

CLOTHING: A STATEMENT OF ONE'S GENDER IDENTITY

by

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of Project

From the time a child is born, they are put into a world of gendered discourse and sexual difference, and taught to distinguish not only between what is 'female' and what is 'male,' what is masculine and what is feminine, but also the social and political consequences if they cross these binaries. Clothing placed on children helps reinforce these identity-based stereotypes, restricting and limiting children to choose between either 'girls' or 'boys' clothes, more often than not without the choice of cheap gender neutral options. This project primarily aims to explore how clothes can sculpt one's individual identity beyond the gender binary. Secondly, through this exploration I investigate how clothes discipline bodies by visually constructing the heteronormative conceptualizations of 'maleness' or 'femaleness.' This leads to further investigation into how clothes can reconstruct this binary, providing individuals with the freedom to break through gender boundaries: when our sartorial options are opened to accessible non-restrictive options, what are the options for identity formation?

In order to address these issues, this project, defying gender stereotypes, focuses on how gender-neutral clothes can dismantle these constructs, and how clothes can create a safe space for children who do not want to fit, or do not fit neatly into the traditional gender binary: a position from where gender-neutral, gender fluid or gender non-conforming children can freely express their identity and choose their own gender. By using feminist theories of disciplined bodies, of performativity and of bodily comportment this project explores how clothes can be seen as a communicative tool, one that is a visual performance expressing one's gender. Combining these theories has helped to make sense of the interrelationship between dress, gender and the social construction of the body, as well as helping me to visually demonstrate how we can dismantle a binary view of gender.

This project delves into the realm of the gendering of fashion, and advocacy practice by turning fashion artwork into liberating political statements, specifically concentrating on how clothes discipline bodies, provide freedom and sculpt one's identity. My ultimate goal, therefore, was to create a collection of gender neutral clothes that would allow all children to feel confident and comfortable in performing and expressing their true, authentic selves. The clothes "open gender" by encouraging children to regulate and shape their own appearance, to a desired point on a spectrum of genders (Alexander, Gender and Clothing). The finished collection comprises of a shirt, dress, coat, blazer, dressing gown, tracksuit, ten pieces of underwear and two pant options. Items within this collection range from the ages of 3-8. These specific ages have been chosen to emphasize how children, from as early as three, have an innate sense of their gender identity and may demonstrate gender-nonconforming behaviour and gender dysphoria (Stein 12, World Professional Association for Transgender Health). These garments, it is hoped will transgress normative understandings of gender and gender representation by breaking down the gender binary and reflecting the variety of gender identities in the world.

In order to provide viewpoints beyond cis heteronormative assumptions and lived experiences of clothing I collected online questionnaires, consisting of both open-ended and closed questions. Using the snowball sampling method, I was able to receive five responses from members of Parents of Trans and Gender Diverse Kids, NL. Thematic Content Analysis was conducted in this project, to help systematically code recurring, dominant themes within my data. Classifying data into the topics of 'Expression,' 'Autonomy,' 'Bodily Comportment' and 'Societal Pressures' encouraged me to organize respondents' data, and help me to gain a rich description of the data set. Ultimately, this was advantageous to my project, helping me to label important concepts that correspond with ideas in the literature review and theoretical framework. The participants' lived experiences, of requiring,

searching for, and often not finding gender neutral clothing for their children provided a necessary perspective, which complemented my theoretical framework and understanding of current literature. Feedback from the questionnaires, therefore, influenced the design and construction of my collection of clothes, as it is their stated needs, concerns, and issues about children's clothing that have formed the background of my designs.

Significance of Research

At a time when sex and gender are still considered to be intertwined within our society, and despite changes to the human rights code that protect gender identity, research into the social constructions of gender is necessary in helping to educate and provide an awareness of the importance of uncontrolled gender expression. This project, therefore, offers a new perspective on one aspect of the way gender is constructed, maintained, and transformed, namely clothing. Clothing studies provide a feminist lens to the often unrecognized way gendered clothing demarcates the spaces of identity in the Western world; clothing influences the formation of social and political boundaries that exclude or include certain bodies. It is evident that there is a need for a more enlightened and empathetic understanding of the role of gender in all aspects of our day to day life, indeed, our society needs to be more mindful that young children are often sensitive to messages around gender and require safe and nurturing environments to explore, express and engage with gender (Young 149, Foster 47, Paoletti 2).

In these terms, this research, it is hoped, provided participants with an opportunity for those who may have previously been uncomfortable or unsure of how to speak out about both their positive and negative experiences of inclusion or exclusion in our society, in relation to their own or child's clothing choices, particularly children who may not identify with the cis heteronormative clothing choices generally available. At a time when prominent department stores in Canada, for example Zara, H&M, and Abercrombie and Fitch, see the need for

pursuing a gender neutral agenda for children's clothing, this completed collection of gender neutral clothes highlights the practical reality of manufacturing and designing pieces for a Western society (Bach, This Retailer is Facing Backlash). Designing with this all in mind has allowed me to explore the dimensions of fit-to-body, community building, and specialized bodies.

CHAPTER 2: EXISTING LITERATURE

The Gendered Body

According to Terence Turner, the body is a symbol of society, with the surface of the body acting as a frontier of one's "social self" (486). Turner, Malcolm Bernard, and Erving Goffman explore two notions of the body: the body as it manifests itself to oneself, known as the phenomenological body, and the performative social body, that is interpreted by and participates with others. This study explores the latter notion, how the body is a performance of the self that is social, communicative, and therefore symbolic of social roles that are thrust upon it. How we experience our body is intimately linked with how the body is presented to the world and coded or made symbolic of social roles; in turn when one's body is symbolic of social roles and understandings, it is treated in certain ways that incite us to experience our bodies in those ways. Both of these notions of the body are interrelated with one another, indeed, how we experience our body depends on how it is symbolized, which in turn affects our experiences of embodiment. Without a conceptual understanding of the body, bodies, perhaps not intentionally, can become misread. Thus, it is these symbolisms that make the body readable to society (Battisti 102) .

Clothing is a form of social self-presentation: something that is presented to others to help them 'read' the body within, but is also something that is coded by others, and not entirely self-made or symbolized solely by the wearer. In this sense, clothing therefore has the ability to transform the social body in two ways: in terms of how the body is understood by others and in terms of how that body is experienced by the self. Indeed, Diana Crane and Laura Bovone describe the covering of the body through dress as being a filter between an individual and the surrounding world that both hides and blurs the boundaries of bodies (321). It is a form of mediation that affects both the individual and the surrounding world. Bernard notes how clothing is intimately related to our bodies due to them being instrumental

in the process of socialization into assigned gender roles, with clothing helping to create and reproduce attitudes towards stereotypical images of men and women (111). Goffman adds to this, when putting forth his theory of social interaction that can be likened to a theatre.

Goffman describes how individuals can be perceived as actors on a social stage, performing and projecting images of ourselves (22). Individuals can manipulate the setting in which they perform, for example by changing their appearance; this helps to create a “front” that audiences read (Goffman 22). Clothes are influential in mediating an understanding of the interactions that may exist between the body and the social world (Crane and Bovone 320, Twigg 287). Elina Paju, whilst defining the concept of “plug-ins,” comments on how the process of wearing clothes, habitually establishes a relationship between the person and their environment, their identity and selfhood (Paju 530).

Some scholars, including Wendy Parkins, Jo Paoletti and Iris Marion Young have argued that clothing is a visual marker, presenting the social construction of the human body, with dress being a visual representation of one’s gender. Malcolm Bernard states that your dress allows you to speak through clothes, the same as the spoken word (26). Both Bernard and Paoletti accept that the presence or absence of a particular item of clothing, for example bows, ribbons and headbands can be a signal of femininity, while ties and stripes convey masculine symbols (Bernard 112). Paoletti describes how clothing affects how we view and interact with the world, with one’s appearance indicating the social roles and expectations that individuals are expected to have. Using the example of children dressing up in pink princess tutus she explains how children use clothes to play out differing roles, to embody femininity (Paoletti 6). Bernard, quoting Berger states how “men act and women appear,” with clothing for men expressing masculinity, enabling individuals to “quickly run and jump,” all qualities of activity and strength (118). Whereas women, through their choice of clothes, construct, signal and reproduce versions of femininity, often wearing decorative

garments unsuitable for action (qtd. Bernard 118). Robin Peace adds that queer bodies, including lesbian and gay bodies, use “markups” which help individuals identify them (45). Individuals are visibly recognized through the use of “visibility factors,” these items include costumes, clothing styles and hairstyles (45).

Clothing is the most prominent way that bodies are gendered, ultimately presenting one’s identity to others in terms of masculinity or femininity (Entwistle 141). The gendering of hairstyles is also important for self-expression, yet, clothing styles are often more striking and noticeable. In order for a garment of clothing to be considered gendered, visual cues or patterns that are understood to be clearly masculine or feminine are necessary. Without these gender symbolisms and indications, clothing is understood to be neutral, not masculine or feminine (Paoletti 19). These stereotypical gendered cues point to the socially constructed nature of gender, and show how a society organises one’s expectations of what an individual should or shouldn’t wear based on one’s sex (Arvanitidou 111, Paoletti 6, Kacen 345). Most clothing manufacturers dismiss the gender-sex distinction and instead rely heavily on the assumption that sex and gender are fixed, stable categories and that everyone’s gender identity maps directly onto their biological sex (Ellisa et al. 351).

Quoting Wilson, Joanne Entwistle accepts that “fashion is obsessed with gender, it defines and redefines the gender boundary” (140). Indeed, Jon Spade, and Catherine Valentine identify how the gender-coding of clothing is an example of the exploitation of gender, and how capitalist organizations sell to consumers “gender itself” (225). Spade and Valentine add to this idea, informing us that clothing designers and manufacturers of gender neutral clothes still include just enough gendered elements so as not to erase completely masculinity and femininity, thus, suggesting that intrinsic capitalist value is bred by a society’s obsession with gender (225). The fashion industry therefore controls and limits self-expression by restricting what is available to customers (McLeod 52).

Age

There is an extensive range of literature outlining the construction of gender identity and clothing as it pertains to age. It is during one's childhood that individuals first learn about and begin to express their assigned gender categories (Halim et al. "From Pink Frilly Dresses" 933). Quoting Davis, Annebella Pollen notes how children negotiate and make sense of the world by engaging with gender norms, and how children use gendered clothing as a "sign" of gender in play (174). Paoletti argues that clothing is an important tool in teaching young children to learn sex roles, and how children learn patterns of gender appropriate dress and apply them to their own constructions of their identity (2). Jacqueline Kacen and Sarah Murnen et al. highlight how children from as young as two are aware of societal gender distinctions that later reinforce stereotypical feminine and masculine characteristics. Indeed, at the age of two, a child has substantial knowledge of gender, often referring to themselves as a "girl" or a "boy" (Martin 365, Kacen 346, Paoletti 19). The American Academy of Paediatrics, stated by Fernando Stein, and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health reinforce this, by informing readers that children as young as two may demonstrate gender-nonconforming behaviour and gender dysphoria, preferring clothes, games and toys associated with the opposite sex (12).

Childhood studies in particular explore the concept of color schemes, emphasizing how in very early development girls and boys are already conditioned to what colors they should and shouldn't wear, and how this stereotyping is reinforced as they grow up in contrasting female and masculine spaces (Pomerlau 365). From a young age boys are placed in blue, white and red clothes, whilst girls are dressed in multi-colored clothes, frequently with pale shades, especially pink. Colors are used to demonstrate an identification for others of bodily gender markers (Pomerlau 365). The cultural and social construction of the color pink has, since the mid-twentieth century, been associated with "immature" feminine

identities, a femininity that is innocent, asexual and girly (Gleeson and Frith 104). Pollen and May Halim et al. comment on the increasing “pinkification” of clothing, aimed at young girls (Pollen 164). Similarly, Nurgül Kiling points out that by the age of five children become active consumers; manufacturing businesses, therefore, use color as a valuable marketing tool to attract customers (1359). Indeed, as Paoletti notes, clothing manufactures are eager to capitalize on how hard it is to hand down clothes with distinct gendered colors from one sibling to the next (19). However, gender marketing is not just seen for clothing, there is the same division in toys, games, diapers and toothbrushes.

During the ages of three to eight, as soon as children comprehend that there are gender categories, they embark on their own personal journeys as “gender detectives” obtaining knowledge about their own gender and their peers (Halim et al. “Pink Frilly Dresses” 1092). During this stage of childhood, the phenomenon of “pink frilly dress,” is observed, as children begin to understand and embrace their female gender identity, requesting to wear pink for every occasion (Halim et al. “From Pink Frilly Dresses” 934). Indeed, dresses are important and “mark the femaleness” helping girls to learn how to become a girl (Pollen 176). Halim et al. in another of their works, suggest that children at this age enter a stage of “gender appearance rigidity,” where girls will only wear pink, dresses and skirts whilst boys refuse to wear anything considered feminine (“Pink Frilly Dresses” 1091). This “rigidity” Halim et al. proposes is linked to socialization processes and advertising pressures (“Pink Frilly Dresses” 1092). For these reasons I have chosen the age range of my clothing collection to be for children between 3-8 years.

Paoletti adds to this suggesting that ‘feminine’ clothing, including ruffles, ribbons, bows and flowers are often placed on individuals due to parental anxiety, a desire to make sure that onlookers can visually identify their child to be either a girl or boy (xix). Indeed, Paoletti blames conservative parents, who uphold conscious and unconscious fears and

unease, for supporting and upholding traditional heteronormative ideologies of femininity and masculinity (117). This is due to a “deep change” in outlooks and attitudes of adults towards children’s gender and sexuality (Paoletti xviii). It is often the parents, and mothers in particular, who acts as the “agent,” (Paoletti 119), and who play the role of “gatekeeping,” controlling and legitimizing the consumption of purchases of food, toys and clothing for children (Pollen 163).

Dan Bilefsky and Natasha Bach both explore how clothing shops are beginning to promote inclusiveness, opposing previous societal norms of color, clothing and one’s gender. Indeed, retail stores, including John Lewis in England, are emphasizing gender neutrality through its introduction of a new, diverse range of clothing styles for children including dinosaur and spaceship print dresses (Bach, *This Retailer is Facing Backlash*). The shop has removed girls’ and boys’ labels from their clothing as well as removing clearly defined gendered sections of the shop floor (Bach, *This Retailer is Facing Backlash*). By removing gender as the binary division influencing the layout of the store, children will be provided from an early age with the opportunity to freely choose styles and clothes. However, Jaimie Wylie suggests that many high street stores on the onset of catering for gender neutral customers don’t consult gender neutral people to ascertain what they require and need when considering fashion and dress (*What Fashion Needs to Understand*). Indeed, Wylie proposes that these stores, including Zara and H&M, although their intentions are “positive,” still see their gender neutral collections being merchandised in either the girl’s or boy’s sections of the store, resulting in individuals having to consciously and physically choose one category when deciding where to look and shop (*What Fashion Needs to Understand*).

Often stores make the assumption that girl’s clothes are “exclusively for girls” and that “boy’s clothes are for everyone” (Wiley, *What Fashion Needs to Understand*). Wiley explores how stores exclude non-binary, non-conforming and transgender individuals by

often utilizing traditional masculine styles to capitalize on the recent political consciousness of consumers. Current gender neutral collections therefore prevent equality, due to them being “literally just menswear” which continuously reinforces the stereotype and assumptions that femininity, and feminine clothes are inferior and unsound, while masculinity is normal (Wiley, What Fashion Needs to Understand).

The concepts and ideologies selected from this literature review will be vital in ultimately facilitating an understanding of age and gender within clothing studies. Scholarly opinions, beliefs and critiques, along with my chosen theoretical concepts, have been influential in the final design, shape, cut and color of my gender neutral clothing, by pointing out valuable notions of gender identity, of performativity and of bodily comportment.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Whilst there are many theoretical frameworks that I could use to structure the discussion of the social construction of clothing, I will be using three main theoretical frameworks. The first theory used is Judith Butler's concept of performativity, which will help me to examine notions of identity and self-representation as well as gender-constructedness. Secondly I utilize Michel Foucault's notion of disciplined bodies, which provides a context for the ways in which bodies become docile in our modern panoptic society. The third theory is bodily comportment, a concept explored in detail by Iris Marion Young, who examines female embodiment by understanding how female actions are constrained by sex and gender specific norms. Combining these theories will help me to explain why clothes have a specific gender binary and will allow me to make sense of the interrelationship between dress, gender and the social construction of the body.

Performativity

Butler's theory of gender performativity, introduced in *Gender Trouble*, provides a clear distinction between sex and gender whilst deconstructing the essential nature of one's gender identity. Butler accepts that gender is existent only to the extent that it is performed, indeed, it is the "stylized repetition of acts," (Butler 519) and "the act that one performs" that encourages what is perceived as an essential masculine or feminine identity (Butler 526). Candace West and Don Zimmerman describe gender as a "routine accomplishment," an ongoing acquisition that is reinforced through every day masculinized and feminized actions and interactions (126). Veronica Hollinger adds that gender, is thus, a "series of performative gestures that the individual learns to replicate" (32). It is assumed then, that one's gender is therefore constructed thorough the performative choices we daily communicate to and with others. West and Zimmerman acknowledge that we as humans "do" gender, this "doing of

gender,” which by creating differences between girls and boys, appears natural; however, in actual fact it is maintained by our organized active performance (126).

Dress codes are therefore created to preserve the socially constructed differences between girls and boys. Whilst quoting Byrne, Jaymie Arns states that “gender is the collection of attitudes, which society stitches together to clothe boys and girls,” they believe that society is therefore “clothing children with their gender” which forces them to fit into the gender binary of male or female (18). Dress codes, enforced by Western societies, either differentiate between genders, or suppress and contain the expression of genders (Ars 30). Butler repeats how essential it is to therefore understand that gender is also established through the “stylization of the body,” arguing that through embodied movements, enactments and gestures, one ultimately creates the “illusion” of one’s gendered self (519). The constructed nature of gender is a fundamental aspect of this project. Butler’s theoretical perspective of performative acts and the doing and performativity of gender is vital as I illustrate how imperative it is that children are able to express and perform gender by wearing clothing that does not always distinguish or fit into the gender binary.

Undeniably, certain garments encourage performativity and provide individuals with a flexible experience of gender. William Alexander, the designer of *Gender Performance Clothing*, a brand of undergarments that provide methods of body modification that either enhances or diminishes physical body shape, states that “undergarments embody an active performativity” (Gender and Clothing). Alexander states that their undergarments, for example chest binders and waist binders, provide individuals with the opportunity to “open gender,” allowing customers to regulate their appearance to a preferred point in a spectrum of genders (Gender and Clothing). This project highlights the significance of providing all individuals, including non-binary, transgender and genderqueer persons, for example, and

children in particular, with the opportunity to take active control of their body representation through their choice of clothing.

Disciplined Bodies

All of this points to the multitude of ways that bodies are disciplined through dress codes, both socially or externally and intrinsically through perceived choices and affiliations. Foucault's theory of power and knowledge of the body in *Discipline and Punish*, can help us consider how the twofold notions of surveillance and biopower work together to control how clothing encourages people to accept certain restrictions or coding's and to reject others in order to fit in and to feel comfortable in oneself. Although, as Entwistle suggests, Foucault has little to say about fashion, his work can be significant in helping to think about how gendered clothing disciplines and instills meaning on the body (18).

The metaphor of the Panopticon, theorized by Michael Foucault from Jeremy Bentham's architectural design of a prison is fundamental in our understanding of how we as a society regulate others based on what we feel is normal stereotypical behavior. Bentham's Panopticon system, in which cells of a prison faced a central tower, meant that prisoners felt like they were being watched, and thus became "docile" bodies, trained, manipulated into obeying rules (Foucault 134). In our modern society the power of the "gaze," indeed, the power of "watchers" Ivan Manokha implies, creates a structure where individuals conform to the "norm" by self-policing and self-disciplining themselves in order to maintain expectations from "watchers" (226). This invisible form of surveillance encourages individuals to behave in a habitual way, building normal bodies to be part of the system, whilst abject bodies are perceived as a threat.

Bodies become "docile" through self-discipline, as individuals continuously feel as though others are observing or judging them. Individuals, therefore, do not want to be shamed by society or to feel insecure undergo daily bodily surveillance (Foucault 134).

Angela Tretheway, using a Foucauldian feminist lens, analyses how women's bodies are often self-disciplining in differing ways than men's bodies are. Even from a young age, girls are taught to walk, work, sit, behave and dress in a certain way, resulting in women's bodies becoming docile (Tretheway, Young). While exploring Foucault, Entwistle similarly points out that bodies, unconsciously but also consciously are being disciplined into wearing certain clothes or makeup, eating certain amounts of food and exercising to become the normalized healthy body (11). Undoubtedly, the fear of being watched, restrains and alters one's behavior. Sheetal Paul accepts that the structure of the Panopticon is evident in many young children's lives, especially within the educational school setting, where children and teachers are always watching you to make sure that you fall into your assigned stereotype and performing your roles. Children, to Paul, are persuasively influenced to grow in an "arrested environment," unable to truly act and perform how they want to (299). This project highlights the need to dismantle such stereotypes, to disassemble this panoptic society where children are often scared of portraying the wrong gender roles, or gender identity. My collection of clothes therefore breaks these stereotypes, allowing every child to feel safe to choose whatever they want to wear, and to be open to whoever they want to be. By designing gender-neutral clothes, I represent the different embodiments potential to all children. Combining theories of gender comportment, Foucault's notion of discipline and punishment, as well as Butler's theory of gender performativity, this project illustrates how important it is to educate all children that they can indeed fail to perform the "illusion" of gender, and that it is acceptable to perform gender "wrong" (Butler 528).

Not surprisingly, gender is a fundamental part of this disciplining. Ambiguous or unreadable bodies cannot be placed in the gender binary categories, thus causing suspicion from others and a potential lack of identification for the self. Foucault's conceptual framework of discipline, power, and punishment is key to Judith Butler's concept of gender

identity, indeed, Butler amplifies Foucault's notions, suggesting that gender is in actual fact the predominant factor which operates the body (520). Angela King, suggests that Foucault's arguments about discipline fail, however, to acknowledge the extent to which gender influences the level of discipline exerted on the body (30). King, whilst critiquing Foucault, states that gender, and specifically femininity, is a discipline that acts as a form of social control (30). King accepts that the female body is manipulated, trained, and controlled to show signs of femininity (33). Women embody "all that man fears and despises," indeed, their crime, of being "other" causes society to punish them by constantly attempting to correct the female body by "drawing attention to sites of otherness," (34). In women's fashion, for example, female clothes emphasize the chest, buttocks, hips and waist (King 34). It is evident that disciplinary methods are still in evidence today, indeed, an analysis of Foucault engenders contemplative thinking surrounding discipline and gender issues, accentuating the need to deconstruct the panoptic society we live in.

Bodily Comportment

It is by understanding Foucault's notions of disciplined bodies, that we, too, are able to understand Iris Marion Young's discussions of female embodiment in a male dominated society. Young, whilst providing us with a description of feminine body comportment, teaches us how girls restrict their movements and limit the space they consume, with girls walking, sitting and throwing a ball differently to boys (28). This, Young believes transpires because women's opportunities and actions are constrained by sex and gender specific roles that are ingrained into our society (28). Women are notably more restricted in their manner of movement and spatiality than men, with gendered differences seen in gesture, posture and overall bodily comportment (Yap 93, Foster 47, Chisholm 11).

Analyzing Mariane Wex's photographic study 'Let's Take Back our Space,' Nick Crossley and Sandra Bartky gage the basic and mundane actions, the "typical differences"

that men and women perform (Crossley 113). Wex's photographs, illustrating individuals waiting for trains, show women taking up little space, making their bodies small and narrow, with arms close to their body and hands folded on their laps. This is opposite to the photographs of the men who sit with their legs apart, expanding the available space, a "proffering position" (Bartky 30). Female bodies have become "docile," a concept explored in the previous section, due in part to disciplinary practices that produce the embodiment of femininity (Foucault 134). Indeed, Yap suggests growing up girls are taught "ladylike" qualities, trained to move with the appearance of grace, not being aggressive, loud or taking up too much space (Yap 104).

Sue Campbell et al. refer to "*bodily encoded* limits to autonomy" to explain that there are physically restrictive postures and movements that are expected from women, which embody femininity. (128). Feminine socialization, we are told, disciplines women to view their body as an object of "appreciation" rather than an "instrument" to enforce action in the world (Campbell et al. 129). Having limited physicality threatens and often removes autonomy by removing the possibility for forms of self-expression. Campbell et al. acknowledge how important it is to understand this, teaching us that restrictions of bodily expression may undermine self-appreciation (129). However, Bartky's Foucauldian analysis of the 'technologies of the self', suggests that the practices and "technologies" which influence comportment and mobility, and which are invested in the body, are in fact voluntary and self-administered (27). Kelia Tyner and Jennifer Ogle, who, quoting Bartky, discuss how women voluntarily participate in disciplinary actions of femininity and mobility because they sometimes "enjoy them" (107). Nevertheless, they realize, by citing Bartky and Bordo, that these practices produce a "subjected" and "inferiorized body" and thus, need to be understood within an oppressive system of sexual subordination (Tyner and Ogle 107).

Young presents the concept of “inhibited intentionality,” explaining that women and girls underestimate their ability when developing their motor skills and undertaking physical tasks, for example in wrestling, climbing and martial arts (149). When considering that they are physically weaker than men, women internalize a “I cannot” stance, even though women possess the necessary muscular power (Yap 93). Women, Crossley believes, have a tendency to only use “parts” of the body when moving physically, instead of using the whole body. This inhibition, Crossley states, leads often to a lack in “female agency capacity” (113). Instead women tend to move and engage with their environment with hesitancy and cautiousness, which is “inhibited in relation to that of men” (Crossley 113). This “frailty myth” of the female body, reflective of weakness and fragility, inhibits female movement (Evans 554).

Colette Dowling believes it is “the frailty myth,” dating back to 19th century medicine, which reinforces ideologies of female physical inferiority (105). Indeed, the concept of female fragility is learned, something that girls are taught; unsurprisingly most parents are unaware that they reinforce gender conditioning in their girls. As a result, children learn the disciplinary rules for gendered behavior and restrict themselves from engaging in cross-gendered activities. For instance, children, by the age of four grasp that sport is suitable for boys, and that girls should play with dolls (Posey 20). Undeniably, girls are “behind from the get-go in learning the skills needed for physical competence” (Dowling 105). This gender bias, Misty Posey believes, is significantly affecting girl’s motor development skills (20). As a result, girls perceive themselves as weaker than boys, which is subconsciously disturbing their physical movements and performance (Posey 28). Posey adds that in schools children are segregated in their physical education, with girls encouraged not to rigorously exercise or competitively participate in sports (Posey 9). Teachers are accused of “dumbing down”

courses for female students and offering an inferior curriculum when compared to their male peers (Posey 21).

These female bodily experiences pose as barriers in physical tasks, often affecting female ability, and constraining their spatiality and mobility. Chisholm suggests that these imposed gender norms in our social structure act as an “existential obstacle” to female bodily freedom and movement (33). The feminine body, and its relationship to space is governed by “structures,” for example clothing, which inhibits female spatiality (Foster 47). Young therefore points to how clothing is designed with these assumptions in mind. For example, high heels, skirts and dresses restrict one’s movement in space. Ruth Barnes and Joanne Eicher suggest that high heels when worn in a work place represent female weakness and an inferiority to masculinity (19). Indeed, high heels worn over time can change the shape of one’s feet, alter posture and strengthen muscles in your legs. These changes result in body compartment, Eve Shapiro states, which ultimately highlight one’s buttocks and breasts, helping to transform women into objects for the male gaze (4).

For children, inappropriate clothing can act as obstacles that restrict activity and movement. Examples include shoes that do not provide adequate support for running and clothing that is too small or too big (Copeland et al. 4). In child care-centers clothing that is ill-suited for the weather can impede children from going outside to play; for example, Kristen Copeland explains that not having appropriate hats, gloves or a coat can cause problems for the whole class (5). In addition, children’s clothing that is too tight or short, for example dresses and skirts can inhibit bodily movement, ultimately interfering with their tasks and activities, causing inactiveness. Understanding that clothing is gendered helped me to prioritize the design and choices of the clothing that I intended to make, encouraging me to focus on altering clothing that often problematizes compartment and that doesn’t fit certain bodies.

Foucault's theoretical framework from *Discipline and Punish*, along with Judith Butler's concept of performativity and Iris Marion Young's opinions on bodily comportment, have been a significant influence in encouraging the fit, styles, and color schemes of my collection of clothes. These theories help me to grasp how gendered clothing symbolises societal control and power over the body. They help illuminate how young children are coerced into being "docile" bodies and individuals that self-discipline and restrain themselves to only wearing clothing that is deemed either feminine or masculine (Foucault 134).

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Methods

After much thought and supposition I realised that designing and constructing gender neutral clothing was the most beneficial method in helping me to understand the inherent binary nature of clothing. Although other conceivably more creative methods could have assisted in my understanding of these needs, for example creating a video or a sculpture, I believed that only through the actual physical process of making clothes would I truly understand the essence of what I hoped to discover. Indeed, by actively choosing, buying, cutting and sewing the fabrics I was able to focus on the underlying issues of gender identity and how significant clothes are in a child's understanding of one's self. Moreover, it became apparent whilst creating clothes how gendered not only clothing is, but also the fabrics and material needed to make them. By tangibly creating garments I was able to get a real feel for how clothing works practically, providing me with an appreciation of the time, energy and cost it takes to make unique one-off pieces. I was therefore able to also comprehend how difficult it can be to alter and reconstruct traditional clothing patterns to accommodate all bodies.

Rather than creating a static, immovable object, I wanted to construct something that could be dynamic and enterprising, garments that could be worn and utilized by children. In order for me to gain an accurate understanding of how children construct and perform their own gender identity, a qualitative research approach was considered to be the most suitable for this study as it allows one to investigate "why" questions (Smith 2). These are essential when analysing behavioural and social based aims and objectives whilst strengthening research conclusions. Jonathan Smith proposes that research within a qualitative framework is "generally engaged with exploring, describing and interpreting" the personal and social experiences of participants (2). This is why it aligns with my research area so perfectly.

Data Collection

My project emphasizes the importance of gender neutral clothing for every child, no matter where they fit on the gender binary. However, I approached the project knowing from precursory research that there seemed to be insufficient clothing available for trans and gender diverse children. In order for me to understand how to make gender neutral clothing for every child's body, it was decided that the best way to understand what trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming children want and need therefore is to simply ask them. As a cis-gender researcher it is important that I acknowledge my "cis-ness," by intentionally engaging with trans and gender diverse perspectives, rather than my own bias opinions (Galupo 242).

Questionnaires, more specifically, mixed-method web-based online questionnaires, were chosen for this project, after careful deliberation, as they were considered to be the most appropriate and practical research methods for my style of project and within my time frame. Stigmatized communities, for example transgender populations, we are told by Michael Miner, can benefit from using the internet for data collection (203). Indeed, questionnaires can provide parents and their trans and gender diverse children with a voice to state what their desires and needs are, opinions that are perhaps overlooked in society. Research questionnaires were therefore sent to members of 'Parents of Trans and Gender Diverse Kids', NL, a purposefully selected group because of their first hand experiences with children who reject heteronormative assumptions of clothing, or who may or may not have encouraged their children to wear clothing that followed societal norms. Parents in particular were chosen as the focus of this project because they are frequently the ones who pay for and decide on their child's clothing choices.

There are a variety of options available for questionnaire circulation, however, web-based-online questionnaires are the most "easily adaptable tool" (Hewson et al. 43). The advantages of circulating a questionnaire electronically are that they reduce the cost, have a

higher response rate and are relatively easy to complete (Thatch 31). These were important criteria for my own project. Indeed, if I wanted to get the most detailed responses from parental questionnaires I needed to choose a quick and easy to answer method. Online questionnaires, therefore, cater for parents who are busy and often distracted. In addition, Toerien Merran, Sue Wilkinson and Kevin Wright state that questionnaires are practical and flexible research tools that provide significant, extensive research over a large geographical population (1). This was another necessary requirement for my own project. The Parents of Trans and Gender Diverse Kids, NL group covers the whole of the Newfoundland and Labrador province, meaning that members who live far away from St. John's may not have been able to participate in other qualitative method types, for example interviews or focus groups. Online questionnaires, I trusted would accommodate every parent and encourage a rich collection of data. Sending out questionnaires online, furthermore, meant that I did not have long waiting times for participants to send back written questionnaires from all over the province.

Wright adds that questionnaire data collection ensures respondents have greater anonymity; this was an important factor within my own project (1). Providing participants with anonymity and confidentiality when responding to what could be seen to be delicate and personal topics, such as gender identity, was vital for this project. By doing this, I believed that participants would feel protected and comfortable enough to provide detailed answers and opinions. Unlike interviews and focus groups, questionnaires allow participants to contemplate and respond to sensitive questions in their own time frame, encouraging data collection of greater depth and acumen. I anticipated that this method would also be advantageous in allowing me to gain extensive amounts of data at one time. This, I expected, would ensure that I generated a wide enough range of responses without it spiraling out of manageable control.

Participant Recruitment

The snowball sampling method is understood by Kath Browne to be a valuable tool for the study of “hidden” or marginalized communities (47). Snowballing thus was a convenient method for me, assisting in my recruitment of participants who would be willing to respond to my research questions. Indeed, I gained contact with the parent group through my supervisor Jennifer Dyer, who then directed me to the group’s leader Julie Temple-Newhook. An online PDF poster was the best way of advertising my online questionnaire which was sent to Julie Temple-Newhook and subsequently posted onto the Parents of Trans and Gender Diverse Kids, NL, Facebook page. Social media in recent years, and Facebook in particular, has become a favorable strategy for participant recruitment due to the immediacy of data collection, being able to reach individuals in remote locations and the cost effective nature of the medium (King et al. 240). It is for these reasons that I utilized this platform to collect data.

Julie Temple-Newhook was not only provided with the link to the poster, but also to the consent form, to ensure that anonymity was honoured for the willing participants. Participants were invited to participate in the online questionnaire through a Facebook link, which directed them to the consent form. The consent form provided initial information about the purpose of the study, about how participation would be voluntary, their right to withdraw from the study, and how I would uphold confidentiality and the anonymity of their responses. Willing participants were also informed about how they could view the finished clothing displays and how to access the project report online. By clicking on the ‘Continue’ link, after giving their consent, participants were able to proceed onto the Survey Monkey website. Survey Monkey was chosen as the platform to collect the questionnaire results because it is free, easy to use, exports results, and also displays the results in a way that is easy to understand (Survey Monkey, Making Responses). Additionally, this programme offers a

wide range of analytical functions, including cross tabulation which enables you to examine the relationships within the data, which simplified the data analysis process (Johnson, What is a Cross-Tab Report).

A total of ten questions were included in the questionnaire, see Appendix 1, enquiring about their child's daily clothing choices, their experiences with the binary of gender and if their children adhere or challenge societal norms. This number of questions was selected to ensure the questions were focused and to the point. I recognized that each question needed to be carefully considered, thus ensuring that my participants would fully understand the meaning and context of the question and have the necessary knowledge to answer it. Using a combination of both open-ended and fixed questions, participants were provided with the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences and knowledge in a structured format (fixed questions) and to illustrate their understanding of clothing and gender in as much, or as little detail as they desired (open-ended questions). It was hoped that using open-ended questions would provide me with the opportunity to secure in-depth responses, by "giving voice" to participants, thus "inviting" them to expand upon their lived experiences, knowledges and understandings (Merran and Wilkinson 4). Fixed choice, closed questions were also used to provide a quantitative insight, allowing statistical analysis and comparison, whilst providing participants with quick and easy to answer questions (Wright, McLafferty 76, Flowerdew and Martin 35).

It was hoped and anticipated that there would be responses from 10-12 participants, to help keep analysis manageable. However, it came as a surprise to me that I only received a total of five responses from the Parent Group. The sparse response rate could indicate that the questions were not as precise and unambiguous as I had hoped. Perhaps the questions were not communicated clearly enough, or the remit and purpose of the study was not explained in sufficient detail. I gave willing participants a three-week time limit, perhaps, if given longer,

and with more reminders, a higher number of parents might have responded to my questionnaire. It is also important to remember that parents are often busy, distracted and may not have had time to complete my questionnaire.

The questionnaire responses ranged from sentences with single words to several sentences in length. The responses were eye opening and unanticipated, and have reshaped my analysis and ultimately my clothing designs. Indeed, I initially expected that performativity and disciplined bodies would be the main two theoretical frameworks discussed within the responses, and utilized within my project. However, the concept of bodily comportment was also mentioned by the participants which encouraged me to adjust and fine-tune my project. Instead, as I will explain in more detail in the next chapter, bodily comportment has become a significant theory at play in my work. In hindsight, in-depth interview and focus groups could have provided me with a greater collection of data, however, due to the Newfoundland and Labrador transgender community being small-scale, I could still have struggled finding willing participants. A pilot test could therefore have been beneficial for this project and worth considering for future research projects, to help illustrate any potential issues that would arise.

Analysis

Thematic Content analysis, a descriptive strategy that promotes the exploration of patterns of cultural meaning, was utilized in this study to organize data and to provide the project with a rich description of the data set. This analysis technique allowed me to systematically code characteristics and themes relating to my theories: performativity, disciplined bodies and bodily comportment (Franzosi 2). Coding occurs, according to Judith Lapadat, by inspecting recurrent dominant themes found in participant questionnaire responses (926). A deductive approach to coding was seen, indeed, a “top-down” technique, that allowed myself, the researcher to formulate a pre-established coding scheme of themes

(Lapadat 926, Braun and Clarke 12). The themes ‘Expression,’ ‘Autonomy,’ ‘Societal Pressures,’ and ‘Bodily Comportment,’ were chosen prior to sending out the questionnaire because they were recurring concepts and ideas from my literature review and theoretical framework. Whilst analysing and gaining an understanding of the theory of performativity, the linked themes of ‘Expression’ and ‘Societal Pressures’ were also frequently cited. Using ‘Expression’ as a coding theme, I believed, would help me to comprehend how the participants’ children use clothing to express their gender identity, thus, highlighting the importance of expressing one’s self freely, without constraints.

Understanding Foucault’s concepts of ‘Discipline and Punishment’ highlighted the societal pressures children face with regards to the binary nature of clothing, and how children can be controlled and manipulated into wearing either feminine or masculine garments. This theory also underlined how one’s ‘Bodily Comportment’ is influenced significantly by societal pressures. Both of these themes; ‘Bodily Comportment and ‘Societal Pressures’ therefore, became important themes when coding my participants’ responses. The concept of ‘Autonomy,’ was mentioned by many prominent scholars, including Young, Butler and Halim et al., and was therefore worthy of exploration and use as a coding theme. This theme, I hoped would help me to explain why all children on the gender spectrum need to have choice in regards to their clothing habits. After collecting and analysing my results I realised that further themes and concepts were emerging from participants’ responses, resulting in my inclusion of ‘Comfort’, ‘The Weather,’ and ‘Body Fit’ as important factors to consider when designing a collection of gender neutral clothes. These themes therefore were woven into my analysis alongside my exploration of ‘Expression,’ ‘Societal Pressures,’ ‘Autonomy’ and ‘Bodily Comportment.’ Indeed, the scholars and experts in the best position to drive forward this project, by illustrating the themes that need to be included, are the participants themselves.

The process of classifying data, by marking similar themes with a code or label, helped me to seek out any relationships, theoretical constructs or any commonalities within my data that were important for later retrieval and theory building (Franzosi, Lapadat 925, Given 867). The process of line-to-line coding was beneficial, helping me to separate the themes and concepts, as I split and spliced the data. Nick Tate and Rob Kitchin state that splitting involves the researcher categorizing data into refined sections and tables, whilst splicing allows differentiation within subcategories connecting categories together (245). It was suggested by Hsiu Fang Hsieh and Sarah Shannon that using a tree diagram and concept mapping would be beneficial for helping to map out and organize the themes and sub themes into a hierarchical structure, ranging from the most relevant argument to the least relevant (1279). Tony Griffiths and Joanne Nakonechy believe that this method of data organization assists the researcher in acknowledging the inter-relationships of the themes most efficiently (4). Using this visual strategy provided a structure to the data and helped me to construct an understanding of clothing and gender.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Children are “diverse”; some may be cisgender, others may identify with a gender identity that differs from their natal sex (Pyne 1), whilst other children may express a gender identity which is fluid and constantly changing, blending aspects of multiple genders (Pyne 1). For this reason, there is a “desperate need” for gender neutral clothing in our society (Participant 3). Indeed, providing clothing that is accessible and comfortable for every child is vital. I decided therefore that I would design and produce a collection of gender neutral clothes that would be accommodating for every child, wherever they may fit on the gender spectrum. This chapter has been divided into eight sections each describing one of my finished garments, whilst also analyzing how clothing disciplines and regulates a body, as well as the significance that clothing has in shaping one’s performance of gender and bodily comportment. Each section has multiple photographs that visually demonstrate the finished clothes. It is important to note here that using a variety of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming children as models would have been the ideal situation for this project. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak I had a limited choice of children that I personally knew who could quickly model, this meant I had to resort to using my own son and the same three children as my fashion models. Each child and parent have provided consent for these photographs to be utilized within my report.

Puffin Blazer

Children are not born knowing what it means to be a boy or a girl; they learn it. These lessons and social expectations begin as soon as a doctor announces “it’s a boy” or “it’s a girl,” with young children conditioned to play with certain toys, speak in a certain way and most importantly dress in a stereotypical fashion. Unquestionably, we as a society are unconsciously and consciously disciplining, and manipulating children from a young age into wearing clothes that are binary: feminine or masculine (Entwistle 11). Indeed, as Participant

1 suggests: “the way we market clothes for girls and boys reinforces the idea that there are only two genders, and that they are opposite.” Clothing is designed by manufacturers, and bought by customers who assume that sex and gender are fixed, stable categories and that everyone’s gender maps directly onto their biological sex (Ellisa et al. 351). This can be seen in the clothing inventory of most companies’ stocks. Indeed “it’s obvious from the separation in stores and the different tabs while online shopping” (Participant 4). It cannot be disputed that the female body is particularly controlled and trained to show signs of femininity, which has led to skirts, dresses and tight, figure hugging pants becoming associated symbolically with the female body (Entwistle 33).

Suits, pants and blazers, on the other hand, have traditionally been designed for male procurement, and so therefore now signify “men” (Entwistle 141). Anne Hollander reiterates this when describing suits as expressing “confident adult masculinity” (113). Indeed, in the past, men went to work and wore suits, while women wore dresses, staying at home (Suitkits, 6 Myths About Women’s Suits). Women today are challenging and redefying these gender roles in the home, which means that as a society we also need to update our opinion on what belongs in a female wardrobe. Clothing is “starting to lose its binary nature,” with pants now acceptable for women to wear (Suitkits, 6 Myths About Women’s Suits). However, suits and blazers are still mostly worn by women in a professional setting. Professional female bodies are encouraged to be more “male-ish” in an attempt to compete with masculine “strength,” “ability” and “intelligence” (Tretheway 425). However, even then they are instructed to not be too masculine (Tretheway 425). As a consequence of suits being symbolic of “male power” women who wear them are sometimes accused of being unfeminine (Arvantidou 113). Olivia Stren believes that suits designed for women try to “emulate a menswear staple” and hide one’s femininity (Feminism and Femininity Collide). Suits, therefore, with appropriate tailoring and modified shape could become a “symbol of female empowerment

and strength,” and could become a way of performing femininity (Stren, *Feminism and Femininity Collide*).

When considering designing suits for children, however, it became apparent that suits and blazers are generally only available for acquisition in the “boys” sections. With this in mind, I sought to design a blazer that would allow all children, regardless of gender, the opportunity to wear a fun and vibrant garment. Indeed, despite suits being traditionally designed in dark, plain hues for men and boys, suits can be redesigned and flattering for all children. It is hoped that this jacket will allow all children to feel powerful. Indeed, when girls wear this blazer they will be “undoing the seams that have long divided power” (Stren, *Feminism and Femininity Collide*).



Fig.1. Mpame, Chloe. *Front of Puffin Blazer*. February 2020.



Fig.2. Mpame, Chloe. *Back of Puffin Blazer*. February 2020.

The design for this bold, bright puffin blazer was chosen because it allows for variations in body frame and is flattering on all shapes. The pattern for the blazer was originally designed for a newborn baby boy. I, however, feminized the shape of it. Whilst enlarging it to fit a size three, I made it shorter in length and modified the chest section, ensuring that it would be flattering for all genders, not just for boys. I also made sure that the blazer doesn't cinch in at the waist, providing a more neutral body fit. I choose a bright yellow puffin fabric that is bold and eye catching.

Hollander acknowledges that suits have a reputation for being “inexpressive” because of their colors, shapes and lines which are

considered dull, monotonous, and uninteresting (113).

I therefore wanted to choose a fun and exciting fabric that would be appealing to all ages. When it was mentioned that “boys like color and sparkles too! Even my totally cis son loves a flashy pink button up shirt,” I chose the puffin fabric; a cheerful and refreshing pattern (Participant 2). As a color, yellow, is considered to be neutral, neither masculine nor feminine, which was important for this project (Pomerlau 365).



Figure.3. Mpame, Chloe. *Modelling Puffin Blazer*. February 2020.

It must be noted that there are references throughout this collection of clothes to the province of Newfoundland and Labrador because I wanted children to feel a sense of affinity and belonging when they wear the clothes, being able to recognize familiar animals and items found here in this province. Indeed, children may feel lost and confused whilst trying to identify and express their gender identity. Having a sense of familiarity, therefore, could ground them to a community that they are a part of and understand.

This blazer has been designed to fit a child aged three to highlight how children, from as early as three years old are aware of societal gender distinctions, and how children at this age are already learning the patterns for gender appropriate dress and as such, begin applying them to their own constructions of their identity (Paoletti 2, Kacen 346 and Murnen et al 78). Responses from my online questionnaire reaffirm this, as seen in figure 4, with participants stating that their children were aware of their gender identity from as early as two years old, with one participant ticking the “before 3” option. Two participants also stated that their

children became aware of their gender identity between “3-4 years”. This reaffirms The American Academy of Pediatrics and World Professional Association for Transgender Health, who both state that children from as early as two may demonstrate gender non-conforming behavior and gender dysphoria (12).

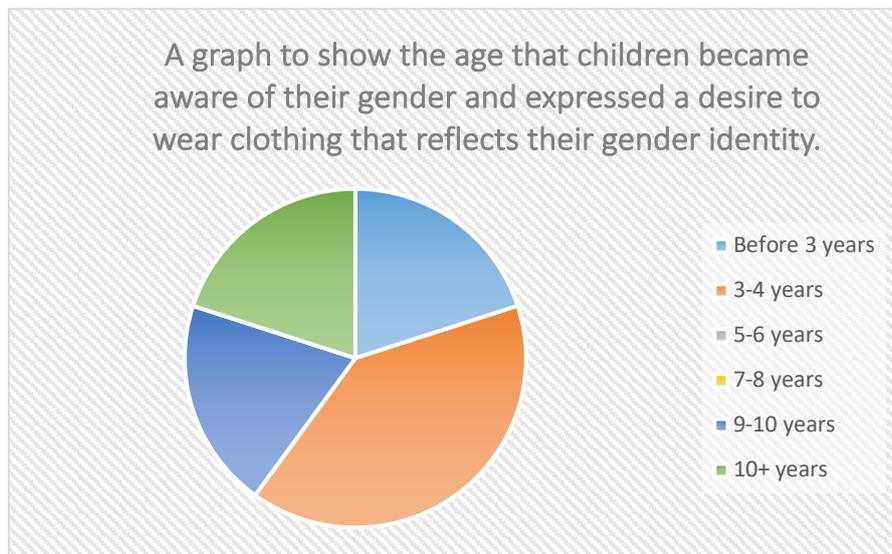


Fig.4. A graph to show the age that children became aware of their gender and expressed a desire to wear clothing that reflects their gender identity.

However, this graph also reiterates Julie Temple-Newhook’s et al. findings, that although most children are aware of their gender identity by the age of 3-4, this is not the case for all individuals, with gender identity for some children being a “more fluid” and “slower” developmental process (217). This can be seen by one participant ticking the “9-10 years” box and another ticking the “10+ years” box. Indeed, Temple-Newhook et al. suggest that children may find that their gender “fits” different identities throughout their childhood and lifetime (217). Temple-Newhook et al. go on to explain that it is therefore important that children are taught that changes in one’s gender identity are not “errors” in the process of discovering a “true gender,” but instead are crucial steps along a journey of self-discovery and life-long exploration (Temple-Newhook et al. 217).

When fashion companies limit self-expression by restricting what is available to customers, it is important that children are provided with the exploration of all clothing styles (McLeod 52). This blazer, it is hoped, will allow children the opportunity to break societal expectations that teach children that it is only boys who are allowed to wear blazers and suits. Although this blazer will promote the exploration and experimentation of one's gender identity, it is parents and caregivers who are crucial at this stage in a child's life. Indeed, it is the parents who need to be accepting of their child's individual journey by allowing them to explore aspects of gender. Kimberley Manning claims that until recently many gender nonconforming and transgender children were "non- apparent" because their parents were reluctant to allow their child's gender transgression, due to the shame and stigma associated with gender nonconformity (582). Sadly, many conservative parents still uphold traditional heteronormative ideologies of masculinity and femininity, acting as "agents," policing their child's dress choices (Paoletti 119).

Manning implies that it is systematic gender regulation which encourages parents to have gender-based expectations and to automatically reject their child's nonconforming gender expression (582). It is often not just parents, but society as a whole that rejects these expressions. Indeed, when asked if their children had ever received any reactions from their peers in relation to their clothing choices Participant 2 stated that:

My youngest is AMAB gender fluid and has been asked more than once why she wears skirts/dresses. Her confident response is "because I like it! Do you like what you're wearing?" My middle child is trans male and has received many negative responses from insults to "why don't you care about your appearance.

Similarly, Participant 1 answered: "Yes, they have noticed that people treat them differently based on their clothes because it influences whether or not they are read as a girl or a boy." These comments teach us that we, as a society, feel the need to discipline and

punish, by treating individuals “differently” (Participant 1), and by throwing “insults” and “negative responses” (Participant 2), to children and adults who fail to perform the correct “illusion” of gender (Butler 528). Carol-Lynn Martin explains that children are disciplinarians and “gender police” their peers, and that children who were exposed to “gender enforcer peers” were more likely to limit their clothing, toys and choices of play with same-sex peers (359). This she believes contributes to the maintenance of gender divisions and distinctions in the school environment (Martin 359). However, the other two participant responses declared “not to my knowledge,” (Participant 3) and “only if my child is wearing a “cool” shirt,” suggesting that not all reactions towards gender diverse children’s clothing are negative (Participant 4).

Nevertheless, we as a society need to dismantle this panoptic society so that children are not scared of wearing a bright yellow puffin blazer, and can grow up in an environment where they are not afraid of portraying the wrong gender roles or gender identity. It’s apparent then, that the regulating of child gender identity by parents and peers needs to be shifted to parents affirming it (Manning 591). Indeed, Temple-Newhook et al. explain that current research suggests that children who have been raised by parents who affirm and validate their child’s gender identity often grow up in a different, sometimes healthier life course than those who don’t (215). Indeed, Herbert Schreier and Diane Ehrensaft teach us that the “gender affirmative approach,” in which parents support their children to live the gender that feels the most authentic and comfortable to them, can improve their child’s mental health throughout their childhood and into adulthood (Want to know a child’s gender? Ask). Quoting Ehrensaft, Katherine Kovalanka et al. explain that the gender affirmative model allows children to express their “true gender selves” with freedom from restrictions or rejection (890). As mentioned above by Manning, many gender nonconforming and transgender children have been “non- apparent” until recently. However, when a transgender

child socially transitions, and begins to freely present their gender, which aligns with their gender identity, they become “increasingly visible in society” (Olson et al. 1). These social transitions can include a change of name, pronouns used and appearance including hairstyle and clothing (Olsen et al.3). It is hoped then that by providing all children with gender neutral clothing, such as the puffin blazer, children will begin to feel confident in expressing their true authentic selves.

Underwear

Although gender identity and gender expression are not the same, experimenting with different clothing, hairstyles and mannerisms that carry gendered connotations can be an affirming way of publically presenting one’s gender identity. When asked how strongly the participants felt the need for gender neutral clothing is in our society it was highlighted that “Underwear is a BIG issue!” (Participant 2) and that we need “An underwear line” (Participant 5). Lorraine Smith and Amanda Leon-Joyce believe that identity formation can be “enhanced” by underwear as it regulates one’s bodily presentation (Unmentionables). Underclothing, and underwear in particular, is often the first thing that individuals consider when deciding how they want to portray them self that day, because it can affect the shape of one’s body and alters the way that clothes fit (Shannon, Androgynous Lingerie). Indeed, it can form part of an individual’s expression of their gender identity because of the “foundation” it provides to one’s outward dress (Tsaousia and Brewis 4). Underwear can help you not only feel comfort, in a physical sense, but can also help you to feel socially comfortable as you dress your body in underwear that is authentically you.

Gender neutral underwear therefore provides individuals with the opportunity to “self-invent” themselves unregulated by disciplinary societal expectations (Campisi Gender Neutral Underwear). Indeed, when you wear gender neutral attire “you take gender out of it” which unlocks endless opportunities for “universal comfort, fit and performance” (Campisi

Gender Neutral Underwear). Undeniably underwear is gendered with girls' underwear stereotypically feminine and characterized by frills, lace, thin fabrics, and elastic that digs into one's hips (Campisi, Gender Neutral Underwear). This is in stark contrast to stretchy, soft, thick cottoned, snug fitting comfortable boys' underwear. This indicates, as Stephanie Campisi points out, that the distinction is that "one is about the underwear's appearance. The other is comfortable underwear" (Gender Neutral Underwear). I decided therefore to create my own collection of underwear, which consist of 10 pieces including three styles, four different fabric choices and multiple sizes that would be comfortable for all body types.

I chose three designs. The boxer brief, shown in figure 5, is unrestrictive and allows for more movement, providing fuller coverage, especially in the rear. It was decided that the boxer style pieces would have a smooth front with no slits because according to Lisa Davis' research "men don't use the pee hole" (Gender Free Underwear). This would also allow all children the opportunity to wear a traditionally 'boyish' underwear design and fit. The second pattern, seen in figure 6, is called the 'Soaker.' It was originally designed to fit over diapers and since, has been enlarged to provide a neutral shape and fit. This pattern was chosen to allow children the opportunity to wear tighter fitting underwear that is high waisted whilst still providing coverage. The third style of underwear produced is traditionally a more feminine brief/pantie shape, as seen in figure 7. This style was included because it is important to provide children with all styles and shapes to allow them to experiment with their own comfort and performance.

Each garment has been made out of a breathable cotton-blend knit fabric that has a wide soft waistband made of the same material, purposely not an elastic band, so that it doesn't dig into your hips. I chose to do a vast variety of sizes and colors because three participants mentioned the need for colorful fun clothes that fit all body shapes. Indeed, Participant 3 mentioned the need for "clothing in all colors and styles," Participant 2 asked

for “the same clothes/patterns/styles in different fits to accommodate different bodies with a range of colors, patterns and embellishments.” In addition, Participant 1 requested “Lots of color choices, patterns and pockets.”



Fig.5. Mpame, Chloe. *Boxer Style Underwear*. March 2020.



Fig.6. Mpame, Chloe. *Soaker Style Underwear*. March 2020.



Fig.7. Mpame, Chloe. *Brief Style Underwear*. March 2020.

The garments therefore range from three to eight years of age, as this is when children embark on their own personal journeys as “gender detectives,” analyzing and experimenting with their own gender identity (Halim et al. “Pink Frilly Dresses” 1092). I chose to experiment with two “neutral” fabrics, (the black constellation pattern and the dark pink robot pattern) as well as one feminine pattern (the princess swan) and one masculine fabric

(skateboard). These were chosen to allow any trans children with the opportunity to experiment with feminine or masculine styles, whilst still accommodating their body shapes.

Tsaousia and Brewis acknowledge that although underwear is hidden underneath clothing it is still a vital part of the construction and reconstruction of feminine identities (18). I, therefore, also experimented with two pieces of gaff underwear for transgender girls, by including a snug second layer of cotton fleece sewn into the inside panel, as seen in figure 9. Placing this extra fleece fabric offers extra padding and coverage to accommodate genitals. Ginger Gorman mentions how underwear for transgender girls needs to be “comfortable, have good coverage, be colorful and fun looking” whilst also including “the additional thickness in the crotch area” (More Than Just Undies).



Fig.8. Mpame, Chloe. *Swan Princess Briefs*. March 2020.



Fig.9. Mpame, Chloe. *Gaff Underwear*. March 2020.

These undergarments will “open gender” by allowing children the opportunity to regulate their appearance by diminishing or enhancing their physical body shape (Alexander, Gender and Clothing). Indeed, outer clothing altered by these garments will perform new physical geometrics, providing children with the opportunity to shape their appearance to a

desired point in a spectrum of genders (Alexander, Gender and Clothing). These, it is hoped will encourage performativity, offering transgender girls in particular, with a flexible experience of gender, by providing them with the freedom to perform their gender identity whilst feeling comfortable and securely dressed. However, it is important to note that all underwear pieces are available for all children, not just for those who do not fit into a gender binary.



Fig.10. Mpame, Chloe. *Modelling Soaker Style Underwear*. March 2020.

Bear Print Shirt

Clothes can help demonstrate, shape, and reveal one's identity, providing it with a direct material reality (Twigg 1). Analyzing clothing, therefore, offers a useful lens through which to review how one's dress is so intimately related to our bodies and how it is connected to our gender identities (Bernard 110). One of the ways that gender is maintained is through the gendering of clothing and how we are constantly upholding these gendered performances. The buttoning of shirts, although unnoticeable to many, is a gendered experience. Indeed, it has become normal and unquestionable that shirts designed for men and boys', find buttons on the right hand side, whilst shirts for women and girls' are featured on the left hand side. It is the "stylized repetition of acts" that encourage individuals to believe that shirts with buttons on the right hand side are masculine and thus, not for women (Butler 519). The constant repetitive performativity, of buttoning up a shirt has consequently

become a “routine accomplishment,” an ongoing natural habit in our daily lives (West and Zimmerman 126, Crawley et al. 48). By not questioning these gendered norms, individuals, become passive consumers and “merely take what’s given to them,” ultimately reinforcing and maintaining these societal expectations (McLeod 11). Active consumers on the other hand use clothing to challenge and resist (McLeod 11). When children perform gender “wrong,” (Butler 528) or perform the “wrong gender” they disrupt these dominant gender ideologies (Crawley et al. 84).



Fig.11. Mpame, Chloe. *Open Bear Print Shirt*. February 2020.

The bear print shirt, as seen above in figure 11, was therefore designed to allow children including trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming individuals the opportunity to become active consumers. This shirt was designed to reassure children that they are able to express and perform gender by wearing clothing that does not always distinguish or fit into the gender binary. The double buttons and buttonholes on both sides of the shirt eliminate fixed binary categories, enabling children to develop and pick their own aesthetics. This, it is hoped, will grant children who may be feeling pressured to fit into certain expectations of

gender, the freedom to be in control of their own bodies. This will ultimately stimulate an active performativity for a more fluid experience of gender.



Fig.12. Mpame, Chloe. *Buttoned up on Left Hand Side*. February 2020.



Fig.13. Mpame, Chloe. *Buttoned up on Right Hand Side*. February 2020.

Shirts are often restrictive and tight, however, this one is loose fitting, enabling children to fully utilize their bodily capacities. Participant 1 noted that there is a need for gender neutral clothing in Newfoundland and Labrador to have “layers for our unpredictable weather.” Having a larger fitting shirt therefore allows for other garments to fit comfortably underneath. The thin cotton fabric also ensures that there is room for extra layers to be added on top. The participants in my study mentioned that ‘Color’ and ‘Style’ were the second and third most important factors that influence their child’s clothing choices. I adapted the shirt’s length, making it a little longer than a traditional garment, providing a new modern twist on the classic shirt. Indeed, the shape extends out into a miniature flare at the bottom to fit over pants, leggings and skirts.

With the participants’ responses in mind, I was careful to pick out a neutral color scheme and pattern which could appeal to every child regardless of one’s gender. The green, brown and orange tones are neither feminine nor masculine, reflective of Newfoundland and

Labrador’s natural environment and wildlife. This fabric, although presenting a limited color pallet, is still fun and interesting to look at.



Fig.14. Mpame, Chloe. *Modelling Bear Print Shirt*. February 2020.



Fig.15. Mpame, Chloe. *Bear Print Shirt Model*. February 2020.

To Joanne Finkelstein, clothes are comparable to a vocabulary which can convey messages and communicate “to those skilled in reading them” (qtd. McLeod 50). This shirt therefore can be seen as a non-verbal language that children can speak through. It is possible to express one’s self through the active performance of buttoning up one’s shirt (McLeod 50, Bernard 7). This shirt, along with the underwear styles mentioned previously, offer children control and agency over their bodily representation, providing a “personal voice” that can help open up gender and the body to critical conversation (Alexander, *Gender and Clothing*).

Reversible Bear Coat

It is apparent, therefore, that agency and autonomy is vital in the performance of one’s gender identity. As individuals, we have the “decision-making capacity” to consciously choose to reject and transgress against social expectations of gender and dress (Crawley et al. 62). For children, however, this may not be the case, with child agency being controlled by

parents and caregivers. Pollen and Paoletti describe how it is the parents, and the mothers in particular, who play the role of “gatekeeping” by monitoring and controlling the purchasing of clothes and accessories (Paoletti 163). However, parents can provide their children with the necessary autonomy and agency to make their own decisions about self-presentation and bodily practices, rather than pressuring them to simply conform to gendered norms (Crawley et al. 182). Indeed, it is apparent that the parents in my study understand that autonomy is fundamental in their child’s life. Indeed, figure 16 visualizes this, with four out of five of my participants’ stating that they “Never” choose what their child will wear that day, and one claiming that they choose their child’s clothes “1-2 times a week”.

A graph to show the frequency of participants choosing their child’s clothing per week.

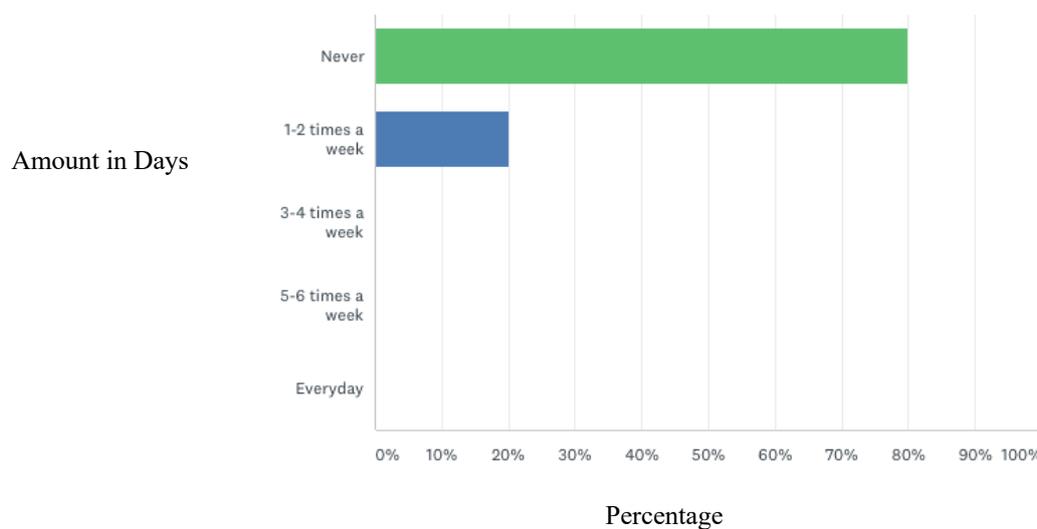


Fig. 16. A Graph to Show the Frequency of Participants Choosing Their Child’s Clothing Per Week.

This is reinforced by the participants’ answers to question 4 of the online questionnaire. When asked if they believe that it is important to support children in the development of autonomy by allowing children to make their own choices and decisions all four replies gave an instant “Yes” or “Absolutely,” with Participant 1 stating that “I give all of my children a great deal of autonomy in choosing their own clothes.” In addition,

Participant 4 mentioned how “children need to feel supported and they need to learn to be independent and need to learn how to express themselves.”

Interestingly, three responses mentioned that they allow their children the freedom to choose clothing unless it is in regards to safety and the weather, for example, Participant 2 mentioned:

While I discourage choices that will actively harm them (sandals in winter) I also embrace learning opportunities (shorts in winter when they’re only walking from car to school). I refuse to accept the societal pressure to adhere to a certain clothing norm and embrace their creativity.

With the significant influence of the weather in Newfoundland and Labrador and the importance of child autonomy in mind, I was determined to construct an item of clothing that would not only provide children with agency and freedom to perform their gender, but also to keep them safe and warm. The reversible bear coat was thus created, with two differing sides.



Fig. 17. Mpame, Chloe. *Modelling Feminine Side of Bear Coat*. March 2020.



Fig.18. Mpame, Chloe. *Modelling Masculine Side of Bear Coat*. March 2020.

On the one side, as you can see in figures 17, 19 and 20 there is green fur, flowers, bear ears, bear claw pockets and a tail. This side was chosen to be a more feminine side. The

green, although a neutral color, is feminized by the flower pattern and texture. This feminine side of the coat juxtaposes the pin striped blue fleeced material, representative of the masculine side. Blue stripes were chosen because they are considered by Paoletti to be masculine (19). On this side of the coat, the absence of the flowered texture and animalistic features conveys masculine symbols, rather than signaling femininity (Paoletti 6, Bernard 112).



Fig. 19. Mpame, Chloe. *Feminine Style*
Front of Bear Coat. March 2020.



Fig. 20. Mpame, Chloe. *Feminine Style*
Back of Bear Coat. March 2020.



Fig. 21. Mpame, Chloe. *Masculine Style*
Front of Bear Coat. March 2020.



Fig. 22. Chloe, Mpame. *Masculine Style*
Back of Bear Coat. March 2020..

The soft fur and fleece fabrics were chosen because they are thick and heavy. Although not waterproof or a windbreaker, this coat would still be suitable for cold days. Kristen Copeland explains how certain clothing can act as a barrier to children's physical movement and activity in the wintertime (5). Ill-suited clothing, for example flip-flops and no coat or gloves, can impede children, and a whole class from going outside to play (5). For this reason, a coat was considered appropriate for Newfoundland and Labrador's weather, and thus, added to the collection of clothes.

Femininity and masculinity are "not what you are, they are what you do" (Crowley et al. 52). Thus, rather than directing a child towards a particular identity, this coat was designed so that children can actively manipulate the setting in which they perform, to help them "do," (West and Zimmerman 126) and explore gender that is the "right fit" (Temple-Newhook et al. 217). This coat, similarly to the bear shirt and underwear, provides children with agency to openly experiment and create their own "front" that audiences read (Goffman 22). Indeed, the reversible feature of this coat allows children to pick which side they want to wear, depending on how they feel that day.

Hockey Print Dress

Ben Barry, quoting Madison Moore, describes the disruption of gender codes, through the "stylization of the body," (Butler 519) as "fabulousness" (What Happens When Men Don't Conform). It is evident that "fabulous" men and boys who self-discipline and police their clothing, to avoid "masculinity dilemmas," often avoid appearances that reject societal expectations of what masculinity should look like (Barry, What Happens When Men Don't Conform). There is a societal fear of crossing gender boundaries, which leads individuals to censor their "fabulousness" and "mute" core aspects of themselves (Barry, What Happens When Men Don't Conform). Boys, although possibly wanting to wear them, reject feminine dresses and skirts when entering a stage of "gender appearance rigidity" (Halim et al. "Pink

Frilly Dresses” 1092). Foucault’s theory of disciplined bodies helps us to understand that these bodies have become “docile,” with boys self-disciplining and undergoing daily bodily surveillance to ensure that they are performing masculinity correctly (134). In adulthood men are expected to wear clothing that embodies masculine traits, for example the business suit which is synonymous with corporate success (Barry, *What Happens When Men Don’t Conform*). Children are equally placed in an “arrested environment” where they are constantly being observed and scrutinized by teachers and peers to perform their stereotypical gender roles and to uphold traditional heteronormative ideologies of femininity and masculinity (Paul 299). Instead of wearing dresses and skirts, most boys choose appropriate shirts, pants, and shorts (Paoletti 19).

Butler and Sarah Crawley et al. suggest that when individuals consciously perform gender in a way that should be culturally taboo and unimaginable, for example male femininity and female masculinity, they destabilize dominant notions of gender and expose the “impossibility of a so-called natural gender binary” (Crawley et al.183). The hockey print dress was thus designed to allow every child on the gender spectrum the opportunity to announce to the world that “this is who I am,” and that “our aesthetic is resistance” (qtd. Alveraz 619). Indeed, when boys wear this dress they will be testing the boundaries of masculinity by visibly embracing femininity through their outward appearance. Just as handbags, earrings and necklaces have over the years “lost their taboo,” we can, by teaching boys that it is acceptable to wear dresses and skirts, help clothing to start to lose its binary nature (Hollander 182).

This hockey print dress, on the other hand, can also help to affirm one’s gender identity. Wearing a dress begins the process in which “femaleness becomes inscribed” in girls bodies (qtd. Pollen 176). This dress, therefore, could help individuals who feel



discomfort within their assigned sex, for example gender non-conforming or trans children, to feel authentic and comfortable in their own clothed body. It is important to allow children to experiment with their affirmed gender, and wearing this dress therefore, could help trans children who may be struggling with gender dysphoria to feel genuine and confident.

Fig. 23. Mpame, Chloe. *Hockey Print Dress*. February 2020.

Indeed, gender-conforming clothing, for transgender girls, for example dresses and skirts, can help individuals to avoid hostile, uncomfortable situations, as well as helping them to maintain their gender identity (Reilly, Clothing Fit Issues). Thus, I wanted to design a dress that could enable children to feel that “my wardrobe is my armor in this battle,” providing children with the confidence to face a society that tells them that their style of living “doesn’t deserve recognition” (Alveraz 618).

When answering question eight of the online questionnaire Participant 1 mentioned that they “...would like to see gender neutral clothing with more flair, including dresses!”

This style of dress was therefore selected because of its structure which incorporated elegant pleats and a detailed bodice section. The straight cut of the bodice was decided upon as a flattering option for bigger as well as smaller chested children. Additionally, the sleeves were designed, with a thin strap, rather than a full capped sleeve, to provide a fit for children with bigger shoulders and arms, as well as being suitable for those with smaller, thinner arms. I had conceptualized that the bottom of the dress would hang loose and be floaty. Dresses are often restrictive, acting as “structures” that inhibit female spatiality (Foster 47). Having limited physicality can threaten and often remove one’s autonomy by eliminating the possibility for forms of self-expression (Campbell et al. 129). I therefore wanted to create a garment that would allow children to move unrestrictedly and freely, whilst still being able to perform their gender identity.



Fig. 24. Mpame, Chloe.
Front of Hockey Dress.
February 2020.



Fig. 25. Mpame, Chloe.
Modelling Hockey Dress.
February 2020.



Fig. 26. Mpame, Chloe.
Back of Hockey Dress.
February 2020.

Nevertheless, I had imagined that the dress would have been shorter and substantially bigger, having used measurements for age four. However, I can see now, that I miscalculated the pleating of the chest area and subsequently it ended up being quite tight and restrictive on

top, whilst still being the appropriate length for a four-year-old. Consequently, the dress was able to fit my two-year old, however, as you can see in figures 24, 25 and 26, the dress is very long and inhibits full bodily movement. This points to the ways in which modifying and adjusting clothing patterns can be difficult, especially when you are trying to create a garment that is suitable and fits all children.

This motivated me to consider an additional accompanying garment that would provide all children, not just boys, with full bodily capacity to move and partake in physical activity. Young and Susan Foster, highlight the phenomenological distinctions in the systematic gender conditioning and training of male-bodied and female-bodied individuals (Young, 28, Foster 47). They both agree that girls and boys are notably differentially taught and trained to experience and practice the body differently, resulting in very contrasting understandings of one's body, self and their physical ability (Crawley et al. 64). Chisholm suggests that imposed gender norms in our social structure act as an "existential obstacle" to female bodily freedom and movement (33). Our society, thus, creates "more-abled male bodies" and physically "dis-abled" female bodies (Crawley et al. 64). Indeed, women and girls are notably more restricted in their manner of movement and spatiality than men, with gendered differences seen in gesture, posture and overall bodily comportment (Yap 93, Foster 47, Chisholm 11). Thus, wearing a dress or skirt can inhibit a girl's ability to participate in sports and physical activity due to fears of immodesty. They therefore have to negotiate how they sit, how they play and how quickly they move (Crawley et al. 65).



Fig. 27. Mpame, Chloe. *Shorts Under Dress*. March 2020.

I therefore created a pair of red shorts, as seen in figure 27, which fits neatly underneath the hockey print dress. This add-on offers children freedom of movement, allowing children to run, and be active, whilst still being able to happily express their gender identity. I have sewn the shorts into the dresses' waistline, however, reflecting on this, I could have added in snap fasteners to allow children to freely remove or add the shorts when desired. The visible fabric choice, the hockey print has also been carefully selected to portray how girls, too, can be interested in "aggressive" sports such as hockey (Theberge 507).

When we, as a society, teach children that "sport= masculinity" (Crawley et al. 64), we are reconstructing societal norms that govern and discipline female bodily comportment which in turn establishes female "inhibited intentionality" (Young 149). There is evidence that girl's participation in physical activity dramatically declines as they enter adolescence (President's Council iii). We therefore need to encourage girls to partake in sports and physical activities, to aid in building the foundations for an unrestrictive, healthy adult life. It is hoped, therefore, that this garment can help children, including cis-gender and transgender girls, to accomplish this whilst still providing them with the freedom to wear a dress.

Tracksuit

Although the Hockey Print Dress provides children with the opportunity to wear a dress and still be physically active, it can still be seen to be somewhat restrictive. An item of active wear that is worn by everyone, regardless of one's gender identity is the tracksuit, consisting of both sweat pants and a hoodie. Sweat pants, in particular, are one of the few items of clothing that "transcend" societal norms of gender and fashion (Devaney, Differences Between). I was thus inspired to include my own tracksuit in this collection of clothes. As seen in figures 28 and 29, it is loose and cozy, offering children warmth and physicality. Despite tracksuits "transcending" gender norms there are still some differences between sweat pants for women and girls, and men and boys (Devaney, Differences

Between). In order for me to create a tracksuit considered to be gender neutral, I first needed to consider the visual cues or patterns of tracksuits that are understood to be clearly masculine or feminine. Sweat pants designed for boys have wider waistlines, are longer in the leg and incorporate dark, solid colors for example black, blue and grey. Girls' sweat pants, on the other hand, often come in pastel colors and are made of stretchy fitted fabrics rather than cotton used in boy's designs, which results in them hugging the contours of girl's legs (Devaney, Differences Between). Creating a tracksuit without these gender symbolisms and indications of fit, shape and color scheme, is thus considered to be neutral, neither masculine nor feminine (Paoletti 19).



Fig. 28. Mpame, Chloe. Tracksuit.
February 2020.



Fig. 29. Mpame, Chloe, Modelling Tracksuit.
February 2020.

A fun, exciting, image of a mountain landscape is the center piece of this hoodie. As mentioned previously I desired to have a Newfoundland and Labrador theme for this collection of clothes to evoke a sense of belonging and locality, as seen for example by the

puffin blazer, the hockey print dress and the moose on this hoodie. I created my own design to be the motif and emblem of this hoodie, by cutting out a piece of colorful fabric and layering the assorted pieces on top of one another, as seen in figure 30. To create an



Fig. 30. Mpame, Chloe. Designing Hoodie Motif. February 2020.

entertaining 3D effect for children, I enclosed the moose with padding. Participant 2 acknowledged that “boys like color and sparkles too,” which influenced me, whilst using fabric glue, to attach sparkly netting onto the blue skyline. I then sewed all of the pieces together to create the finished design.

I chose a warm fleeced fabric to clothe children in “layers for our

unpredictable weather” (Participant 1). However, looking back now, I unconsciously picked a grey cotton as the fabric for this garment, which has been described by Erik Devaney as being two of the features of a masculine boy’s sweat pant. Wiley emphasizes how often individuals, as well as clothing manufacturers, understand that girls’ clothes are “exclusively for girls” whilst “boys’ clothes are for everyone” (What Fashion Needs to Know). Often clothing created under the title of “gender neutral” is therefore “literally just menswear,” which excludes non-binary, gender non-conforming and transgender individuals (Wiley, What Fashion Needs to Know). Interestingly, I had asked my participants in question 8 how they felt about the statement “gender neutral clothing is just boys’ clothes for girls.” It came as no surprise that participants agreed with this comment. Participant 1 stated “I agree strongly and would like to see gender neutral clothing with more flair, including dresses.” “I

hate this idea!! Boys like color and sparkles too!” was also voiced by Participant 2. This is thought provoking. I had previously understood that manufacturers were capitalizing on recent political campaigns for gender neutrality, however, I acknowledge that it isn’t easy to break convention. Indeed, my choice of fabric color fuels this.

Ultimately comfort was my justification for this choice of cotton fabric. Participants were keen to point out, as one can see in figure 30, that the comfortability of clothing is the greatest desirability when a child is choosing their own clothes. Indeed, a weighted average was calculated from question 9’s rating scale, of the online questionnaire.

A graph to show which factors children are most attracted to when choosing clothes.

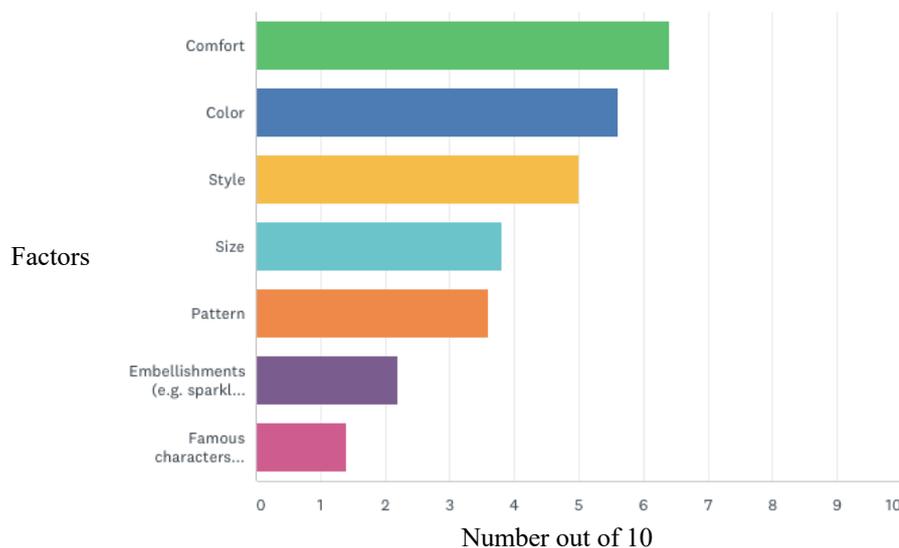


Fig. 31. A graph to show which factors children are most attracted to when choosing clothing.

The results illustrate that ‘Comfort’ and ‘Color’ were the highest ratings. This surprised me as I was expecting ‘Famous Characters’ or ‘Pattern’ to have been the most influential feature determining clothing choice for children. However, these were considered to be the least important factors. I therefore, unconsciously chose the fabric that I believed to be the most comfortable and accommodating to physical movement. However, despite this, I shouldn’t need to be criticizing and justifying my choice of fabrics. In fact, this whole project’s aim is to highlight the significance of rejecting these gendered norms that have

become ingrained into our society. This is reinforced when Participant 4 questioned the comment “gender neutral clothing is just boys’ clothes for girls” by emphasizing that “that doesn’t make sense. What makes it boys’ clothes?” Similarly, Participant 3 responded with “clothes are clothes.” Instead, comfortability is the highest priority and most essential to their children, not, color, shape, style or pattern which are often the gender symbols and indicators of femininity or masculinity (Paoletti 19).

Dressing Gown

After understanding that comfort is so vital to a child’s choice of clothes, I decided to create a dressing gown, allowing children to feel warm and comfy whilst at home.



Covering the body, through one’s dress, can act as a filter between an individual and the surrounding world. It is a form of social self-presentation: something that is presented to others to help them “read” the body within. Clothing has the ability to transform the social body in two ways: in terms of how the body is understood by others and in terms of how that body is experienced by the self (Crane and Bovone 321). Wearing clothing

Fig. 32. *Modelling Dressing Gown*. that makes you feel at ease in your body, as well as being physically comfortable, is therefore important in helping individuals to gain an understanding of their bodies and selfhood. Elina Paju explains that clothes become “plug ins,” connectors that heighten, diminish or magnify the possibilities for recognition and perception in everyday life (530). Through the process of wearing clothing, Paju clarifies, that children play a role in constituting their own selfhood. Even when children are at home, away from the pressures to act and perform on their own “social stage,” they still need the opportunity to understand their bodies (Goffman 22). The

habitual repetition of wearing a dressing gown everyday could therefore help children to establish a relationship between their environment, their identity and selfhood (Paju 530).



Fig. 33. Mpame, Chloe. *Front of Dressing*
September Gown. 2020.



Fig. 34. Mpame, Chloe. *Back of Dressing*
September Gown. 2020.

This dressing gown, similarly to the tracksuit, has been constructed in a grey color scheme, with a grey ribbon to add a fun texture to the outer edges. Participants made it clear that gender neutral clothing needed to be bright and colorful, reiterated by Participant 1 commenting on the need for “...lots of color choices.” Similarly, figure 31 illustrates that ‘Color’ was considered the second most important factor that attracted children to clothes. However, finding and purchasing fabrics that are both bright and colorful, whilst at the same time being warm and comfortable, is almost impossible. In St. John’s, there is only one fabric shop that sells different types of fabrics, as opposed to quilting material. This means that unless you are designing and creating your own fabrics you are limited to gendered fabric choices that possess either masculine or feminine symbolisms. Luckily the fabric used on the dressing gown links this garment to the Newfoundland and Labrador theme, represented by

the whales. Unfortunately, I was unable to stick to this theme whilst constructing the underwear. Indeed, the cotton-knit material needed to make stretchy underwear, is only found in the one fabric shop. This meant that I had limited choice, and found myself resorting to thrift shops in order to find similar fabric types. As a result, I was unable to create boxer style garments, as seen in figure 5, in the skateboard and black star constellation fabrics because I had upcycled these from young children's garments.

Rachel Lubitz questions why gender neutral fashion is so “colorless and grey” whilst being “structure less and drab” (Two Months After). Although I had a limited choice in the fabrics available, I acknowledge that I should have added colorful sequins, sparkles and embellishments to this garment to make it more appealing and less predictable. The dressing gown has been made out of warm fleece to keep children snug and cozy in Newfoundland and Labrador winters. However, I could have used vibrant fun cotton fabrics instead, which would have provided me with a greater variety to choose from. Additionally, the grey ribbon around the dressing gown could have been substituted with a brighter, fun color. All of these considerations will be important if I continue to make gender neutral clothing in the future.

Sailboat Print Pants and Orange Leggings

The participants in this project highlighted that ‘Comfort’ was the most important factor when their child chose clothes. As identified in the ‘Hockey Print Dress’ and ‘Dressing Gown’ sections, this can be interpreted as physical comfort; non-restrictive and being able to freely maneuver. However, as Eddy Alvarez points out, comfort can also be interpreted as a feeling of satisfaction, contentment and peacefulness in one's body, through the wearing of certain clothes (618). Indeed, clothing the body is a communicative way that transgender individuals express and “do” gender (West and Zimmerman 126). Entwistle informs us that wearing the right fit of clothing can help individuals to feel comfortable and at “ease” with their bodies, as opposed to feeling out of place (7). However, inaccessibility to

appropriate clothing can be a hurdle for many transgender children (Reilly, Clothing Fit Issues). This is reiterated when Jennifer McLeod questions if children can ever truly express themselves when clothing manufacturers are in total control of what is accessible to the consumer (10). Unfortunately, clothing that is designed and manufactured for cis-gender children will often not be an adequate fit for transgender individuals. Clothes can be too short, long, loose or too tight (Reilly, Clothing Fit Issues). Often transmen and boys find it hard to find pants that are masculine whilst still accommodating their waist to hip ratio and height (Reilly, Clothing Fit Issues). Whilst transgender women and girls often have inaccessibility to appropriate garments that cater for bigger feet, arms and shoulders (Reilly, Clothing Fit Issues).

To reiterate this, all participants whilst answering question 7 of the questionnaire agreed that there is a pressing need for gender neutral clothing in our society because it “helps to take the pressure off gender for kids” (Participant 1). However, Participant 2 made an interesting comment when noting:

I think gender neutral clothing is not so important as less of a binary in clothing...More important to me and my family is that clothing be accessible to all body types. My AMAB youngest wants dresses that fit her frame as well as her cis friend's frames. She wants pink pants that fit over her bigger feet and knees and don't need hips. She wants sequins and gender neutral sayings. My AFAB trans son wants pants that DO fit his hips and larger thighs and butt but in a boyish style. He wants shirts that aren't tight in the chest without having to put an xlg on his s/m frame...“Gender Neutral” clothing is easy enough but gender blind clothing is impossible.

Thus, understanding how clothing fit can support or inhibit someone's gender expression is of critical importance to clothing designers like myself. If clothing doesn't fit a body

correctly it can cause body dysphoria; finding the perfect outfit, therefore, can be affirming, euphoric and comforting (Ondak, Trans Fashion Exists). For these reasons I began experimenting with two different pant options that would provide transgender children with the opportunity to wear pants that fit correctly, that feel comfortable and satisfactory.

The first design is a cotton garment with a pale blue sailboat and lighthouse pattern, as shown in figure 35. The motif of the lighthouse and boats

reference the province's picturesque landscape and its connection to the ocean which plays a massive part in this community's identity. The pattern provides a refreshing, calming, vibrant aura whilst still remaining a neutral color and arrangement. I included two back pockets and two side pockets because Participant 1 requested gender neutral clothing to have "lots of color choices, patterns and pockets!" However, due to the original pattern not including pockets,



Fig. 35. Mpame, Chloe. Sailboat Pants. February 2020.

I experimented and altered the pattern. By visually demonstrating the clothing, my model, in figure 36, shows how I had placed the pockets too far down the pant leg. I am not accustomed to making my own clothing patterns. This garment, therefore, exemplifies how difficult it can be to alter a pattern whilst including details needed to be considered gender neutral.

When understanding that "gender blind clothing is impossible" to find, I altered the original pattern for this pant, designed originally for cis-gender girls, to provide a comfortable fit for cis gender boys, non-binary and gender non-conforming children as well as transgender girls. After reading Participant 1's comments about their daughter wanting

“pink pants that fit over bigger feet and knees and don’t need hips,” I attempted to experiment with these ideas. Indeed, I made the crotch area longer, the knees wider and the foot hole an inch wider by including extra material in the construction of the pants. I also shortened the height of the waistband so that the pants fit a little lower on hips and are tighter for a smaller rear. Without having a transgender girl as my model this is difficult to visually demonstrate, however, as you can see the crotch of the pant is a little too low down to fit this child accurately and there is extra fabric for bigger knees and at the bottom for feet.



Fig. 36. Mpame, Chloe.
Side Portrait of Pants.
February 2020.



Fig. 37. Mpame, Chloe.
Close up of Pants.
February 2020.



Fig. 38. Mpame, Chloe.
Front Portrait of Pants.
February 2020.

Similarly, I attempted to alter another pattern to create orange leggings that can comfortably fit transgender girls, cisgender boys and non-binary children, as seen in figures 39, 40 and 41. These leggings, just like the sailboat pants, have had the crotch length altered as well as the waistband and width for knees. The original pattern included an elastic waistband to figure hug bigger hips. However, I experimented with a yoga waist band, using the same fabric just rolled up over. I thought that this would provide children with a snugger fit without having elastic digging into one’s hips. However, on my model they fit perfectly,

which could suggest that they might become too loose for children with smaller hips. I chose the color orange to stand out and to complement the color scheme of the bear print shirt.



Fig.39. Mpame, Chloe.
Orange Leggings.
March 2020.



Fig. 40. Mpame, Chloe.
*Leggings with Bear Print
Shirt.* March 2020.

Whilst these pants and leggings will not presently fit all children, understanding the needs of this consumer group, transgender girls, can promote the design of new exciting better fitting clothing which will ultimately help shape their performance and the expression of their gender. This it is hoped will encourage children with non-normative expressions of gender to feel confident and comfortable as their social bodies are “read” by the surrounding world (Crane and Bovone 32).



Fig. 41. Mpame, Chloe.
Modelling Leggings. March 2020.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Concluding Remarks

It is unquestionable that the phenomenon of gender norms is embedded in all aspects of our society. It is in schooling, the workplace, toys, and most importantly in clothing. By creating a collection of gender neutral clothing, this project has highlighted how we can begin to dismantle the “panoptic” disciplinary society that unconsciously self-polices children into only wearing clothing assigned to their sex (Foucault 134). It is hoped that this report and collection of clothes provides a “gender lens,” that visibly illustrates the deeply ingrained societal expectations of how we should perform gender and what happens when you are freed from these gender regulations (Crawley et al.3).

This project has highlighted how clothing has been, and continues to be, used to create and maintain the binary gender division that has permeated throughout Western cultures. My eyes have been opened, helping me to understand how clothing can “open gender,” by allowing children the opportunity to regulate and shape their appearance to a desired point in a spectrum of genders (Alexander, Gender and Clothing). Unfortunately, it has become apparent that there is a lack of not only gender neutral styles, but also gender blind clothing that caters for all child body types. Instead, “gender blind clothing is impossible to find” (Participant 2). This project has highlighted how current clothing manufacturers rely heavily on the assumption that sex and gender are fixed, stable categories, and thus frequently transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming children have inaccessibility to appropriate, comfortable, fitting clothing (Ellisa et al. 351).

The clothes in my collection are therefore a reflection of my understanding of these issues. I have attempted, through experimenting with different fabrics, patterns, colors and styles to “help to take the pressure off gender for kids,” (Participant 1) through their “stylization of the body (Butler 519). Indeed, the bear print shirt, underwear and reversible

bear coat provides children with a fluid experience of gender. These clothes provide children with the necessary agency to experiment and develop their understanding of gender. I have learnt that clothing, for example skirts and dresses, can restrict bodily movement. On account of this the hockey print dress with the red shorts, as well as the tracksuit, were designed to encourage physical activity for every child. Comfort was highlighted throughout the theoretical framework and participant responses as being a significant factor influencing a child's happiness and confidence. Comfortability has been referenced in this project, not only in a physical sense, as seen by the dressing gown, but to also indicate satisfaction and contentment in one's body. The blue sailboat pants and the orange leggings, along with the gaff underwear for transgender girls, pinpoint how certain clothing can be a positive way of displaying and performing gender in an affirming way. Both the blazer and dress have been included in this collection to teach all children that it is acceptable to wear both of these traditionally considered feminine and masculine items of clothing. By emphasizing this we, as designers, can begin to help clothing to start to lose its binary nature (Hollander 182).

By physically creating tangible clothes that can be worn by children I have learnt that it can be difficult to create clothing that caters to all bodies. However, it is vital in ensuring that all children are provided with the freedom to wear what they want. By undertaking this project, I have had the opportunity to fall back in love with sewing again; indeed, I have mastered new sewing techniques and experimented with new children's clothing patterns. This process has encouraged me and proven that I am capable of producing clothing. Indeed with financial backing and advice from the commercial sector, this may be something I take forward as an enterprise supposition in the future.

My research builds upon previous examination questions based upon clothing and its impact on gendered identities. However, it takes the research further by incorporating the viewpoints of Parents of Trans and Gender Diverse Kids, NL, as well as providing visible

representations of these opinions, accomplished through the design and construction of my gender neutral garments. In this way, this project contributes a new perspective on clothing studies. My project, along with the clothing, it is hoped, will raise awareness of the need for gender neutral clothing in our gendered society and how one's clothing choice can ultimately shape one's gender identity.

This project has made it clear that if we want children to discover their true identity and uniqueness without being tied to stereotypes, we need to change our understanding of those stereotypes. We accordingly need to change the gender norms that society has created by raising and teaching children to have healthy gender expressions, without shame and stigma when they deviate from society's construct of gender. Indeed, the importance of parents and caregivers providing love, support and autonomy has been stressed throughout this report. Truly, all children require encouragement, love, and care from their family, school and society which can foster growth into happy and healthy adults. Rather than policing a child's gender transgression we as parents need to help children to live their childhood in the gender that feels the most authentic and most comfortable, allowing them to express their "true gender selves" (Kuvalanka et al. 890). The participants are examples of supportive parents, with all claiming that they "never" or only "1-2 times a week," choose their own children's clothing, instead they allow their children to express their own style. We as parents can learn from their example, by embracing child autonomy.

Indeed, unapologetically embracing who we really are is an important lesson to teach all children. It is hoped that this collection of clothes will change how we think about clothing. A dress, for example, is not inherently a female clothing item, but something anyone can wear. It is apparent however, that in order to get to this point we as a society need to change how we think about clothing in general. Indeed, Rachel Lubitz, quoting Drucker,

states that “authentic gender neutrality is not embedded in clothing, but in our thinking” (Two Months Ago).

Ultimately, this project’s intentions of creating gender neutral clothing was not to pretend as if gender doesn’t exist, but rather to gain an understanding of how we as a society can reconstruct and reorient ourselves towards embracing and accepting the beautiful ways in which it does.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1:

Gender Neutral Clothing Questionnaire

1. **At what age did your child become aware of their gender and express a desire to wear clothing that reflected their gender identity? Tick your answer.**

Before 3 3-4 5-6 7-8 9-10 10+

2. **Do you feel that society creates unnecessary pressures on children in regards to their gender and clothing choices? Explain your answer.**

3. **How frequently do you, as their parent, choose what your child will wear that day? Tick your answer.**

Never 1-2 times a week 3-4 times a week 5-6 times a week Everyday

4. **Do you believe that it is important to support children in their development of autonomy by allowing children to make their own choices and decisions? Explain your answer.**

5. **If your child freely chooses their own clothing which of the following are they most attracted by? Number these choices with 1= most attracted 6= least attracted.**

Comfort

Color

Style

Size

Pattern

Embellishments (e.g. Sparkles or Sequins)

Famous characters (e.g. Thomas the Tank Engine or Cinderella)

- 6. Have your children ever received responses or reactions from their peers to their clothing choices? Explain your answer.**
- 7. How strongly do you feel the need for gender neutral clothing in today's society? Explain your answer.**
- 8. To what extent do you agree with the sentiment that gender neutral clothing is just "boys' clothes for girls" with no sequins, sparkles or color. Explain your answer.**
- 9. Do you or your children deliberately avoid stereotypically gendered colors and patterns when choosing children's clothing? (e.g. blue for boys and flowers for girls) Explain your answer.**
- 10. In your opinion what would a successful gender neutral line in Newfoundland and Labrador look like? Explain your answer.**

Appendix 2:

Puffin Blazer



Appendix 3:

Underwear



Appendix 4:

Bear Print Shirt



Appendix 5:

Green Side of Reversible Bear Coat



Appendix 6:

Stripy Side of Reversible Bear Coat



Appendix 7:

Hockey Print Dress



Appendix 8:

Tracksuit



Appendix 9:

Dressing Gown



Appendix 10:

Blue Sailboat Pants



Appendix 11:

Orange Leggings

