, the women I spoke with suggested that they have often engaged in these strategies of impression management beyond the first few initial weeks on the job.

Some participants also explained that ongoing impression management practices have helped them to create and maintain positive relationships in their workplace. Paula stated, "It's like you sacrifice your own comfort for other people's...like they don't notice that I'm like pulling at the shirt all day and just wanting to rip it off." Morgan echoed that assimilating to dominant gender and appearance norms within dress codes "play a big role" when she is "trying to maintain good relationships." Paula suggested that even once those initial first few weeks are over, and she has developed good relationships with her coworkers, occasions have still arisen where she has felt confronted by issues of otherness because of her androgynous dress. She argued that impression management becomes necessary in unexpected ways, even once a person feels comfortable in their day-to-day working routine. Paula explained, "you're still doing it [impression management] even if you think you feel fully comfortable, because then you'll have like the Christmas Party. Those situations that like didn't come up for the first six months of working there and you're like ugh I have to navigate this all over again." Paula may have found a work wardrobe that is simultaneously informed by the workplace dress code while allowing her to 'wear herself.' However, it is inevitable that social and formal events (i.e. annual Christmas parties) could come up where she would have to navigate more rigid, and gendered, dress expectations that are not as present in her more casual regular working environment. The perception of my participants that someone's workplace appearance has a direct effect on their ability to have a good rapport with their colleagues and employers suggests that impression management strategies may always be a relevant part of these workers' everyday lives.

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Passing and queer visibility.

While the previous sub-section on impression management touched upon participants' concerns about the visibility of their queer identity in interviews, and at work, this sub-section describes how my participants navigate this issue in more detail. I will explore how participants' impression management is integrally linked to them doing impression management about their queerness. Since heterosexism and discrimination are prevalent within many workplaces (regardless of legal protections), queer workers evaluate the levels of safety, acceptance, and diversity in their workplace to determine how 'out' they are comfortable being at work, and with each person that they work with (Buddel, 2011). Also, several scholars agree that being 'out' at work can often be perceived as a threat to one's professionalism or authority (Brower, 2013; Priola, Lasio, De Simon & Serri, 2014). Importantly, queer people are still vulnerable to heterosexism and homophobia—whether they are 'out' or not—because of normalized practices, policies, language, and behaviours in the workplace (Skidmore, 1999).

Some of the women I spoke with could recall instances when they were consciously 'performing straight' at work as a strategic decision to avoid anticipated prejudice and discrimination. After 'reading the room,' Morgan quickly learned that her colleagues in one of her jobs would not be accepting of her queer identity. Morgan explained, "I go into that room knowing I have to perform straight...to me that mostly means like what I'm wearing, and how I look." Morgan described her 'straight' performances to include wearing traditionally feminine clothing instead of menswear, and avoiding any other appearance indicators that are associated with queer stereotypes. Morgan learned from a negative experience with being openly queer at work, that she needed to be careful with who knows her "real self," and who she discloses her queer identity to. Morgan has also paid careful attention to the visibility of her queerness because her visibility as a racialized 'other' is a part of her identity that she cannot control the visibility of. She shared:

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I think the things that I'm scared of is...I think isolating myself almost. Like if I'm going to come out the second you see me. Like if I got a rainbow tattoo or something and you could see it and there was some way that you could figure out immediately that I was queer, I would just be marginalizing myself more. And I think that being already visibly marginalized, it's unfortunate that still in this day and age I still need to do everything that I can to make sure that I maintain the level of privilege that I have, even though that is higher than other people in my situation.

Morgan elaborated that in order to 'present the 'best version' of herself at work, she has needed to present herself in ways that are not too queer, too brown, or too different. Maintaining boundaries on the visibility of her multiple marginalized identities, she has believed, keep her 'safe.'

Paula also suggested that disclosing her queer identity could pose a risk to her job security when she works precarious jobs (i.e. low wage, little security, high turnover rate with staff). She stated:

When I was student teaching, that was the place where I was a little more scared of just being very obviously queer, because I didn't want it to impact things...I had one student come up and directly ask me, "are you gay?" I just had to brush it off because I'm being graded and I don't want my teaching to be impacted by all these kids being like I think she's gay or something so I said I didn't identify as gay. At one point I did, but now I identify as queer so I just said "I don't identify as gay."

Paula has also self-edited her language in teaching jobs to reduce the likelihood of being perceived as queer, and to avoid being discriminated against. Paula's experiences support Priola et al.'s (2014) argument that there is a "climate of silence" for queer people in heteronormative work environments due to a fear of discrimination and isolation from management, colleagues, and customers (p. 490). In addition to attempting to protect one's self from negative reactions to queerness, both 'closeted' and 'out' queer people often minimize the 'queer' aspects of their of lives in order to make their coworkers more comfortable (Brower, 2013).

Participants have also engaged in impression management strategies to avoid being associated with negative lesbian/dyke/butch stigmas. For instance, Alona does not want to be viewed as an "in your face lesbian" so she goes for a "doesn't hate men kind of look." She explained further:

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There is always that kind of concern like you don't want to look too butch. For me that kind of comes down to I don't want to do that because I don't want to out myself right away, because you never know exactly how people would internalize that, and there's that sort of depiction because I am androgynous that people automatically think oh, what a dyke.

Alona's viewpoint suggests that she has understood there to be a division between her androgynous performances and the performances of lesbians who are considered 'too butchy' and reinforce negative lesbian stereotypes. Yoshino (2014) also argues that queer women may consciously be less aggressive in their workplaces, even though aggressiveness is typically acceptable in the workplace in terms of competitiveness and assertiveness. Yoshino (2014) suggests this is because they are worried that their male colleagues will assume that they hate men—a negative lesbian stereotype. Visibly frustrated by her experiences with this topic, Raegan explained that her androgynous appearance automatically 'outs' her as queer at work, and that she feels she is frequently harassed by male customers who view her as "a challenge" for their sexual conquest. While many queer women who dress androgynously are also interested in heterosexual men, the assumption that queer women can always be 'conquered' with enough convincing is one that is harmful and contributes to discourses and stigmas which delegitimize women's queer identities. My participants reported that men sometimes also assume that they are willing to participate in sexist norms (i.e. verbally objectifying women), and/or have the same interests/hobbies as men (i.e. sports) because they share a sexual and/or romantic interest in women.

The issues discussed in this section suggest that queer women who dress androgynously may manipulate both their appearances and behaviours in order to avoid these types of homophobic and heterosexist prejudices. Importantly, however, queer women who can 'pass' are also likely to experience homophobia because people assume that heterosexual people are less likely to be offended by any projections of homophobia, and therefore may be much more overt with any negative opinions. Here, Goffman's concept of impression management has been extremely useful as an analytic tool in helping me understand how participants have been navigating workplace dress codes in multiple ways.

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Self & supports.

Financial security can play a significant role in someone's ability to make their comfort/preferences with dress codes a priority when job searching. A person's level of financial security also influences an employee's willingness to challenge their employer on workplace dress codes, knowing that this can potentially put their job at risk. Additionally, emotional security (i.e. sense of self, comfort with queer identity) can help people navigate workplace settings and dress codes more confidently in general, and especially when 'wearing themselves.' From a place of emotional security, participants suggested that they could use their 'difference' as a means to educate others, and be a good role model.

Financial security.

As previously mentioned, most of my participants have actively avoided jobs that enforced dress codes which prevent them from 'wearing themselves,' and dressing androgynously. However, not all queer women who dress androgynously are able to make their dress code needs a priority. If an individual is under a lot of financial stress, they are more likely to 'put up' with a rigidly gendered dress code. Raegan explained to me that when she was younger, she would look past uncomfortable dress codes for a paycheck. Now that she is older, and more financially stable, she has felt she is able to prioritize her comfort level as well. She described:

I just got used to the fact that I'll probably be judged and I need to get a job so I kind of put judgement on the back burner to get the job. That's my primary goal. It's not my primary goal to feel comfortable, to make friends, to do any of those things. It's to have a steady job, and make money. That's always been my goal. Things have changed now that I'm older. Now I want a job that I'm comfortable with too, but when I was younger I just wanted the job.

Raegan acknowledged that it is a privilege to be able to prioritize personal comfort when making decisions about jobs. Jill also said that her financial status has determined her freedom in terms of picking and choosing between jobs. She stated, "I definitely had to wear costumes to make money, but

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now I don't have to and I'm pretty fortunate for that." Beyond dress codes, workers will often stay in jobs with unfavourable conditions and low wages because they are financially dependent on that income (Rinehart, 2001; Stanford, 2008).

Overall, a person's level of financial security can influence their willingness to challenge their employers on workplace dress codes, and advocate for themselves as well. When confronting their employer on workplace dress codes feels too risky, many choose to quit their jobs instead, as I did. Raegan said, "It's hard to stand up to your boss sometimes about bigger issues than the ones that just deal with you. I would like to talk to him about it, but I don't want to sacrifice my job and how I pay rent for it." For many employees, quitting a job is perceived as the best and/or easiest option under undesirable working conditions (Rinehart, 2001; Stanford, 2008). Many participants felt that there are limited options for how a person can deal with unfavourable dress codes due to the capitalist power dynamics which underlie most workplaces. Employers have significant control over who does what in the workplace in terms of who is hired and fired, wages, and dress codes (Stanford, 2008). In contrast, employees are often financially dependent on complying with employer demands—whether they agree with them or not—in order to make the money that they need. This crucial difference in political and economic priorities, characterizes the class conflict between employers and their employees (Stanford, 2008). Interestingly, none of my participants spoke to the potential value of collective solutions as an alternative to individual strategies (i.e. quitting), such as unionization and legislation that help prevent discrimination.

Emotional security, coping strategies and viewing self as potential role model/ educator.

This section discusses how developing coping mechanisms, and building emotional security and self-esteem can help individuals deal with the issues brought forth in regard to workplace settings and dress codes. I generally reject the notion of 'it gets better'—a common response to young queer people

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who face homophobia—because it implies that someone’s current situation cannot be better, and that someone must simply ‘wait it out.’ However, the experiences of my participants suggest that the more experience a person has with the labour market, and with dressing themselves for work, that navigating informal and unspoken expectations can become easier over time. Alona claimed that she has learned to be more assertive over time, and has gained a better understanding of how she views her ‘self,’ as separate from how she believes ‘mainstream society’ views her. When Alona was in her teenage years, she was overwhelmed by the pressure to dress traditionally feminine. She said, “I wanted to fit into what I thought was the expectation of like how females should look. But I hated it for so long and I didn’t...I had really low self-esteem for a while.” Alona suggested that she now knows that these expectations of her are socially constructed, and unrealistic for many women. She expanded, “It just comes with being older. You just kind of decide, fuck I don’t care what other people really think at this point. Whatever makes you feel good. And I found the more aware I became of that, I came into my own, and as I’ve gotten older and stuff, my appearance has definitely gotten a lot more masculine, but my confidence has definitely gone up.” Alona thought that confidence would come from her one day learning to feel comfortable with assimilating to traditional appearance norms for women, but instead has found confidence in dressing androgynously. Jill also described how her confidence in ‘wearing herself’ grew along with her appreciation for the value of individuality and self-expression. She exclaimed, “I can’t imagine being who I am now and the way that I present myself and trying to fit that into like a V-neck polyester shirt that I have to wear every day.”

Importantly, my participants suggested that their confidence in their androgynous appearance grew when they began to understand their androgynous dressing as an expression of their queer identity. They also argued that it feels good to be seen in clothes that they feel comfortable in. Paula suggested that it is more rewarding when someone compliments her while she is dressed androgynously, than

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when she is wearing a more feminine workplace ‘costume.’ She explained that the positive reinforcement means more to her when she is actually happy in what she is wearing, instead of dressing for someone else. Paula told me:

For a while I wasn’t dressing very masculinely or androgynously because I’m like ugh...maybe you people won’t like it, but now I really don’t care. And then you get people saying “oh my god you look so good”—like saying you look so comfortable, and it works. You just look like you like what you’re wearing and it looks good on you, you know?

Taylor, a participant who has dealt with many instances of misgendering over the course of her working life, has also learned over time how to cope better with these situations so that she does not internalize them and feel negatively about herself. Now, she says she has more patience for people’s questions and ignorance (whether intentional or not), and tries to “meet people where they are.” Taylor explained, “I’m feeling like I don’t give a flying fuck anymore, right? Like I think it’s almost me thinking okay people are going to misread me. That’s fine, like I’m good. I’m cool with myself, you know, and I think maybe it’s just getting older and trying not to get my knickers in a twist. Like I know who I am at this point.” As aforementioned, Alona said that she has also continued to find new ways to respond to instances of misgendering in her teaching position, and attempts to respond with honesty and humour so that the situations can be teachable moments. While participants do not want the responsibility of always having to educate others so that they can be accepted and understood, they have seen value in being able to educate those that are more narrow-minded, and have sometimes even embraced that role. Raegan suggested that she has had a positive influence on her employers, and on the dress code at her work because she has challenged the status quo, and workplace appearance norms. She expressed, “I kind of squeezed my way in, into broadening what they find acceptable hopefully for other people who are like me.”

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To summarize, emotional security, financial security, and viewing themselves as potential educators and/or role models are all resources that helped my participants to cope with the difficulties associated with workplace settings and dress codes that they navigate as queer androgynous women.

Peers.

In this section I argue for the importance of social support networks, and workplace diversity for queer women who dress androgynously. The women I interviewed suggested that having friends at work, and positive relationships with their colleagues can help them feel more secure in making decisions to ‘wear themselves’ in the workplace. They knew that dressing androgynously makes them stand out, and suggested that they feel more confident in doing so when they know they have the support or ‘backup’ of their peers. Therefore, even when they have stood out because they look ‘different,’ they have felt that they still fit in with their peers because they have felt a sense of belonging in the workplace. Negative experiences with customers have also felt more manageable for participants when they know they have their peers’ support. Participants suggested that having supportive colleagues has even made them feel more confident in challenging authority (i.e. employers, managers) on unfavourable dress codes. As Alona put it, “there’s strength in numbers.”

Participants cautioned, however, that the support from their peers should not rely upon stereotypes. Sometimes, participants expressed, they have been happy to be accepted and welcomed by their colleagues, but have felt it was for the wrong reasons. For example, in one of Alona’s jobs, her female colleagues were “standoffish” towards her, while her male colleagues were eager to become friends with her. However, she noticed that her male colleagues were attempting to bond with her over an assumed shared interest in stereotypical male hobbies and behaviours because of her androgynous appearance. Alona and her male colleagues would bond over wearing the same shirts, and shopping at

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the same stores for clothing, but then they would also assume that Alona had the same interest as them in sports, and other stereotypically masculine activities. She explained, “That’s a big thing I noticed. Like a lot of the male teachers find me more approachable. The female ones not so much...they kind of don’t want to talk to me too much because I think they’re afraid that I’m going to make them a lesbian.” Alona’s experiences suggest that her androgynous appearance does indeed communicate other messages (beyond assumptions about her sexual orientation) to her colleagues about her personality and interests. This point reinforces some of my participants’ earlier arguments about their androgynous appearances being automatically associated with toughness and other ‘masculine’ qualities as well, which is part of the reason why they have engaged in impression management strategies in order to disrupt these assumptions.

Further, queer participants from several studies report that ‘coming out’ at work can lead to interrogations from coworkers with personal questions which assume an expectation of sexual openness from queer workers (Bowring & Brewis, 2009; Guiffre, Dellinger & Williams, 2008; Willis, 2009). Put differently, some heterosexual folks may make a spectacle of a queer person’s sexual orientation, and feel entitled to personal information (i.e. sexual experiences, relationship history) which would not be socially appropriate to expect from a heterosexual colleague. To me, this suggests that workplaces could benefit from ally training so that people know how to interact with queer colleagues in ways that do not fetishize them or reinforce their ‘othering’ as a marginalized group. Overall, participants want to be accepted and understood by their colleagues for ‘who they are,’ so that they feel more comfortable and secure in ‘wearing themselves,’ confident in challenging employers on dress code rules, and supported when there is negative backlash to their androgynous appearance and/or queer identity.

Overwhelmingly, participants suggested that they are often the only queer people (to their knowledge) in their workplace. They stated that they are usually the only women who are dressed

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androgynously as well. This results in feelings of alienation and otherness because they feel they are treated differently and/or that their peers cannot relate to their struggles with the workplace or its dress code expectations. My participants suggested that the known presence of other queer workers—regardless of how close in relationship they are to them—can help with those feelings of isolation. It is comforting for a queer person to see a queer colleague being successful in their workplace because it reassures them that they can be successful too, and that there is someone around who is more than likely able to relate to some of the struggles or stress that they are feeling, even if they do not share the same concerns about the dress code. While most of my participants' working narratives are characterized by never having had a queer colleague to share their experiences with, Taylor reflected on a positive experience with having a queer colleague. Taylor said that having a lesbian colleague—who also happened to dress similar to herself—was helpful because they were able to understand each other's hardships and be supportive of each other. Alona also believed that one of her managers was more understanding of her choice to wear a male uniform because the manager also identified with the queer community, and dressed more on the androgynous side. In contrast, Alona said she would feel more nervous to ask a heterosexual woman for dress code accommodations and flexibility, as she thinks they would be less likely to understand why dressing androgynously was so important to her sense of self, and comfort at work.

My participants argued that workplace diversity in general is very important for them as queer women who dress androgynously. They said that seeing other people who look like them, and/or seeing other people who do not 'fit the mold' in general, helps calm the inner turmoil and alienated feelings that come from being understood as 'other.' Alona said, "I would just feel so much more at home with other people who look like me, who kind of share that same sort of feelings. And I think whether it's in my workplace, my friends or anything...it's human instinct to want to bond with and be part of a group

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where you feel like you fit well.” Taylor suggested that seeing diversity in different workplaces, even when it is not your own, can be reassuring and motivating. She explained, “I can think back you know, in my life, to even other androgynous folks that I’ve seen in places. Even though I’m not their coworker, but it’s like just enough to boost...like okay there’s somebody else that’s pushing and that’s being themselves at work, right? And then that can help carry one along too, I think.” Since queer individuals measure the safety and acceptance in a given workplace in order to decide how open they will be with their sexual orientation (which affects how comfortable they are to ‘wear themselves’), workplace diversity and inclusion needs to be an actual priority for employers, beyond hiring ‘token’ marginalized workers. As Yoshino (2014) analyzes his study results, “although most respondents feel that their organizations express inclusion as a core value, considerably fewer feel that the organization lives up to that value” (p. 16).

Having queer colleagues, and a diverse demographic of workers in general indicates to queer workers that they are more likely to be treated well, in spite of being ‘different,’ and that it is safe to disclose their queer identity (Buddel, 2011). Further, participants voiced the need for a supportive social network at work. They suggested that if there was less pressure from their peers to assimilate with traditional discourses of gender and professionalism, they would feel like the daily energy put into impression management strategies would be less necessary (see also Yoshino, 2014).

Disrupting the Status Quo of Dress Codes and Work Environment

In this final section I discuss what participants have felt is indeed valuable about workplace dress codes in terms of things such as safety, hygiene, and flexibility, and their suggestions for improving the structuring and enforcement of dress codes in ways that do not emphasize or categorize gender. I also

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discuss other shifts that could happen within workplaces which could create a more positive working environment for queer women who dress androgynously, and for all workers in general.

What should dress codes prioritize?

My participants argued that dress code rules and expectations should be concerned with hygiene and safety, rather than attractiveness and notions of professionalism which are concerned with gendered, white beauty norms. They agreed that dress codes can be used as a tool to have employees looking cohesive in a way that distinguishes them as an employee—not a customer—as the primary purpose. Jill stated, “They need to be more practical. Like not intending on women looking more attractive while they’re wearing it. Just they’re wearing clothing that looks like they work at that place and are not a customer instead.” The enforcement of a colour scheme, shirts with a logo that are available in multiple fits/styles, a pin, a hat, and an apron were all suggestions for how workplaces can make sure their employees are identifiable as workers. Beyond the basic purpose for a dress code, dress codes should allow employees to be comfortable—both in terms of physical comfort and functionality, and emotional comfort (i.e. when workers get to ‘wear themselves’). As Paula put it, “If you’re doing something every single day of your life, why do you have to be uncomfortable?” Further, uniform preferences should not be assumed or assigned based on gender. Raegan argued:

I feel like if everyone was given the option to choose between like a man or woman’s uniform it would be a better environment so that people are like free to be comfortable and express themselves the way they want to instead of being forced into like a certain gender’s stereotypical dress code. If I was given that option from the get go I would have been a lot more comfortable.

Overall, participants explained that employers need to offer dress code options right from the start, rather than as a reactive measure once employees have worked up the courage to advocate for themselves. This is important because based on a person’s coping mechanisms, and financial status, not all queer women who dress androgynously will feel comfortable, or be able to advocate for themselves

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when they anticipate resistance from employers. My participants argued that if employers give multiple options to their employees from the beginning, it signifies to them as employees that the employer values and cares about their comfort and overall well-being at work.

Maybe most important to my participants, was the argument that dress codes “need to be more fluid in terms of individual needs.” Flexible dress codes are ones that do not designate uniforms or clothing expectations based on gender, and instead provide multiple fits and styles so that workers can decide what works best for them as an individual, which could shift depending on the day. Dress codes that allow for flexibility and individuality make workplaces seem more appealing to those who make many decisions about their appearance and performance of self on a daily basis. The majority of the women I spoke with said that the way that they present themselves changes, sometimes multiple times in one day, as they navigate through the various spaces, relationships, and contexts of their lives. Dress codes that allow workers to express their individuality at work do not have to compromise the professional look, or uniformity of the staff. Also, there should not be rigid rules around style and fit, as Morgan stated, it is a “socially inclusive practice” to let people make those decisions on their own. Participants argued that dress codes should still allow workers to use clothing as a form of self-expression. Taylor explained:

It has to be flexible. We’re all people, right? And we need to have, even at our workplace, there has to be enough room that people can look good, right? I get the whole, you want your business to be professional and you want your workers to look good, but we all are people and it’s important that we have some ability to be people.

Taylor also elaborated that she was at a work social event recently and she loved seeing her colleagues in their own everyday clothes because “people’s personalities become clearer.” She said, “You can see more of who they are, and it kind of validates how we are all really different, you know?” Taylor and I agreed that employers need to start valuing difference as much as they value sameness (i.e. their employees all looking and acting the same). Morgan also expressed that it feels liberating to have

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flexibility and options within a workplace dress code, so that she can focus on her job and have less concerns for negative backlash to her appearance (i.e. job security, safety, discrimination). Flexible appearance expectations in general have relieved some of my participants' concerns and stress related to impression management and costume-wearing, and also make the workplace a more inclusive, accepting environment which makes it seem more appealing to future applicants as well.

Since clothing—both in expectation and in production—is highly gendered, I questioned how employers could change the implementations of dress code expectations so that they are not characterized by binary notions of gender. Some participants thought that employers should offer unisex uniforms as a solution to the gendered division of men's uniforms versus women's uniforms. Jill explained that there is more unisex and androgynous clothing generally available now than there was 10-15 years ago. Therefore, she said that there is not an excuse for employers to limit options anymore:

If there's a uniform, and it's still gendered, it's bizarre. You can get unisex fit or whatever. All bodies are different, and I guess I wish that if there was rules around uniform at all, that gender was just removed from it... You can find more androgynous fit stuff now, and I think if you really wanted to do a dress code, it wouldn't be terribly uncomfortable or offensive to at least half of the people that are working there.

However, other participants suggested that unisex clothing/uniforms is perhaps not a good 'blanket solution' to this issue for a couple of reasons. First, women who dress and present themselves femininely, may feel uncomfortable with a uniform that presents their bodies in more masculine ways and hides their curves, which is comparable to how uncomfortable women who dress androgynously feel in very feminine womenswear. Taylor wondered if all women would experience her unisex uniform as positively as she does:

To have somebody like me, maybe there is more space, but somebody who really dresses like over-the-top feminine... maybe they would struggle more with a uniformed dress code like that actually... Like some of the women who like to wear high heels that I've worked with in the past, and that like to glam up every day to go to work. They would struggle more with the polyester than me.

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Taylor also thought that she has had a positive experience with unisex uniforms because she has a slender body type, and argued that this may not be the case for many of her colleagues because unisex clothing does not fit curves well. She explained, “I know some of my colleagues who are a bit bigger chested. They struggle with the uniform we have to wear, and they have to get shirts that are so boxy and then they feel like they aren’t feminine enough.” Aside from preventing feminine women from emphasizing their curves if that is their desire, unisex/ gender-neutral clothing is not one-size-fits-all, which was identified as the second major reason why it would not work for all women as an alternative to the dichotomy of men’s versus women’s uniforms. Raegan has worked in many restaurants’ kitchens, a male dominated field, and argued that the uniforms are “all designed for a man’s body, even though they are usually a kitchen jacket and a plain pant.” She expanded, “They are neutral in that sense, but they’re not fitted well for my body. I have to roll up my pants because they’re far too long and then they fit uncomfortably at my waist because it’s built from a man’s waist. So even if I look at it from the other sense, it’s not fitted for me and my body, besides my style.” To summarize, participants agreed that offering only unisex uniforms in place of men’s uniforms and women’s uniforms would not be a strong solution, because it still would not allow for the various performances of gender and self that women need, and it would not be inclusive or equitable in terms of women’s body types.

Participants also had other suggestions for how employers can avoid enforcing gendered expectations, and perpetuating the otherness of gender nonconforming individuals through workplace dress codes. With standardized uniforms, different uniform ‘fits’ should not be visually segregated by gender. As previously mentioned, sometimes gendered uniforms have different colours and/or patterns, which makes it very obvious when an employee wears the uniform of the ‘opposite gender.’ For example, imagine that all of the men in a restaurant are wearing blue shirts with white stripes and all of the women in a restaurant are wearing their uniform of white shirts with pink polka dots. According to

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my participants, the different colours and patterns of the shirts would make it very obvious if there was only one woman who was wearing the blue shirt with white stripes because she would automatically stand out as different from all of the other women. Alona argued, “Make it the same colour and print. It’s a uniform because you’re trying to unify your team. Make it the same for everybody.” Paula suggested that when there is a standardized uniform, that it should be available in multiple fits and styles so that everyone can pick uniform that works best for them. Importantly, Paula argued that the multiple fits should not be labelled or presented with gendered language. Similarly, Alona said that when workers are required to wear their own clothes to work, the dress code expectations can be stated in ways that are not gendered. She expanded:

If there is the expectation of business casual, just explicitly state what you think is business casual. Cardigans, sweaters, blouses, button ups. Do not explicitly say, females need to wear these things and men need to wear these things. Just say these are the things we consider professional for this job, and this is what we expect you to wear while you’re here. Make it so much more generalized so that everybody is just like okay, sure.

Alona’s suggestion made a lot of sense to me. None of my participants felt that dress codes could be totally removed from most workplaces, but rather felt that professionalism can be demanded in ways that do not rely upon a gender binary. For instance, outlining that women should have their hair tied up in combination with the absence of hair guidelines for men, implies the assumption and expectation that women have long hair and men have short hair—ignoring the likelihood that there are indeed men with longer hair and women with shorter hair. To recognize this, employers can use the language of “if you have short hair...” and “if you have long hair...” to communicate those expectations. Importantly, even if gendered language and processes of categorization were removed from dress code practices, aspects of ‘professionalism’ which rely upon ideas about class and race/culture would remain.

Overall, my participants just want to be able to feel comfortable and confident at work, without being constantly reminded, and worried, that they are crossing rigid—overt and unspoken—gender

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boundaries. In order for workplaces to value diversity in practice, dress codes need to be equitable and inclusive proactively—not as a reactive approach or afterthought once a marginalized person has been hired or is asking for accommodations.

Further suggestions beyond the dress codes.

The normalization of heterosexism in workplaces needs to be consistently challenged, and indicators of safety to queer employees can be prioritized and controlled to a certain extent by employers. Unfortunately, studies show that queer individuals can become desensitized to the frequency of heterosexist language, homophobic slurs, and verbal abuse in their work environments (Ragins, 2003; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Waldo, 1999; Willis, 2009). However, heterosexist language, homophobic slurs, and verbal abuse should not be tolerated by employers. Waldo (1999) finds that frequent experiences of heterosexism in a work environment can be detrimental to the job satisfaction, job performance, and overall wellbeing of non-heterosexual employees. When employers fail to discipline their workers for making ‘gay jokes,’ for example, they are communicating to queer workers that the space is not safe for them to be open with their sexual orientation, which could also affect someone’s decision around whether or not they feel safe to ‘wear themselves’ to work. Employers should be explicit about their acceptance of queer employees and customers. They can show this by having a zero-tolerance policy for ‘gay jokes,’ letting employees ‘wear themselves,’ familiarizing themselves with language around LGBTQ+ issues, disrupting the notion of a sex-neutral work environment, and inviting queer employees’ partners to work socials. Queer worker’s perceptions of how accepting and safe a workplace is can also be influenced by their perceptions of how racialized workers and other minorities in their workplace are treated (Brooks & Edwards, 2009; Ragins, 2003; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Willis, 2009).

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Workplaces need to be more accepting of gender fluidity in general. Participants suggested that there is less acceptance for men to dress androgynously, as a man in a woman's clothing is often a joke, a costume, a bet, a dare, or a prank. It is important that gender fluidity is understood as legitimate for women, men, and non-binary people. Employers (and the broader public) need to be willing to broaden their ideas about what it means for people to look professional, in ways that do not prioritize whiteness, heterosexuality, class elitism, and traditional gender norms. My participants believe that diversifying discourses of 'professionalism' encourages a cultural shift in acceptance for people who are 'othered' because they perform their professional self differently than the google-image-standard. Taylor stated her belief that younger workers, who are interpreting professionalism in more trendy and often more casual ways, are creating room for more diverse interpretations of professionalism "just by doing what they are doing." Morgan also said that she thinks there is more acceptance for things like tattoos and piercings in the workplace now, which is definitely a shift since tattoos and piercings have been dominantly understood as unprofessional in most contexts for the majority of even my own short narrative in the labour market. Taylor also suggested that there is growing social acceptance for people who are dressed androgynously as a result of social movements and activists who have been tackling the issue of bathroom safety and acceptance for transgender individuals. She explained further, "I think it has also been this movement, a decade even. Our society is more rigid with gender in some ways but also less rigid. Like this whole bathroom movement has been great right? For folks that dress kind of ambiguously. So I think I've benefitted in some ways from that." These small changes and shifts in public perceptions have perhaps broadened the "range of acceptance" for gender nonconforming people, so that their acceptance and success within a workplace is not dependent upon whether or not they also uphold heteronormative ideals of behaviour and appearance (Belleza, Gino & Keinan, 2014; Bowring & Brewis, 2009).

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored six queer androgynous women's narratives about their experiences with workplace dress codes, and I have provided a detailed analysis of how they have navigated such expectations. A significant theme that I unpacked in Chapter Five was the concept of professionalism, and the ways in which it exaggerates and prioritizes certain performances of gender, sexualities, race, and class. Discourses of professionalism presented themselves in multiple ways in participants' narratives through various workplace settings and challenges. I also explored the issues that participants have faced when getting, having, and keeping a job, as well as the stress, thoughts and feelings they have experienced along the way. An overwhelming feeling of 'otherness' was expressed by my participants, experienced in a variety of contexts and at multiple intersections of their identities. Overall, the women I spoke to believed that their androgynous appearance can risk their likelihood of getting hired, their job security, and their workplace relationships. Chapter Six shifted focus to discuss how my participants have actually navigated these challenges and issues in their everyday lives at work. Participant concerns emerged throughout the interviews regarding the symbolic meanings that their appearance can communicate to others, emphasizing notions of impression management. They have often used impression management strategies to present a performance of self in the work place that is more feminine, in the hopes that they will be perceived more favourably by their employers, colleagues, and coworkers.

In some of the women's narratives, clothing was described as a tool to help them navigate the various contexts of their lives. However, 'dressing the part' has left some participants feeling disconnected from their sense of self at work in ways that reflect Goffman's concept of role distance. Participants also had significant concerns about experiencing discrimination based on their sexual orientation within settings saturated by heteronormativity, and therefore have often attempted to

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minimize the visibility of their queer identity as well. While some coping mechanisms can be developed over time on their own, participants suggested that peer support and diverse workplaces can greatly and positively influence their experiences as queer androgynous women. I have also articulated the many ways in which they thought dress codes (in their structure and implementation) can be improved so that they are more flexible and meet the needs of queer women who dress androgynously, as well as the broader working population. My participants and I also make several suggestions for how dress codes can be presented and enforced in ways that do not rely upon dichotomous gendered categorization and language.

Throughout these chapters I have also linked my analysis to Goffman and Butler's approaches to theorizing the performativity of self, and gender. One of the most significant perspectives shared amongst the women I spoke with was the desire to be able to 'wear themselves' to work as an expression of their queer identity and 'who they are.' Their understandings of self, in relation to their workplace performances have further supported common ground between Goffman and Butler. Some participants described their performance of self through clothing in terms that reflect Goffman's dichotomous concepts of role distance and role embracement, in which they have felt that certain performances have been more sincerely connected to their sense of self than others. In general, participants identified 'wearing themselves' as their most authentic performance. These women's approaches to their sense of self strongly resonated with Goffman's concept of impression management, and supported the idea that these strategies require a lot thinking energy, which Goffman describes as 'self-work.' Conceptualizing the workplace as a 'front stage' where participants are most concerned with impression management, in comparison to the 'backstage' where they can relax was also validated by many of women's' arguments (i.e. workplace dress code imagined as armour). Some participants' understandings of self were more fluid and resonated more with Butler's approach to a shifting,

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contextual self. Some women also recognized that some performances of self are considered more ‘socially acceptable’ than others—as Butler does. Interestingly, several of my participants’ arguments align with both Goffman and Butler in ways that made sense with their own understandings. One of the theoretical contradictions I identified in my participants’ narratives was that many of them believed ‘wearing themselves’ was necessary to express ‘who they are,’ but then they were also able to recognize the fluidity of their dress and ‘self,’ as well as the significance of shifting contexts in shaping many other areas of their lives. Highlighted within these women’s stories is also the pervasive influence of the heterosexual matrix. Their analysis indicated they could see and critique these dominant discourses while also trying to navigate them. Even though they are embedded in dominant discourses, my participants’ comfort with queerness provided them with tools to critique the gender binary and associated heteronormativity.

Having a theoretical perspective that is informed by Goffman and Butler has been both challenging and useful. Goffman provides me with multiple concepts and linguistic tools that have been useful in analyzing this data. Butler allows me to further these tools in ways that also critique heteronormativity, and recognize contradictions in the women’s narratives. There remains a tension between how these two scholars theorize the performativity of the self, which is explored throughout this thesis. Both Goffman and Butler theorize a more socialized ‘self’ that people perform in their everyday routine actions, but Goffman suggests that people also have a ‘sense of self’ that is distinct from this. Overall, engaging with Goffman and Butler has allowed me to explore the complexities of these women’s narratives, as their experiences support both theorists in interesting and sometimes contradictory ways.

While I was able to explore these women’s experiences in depth, I will now suggest some of the strengths and limitations to my research. Overall, my sample size was small. Quantitative researchers

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could perceive a small sample size as a limitation because my population is not large enough to be generalizable. However, I do not intend to generalize from the data I collect. This is an intentional choice that was informed by my theoretical and methodological approach, and reflects the general values I have as a feminist qualitative researcher. Indeed, there are strengths to conducting research with small sample sizes. For instance, I have been able to give great attention to detail and depth in the analysis of each interview. It also worked very well for me to draw on Goffman and Butler for my theorizing my research. I could not be certain that the concepts of impression management, role distance and role embracement would be relevant to my participants' narratives, and I was pleasantly surprised when my participants' statements aligned with both Butler and Goffman in multiple, complex ways. Analyzing how these women perceive their sense of self in relationship with their clothing has helped to further my own understanding of the connections between Goffman and Butler as well, and make more sense of my own contradictions.

I have found that queer androgynous women's experiences with dress codes in the work place are also much more complex than the scope of my study allows me to fully explore. I ended up having a white majority of participants, and most of the women were in their 20s. Since clothing trends, and discourses around gender and sexuality change with time, it would be interesting to compare the perspectives of younger workers with that of 'older' workers. The intersection of race with gender and class was explicitly significant in some of my participants' narratives, and therefore I think that future research should explore this topic with a larger sample that is more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity in order to get a broader understanding of experiences and possible solutions to rigid dress codes that are more intersectional in approach. There is much more that can be unpacked in regard to racial bias in workplace dress codes. It would also be interesting to interview employers and get their perspectives on these issues as well, and potentially get more insight into the processes of decision-making that go into

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choosing and enforcing workplace dress codes. Since the perceived preferences of customers seem to also be a factor in enforcing dress codes, it could also be valuable to gather data from a random sample who would speak from a customer perspective. Service industry work is also much more represented in my thesis than other kinds of work. Future research on this topic should attempt to provide a data analysis that is more diverse in attempting to explore other industries in depth as well.

I believe that my thesis is valuable in disrupting the normalization of gendered dress codes in the labour market, and the naturalization of the heterosexual matrix as an underlying workplace dynamic. My research uplifts the narratives of queer androgynous women who often feel ‘othered’ by the rigid notions of gender and white femininity that are present in many expectations around what it means to look professional. Through the application of Goffman’s concept of impression management, my thesis also provides language for queer androgynous women to describe the energy and effort that they put into their appearance on a daily basis to navigate competing expectations around gender and sexuality (i.e. the ‘double bind’). The data I present is also further evidence of the heterosexism that is prevalent in most work environments, and the ‘climate of silence’ that many queer workers navigate. My work has the potential to make meaningful interventions into the working lives of queer women in Niagara and beyond by arguing the importance of having flexible dress codes that accommodate various body types and gender performances. Inclusive and equitable dress codes can also suggest a more diverse and accepting work environment that is more appealing to potential applicants who do not neatly fit into the status quo. My research also challenges readers to be open to broader definitions of professionalism, which allow workers to ‘wear themselves’ and feel more comfortable and confident at work.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide.

Demographic Questions:

- What area of the Niagara Region do you live in?
- What is your age? Do you understand your age as being relevant to your perspective on workplace dress codes?
- How do you identify in terms of race, ethnicity and culture?
- How do you identify in terms of class?
- How do you identify in terms of sexual orientation?

Interview Guide:

- How do you generally like to dress?
- What were the first dress code rules you can remember being told or expected to follow?
- What kinds of workplaces have you worked for and what types of dress codes did they have?
- What is your experience with negotiating and navigating various workplace dress codes?
→ Informal (unspoken expectations, not specific) versus more formal (enforced appearance standards, posted guidelines).
- Are there any aspects of dress codes that make you feel more or less comfortable?
- What relationship do you have with the clothing you wear to work?
- What has your experience been like with binary dress codes (when there are men's/women's uniforms)? Were you always expected to choose the women's uniforms? Have you ever been given an option?
- What is your understanding of the phrase 'professional attire'? Do you think your understanding is different than what employers mean/are looking for when they say professional attire?

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- How do you think the term ‘professionalism’ relates to ideas about race?
- What do you think about the term ‘professionalism’ in relation to class and economic status?
- In your opinion, do you think that everyone has the same ability to meet the ‘ideal’ employee image that many organizations are trying to encourage with their dress codes? Why or why not?
- Do you think that the dress code of a workplace says something about the values or beliefs of the employers, and/or implies something about the environment/ climate of the workplace?
- Has knowledge of an organization/workplace’s dress codes ever influenced your decision to apply/ work there? Why or why not? What about overall career choices/direction?
- Do you think that the way you dress at work can potentially influence your job performance, performance evaluation, and/or relationships with your coworkers?
- Do you ever consciously change or manipulate your clothing and overall appearance for job interviews, work socials, and/ or for the everyday workplace?
→If so, tell me about some of those situations and how you thought through those decisions.
- Have you ever wanted to, or tried to resist any aspect of a dress code or expectations in the workplace? What did/could that look like? How have employers/ management responded to resistance to the dress code?
- Overall, how has being a queer woman who dresses androgynously affected the ways in which you specifically experience dress codes? How might you experience dress codes differently than a women who are not queer, or who do not dress androgynously?
- How do you think your race and class factor into the ways in which you experience dress codes? Do you think dominant ideas about race and class are reinforced through dress codes?
- What do you think the purposes of dress codes are for employers?

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- What would an ideal dress code look like to you? What do you think the purpose of dress codes should be?

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Appendix B: Email Script

Hello (name),

I think that you could be a great ‘fit’ as a participant for my MA research project, *Navigating Workplace Dress Codes: Experiences of Queer, Androgynous Women*.

I have attached a more formal ‘letter of invitation’ on this email, which provides a description of the project, and the information you would need to know as a participant.

Please respond if you are interested in participating in this project by (date).

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration,

Kailey Kelly
MA Candidate
Department of Social Justice & Equity Studies
Brock University

Dr. Rebecca Raby
Professor, Faculty Supervisor
Brock University

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Appendix C: Letter of Invitation

Title of Study: Navigating Workplace Dress Codes: Experiences of Queer, Androgynous Women

Student Principal Investigator: Kailey Kelly

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Rebecca Raby

I, Kailey Kelly, MA student, from the Department of Social Justice & Equity Studies, Brock University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled *Navigating Workplace Dress Codes: Experiences of Queer, Androgynous Women*.

The purpose of this research project is to add the voices of multiple queer women—and their experiences—into a larger conversation about gender performance and workplace dress codes. This research will explore a range of informal (i.e. unspoken dress expectations) to formal dress codes (i.e. formally posted and enforced dress rules), across your various working experiences. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to answer a series of questions relevant to your experiences with workplace dress codes in an individual, semi-structured interview. Participation in the interview is optional, and will take approximately 30-45 minutes of your time.

Participating in this research has the personal benefit of getting the opportunity to talk about—and reflect upon—your experiences in a confidential setting. This research also has the potential to advocate for more flexible workplace dress codes that do not rely upon gendered ideas about ‘professionalism’ and gender ‘appropriateness.’

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905-688-5550 ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca)

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you in advance for your time,

Kailey Kelly
MA Candidate
Department of Social Justice & Equity Studies
Brock University

Dr. Rebecca Raby
Professor, Faculty Supervisor
Brock University

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