

EVERYDAY PASSING:  
The Heteronormative Dress of Gay Men

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research investigates how gay men ‘pass’ through their everyday lives by constructing heteronormative appearances with clothing. In a so-called ‘neoliberal’ landscape, it seeks to understand the motivations behind gay men’s continued constructions of hegemonic masculinity, which are often limiting and oppressive. To do so, twelve gay men residing in Toronto, Ontario were interviewed on their masculine dress choices. By engaging with their clothing, these men revealed how cultural stereotypes of ‘gay’ have evolved and developed, how gay men experiment with fashion and a new tailoring of masculinity that aims at diminishing – historical – stigmatized perceptions of homosexuality. This research contributes knowledge to the field of fashion and masculinity by exploring how gay men, from past to present, use clothing to survive within heterosexual frameworks.

## **Keywords:**

heteronormative, passing, gay men, fashion, clothing, dress, heterosexual assumption, homosexual

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## **CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION**

A friend suggested I am "privileged" by not appearing visibly gay – that is, I am able to avoid being verbally or physically abused for not appearing [stereotypically] homosexual. He claimed that because I don't wear makeup or dress in feminine clothing, I am safer in public spaces where being gay is still considered taboo. This was the first time I realized my "sense of self" as "apolitical."<sup>1</sup> While I've always been cognisant of my dress choices, it had never occurred to me I was *actively* dressing in a way that did not signal a political message. I was (and am) a gay man, but my style did not elicit an androgynous, subversive or "gay" message that opposed traditional masculine codes that my sexuality did. I also never understood I was part of a group of men who "effectively offset sartorial elements deemed feminine with masculine styles to not blatantly oppose menswear norms."<sup>2</sup> I simply blended into the Western middle-class culture that practiced these gendered rituals as truth; and I continue to do so. Although the twenty first century opened the floodgates to a so-called "democratized" world of fashion, other gay men and I continue to be confined by constructed gender codes that have historically oppressed us. Some of us are still afraid to experiment with the feminine or stereotypically "gay" clothing options that challenge the masculine norm. Accordingly, this study investigates the motivations and practices of gay men who construct a heteronormative – apolitical – appearance with everyday, 'masculine' clothing. It seeks to provide possible answers to the overarching question: why are some gay men still so bound up in constructions of masculinity?

Traditional menswear norms, although challenged by various subcultures,

have continued to develop and remain consistent with Western gender binaries in dress. As a result, gay men who conform to constructed masculine hegemonies often limit themselves to “exemplars of masculinity” (i.e. business wear, formal wear, work wear and sportswear), which allow them to remain unseen and unchallenged within their heteronormative spheres.<sup>3</sup> In fact, scholars such as Shaun Cole writing on the history and dress of gay men have often referred to those who construct a heteronormative appearance as “straight-acting” through their desire to reject gay stereotypes – the effeminate or the hyper masculine.<sup>4</sup> This process, formally known as “passing,” happens when a gay man actively presents himself as heterosexual through dress.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, garments and their meanings are subjective and not definitive of any concrete ethnic, economic or sexual identity. There is no natural link between one’s clothes and one’s sexual orientation. There is also no natural link between homosexuality and femininity, and constructions of gender are fluid and contextual.<sup>6</sup> Instead, as Joanne Entwistle argues, clothes are situated in culture and are “interpreted, accepted or rejected by people in their everyday experiences of dress;” and these interpretations are dependent on time and place, especially in non-Western communities.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, historically and socially constructed dress codes in the West have become naturalized as the “norm” and continue to dictate the ways in which people interpret and construct identities.<sup>8</sup> As Alison Lurie claims, clothes are often used as an “outer layer” which “represent the external or public person” while concealing the “private self.”<sup>9</sup> Homosexuals, then, who refused to conceal their sexual orientation through dress, were condemned for making their

private lives visible to the public. Cole notes that even homosexuals who conformed to conventional codes of dress frowned upon the effeminate appearance of some gay men in society – while they sympathized with those who were “born with effeminate mannerisms” (ways of walking, talking or acting) they resented those who constructed the homosexual “bitchy and effeminate” stereotype.<sup>10</sup>

Homosexual identity has popularly been defined throughout history against a “heterosexual assumption,” which “represents the dominance and normative view of heterosexuality in society.”<sup>11</sup> Socially constructed gender binaries, which are at the core of these heteronormative views, dictate the appropriate appearance and [sexual] activities of men and women.<sup>12</sup> As such, the homosexual man who could not properly fit into either category, was deemed “invert.”<sup>13</sup> From as early as the nineteenth century, his identity was measured by his sexual pursuits – his sexual interest in men – and equated with femininity (which became recognized as the homosexual norm).<sup>14</sup> This led to the emergence of the “fairy” in London and America who manifested his “abnormality” and “perversion” with his feminine aesthetic.<sup>15</sup> For many Nineteenth-Century fairies, effeminacy was the only means of living an active gay lifestyle; however, the 1885 ‘blackmailers’ charter’ equated homosexuality with prostitution, which led to the condemnation of homosexuals and repression of homosexual activity to the ‘private’ sphere.<sup>16</sup>

Consequently, not all gay men could – or wanted to – present themselves as fairies under legal or social constraints.<sup>17</sup> Following the establishment of the fairy – and subsequent subversive gay subcultures – into Western society came another extreme homosexual subculture: the “clone.” The clone, as the antithesis to the fairy,

adopted a “macho” appearance, enhancing his physical attractiveness in an effort to take ownership of his masculinity.<sup>18</sup> With his hyper masculine appearance, the clone aspired to be regarded a “real man.”<sup>19</sup> Yet, his aim was not to hide his sexual identity, but instead, radically appropriate masculinity as a means of purging the gay effeminate stereotype and develop a new ‘masculine’ cliché that could still be rendered “homosexual.”<sup>20</sup> However, once again, not all gay men adopted the clone’s hyper masculine look. Witnessing these gay liberation movements was the “invisible” gay man who clung to culturally accepted conventions of masculinity and rejected outrageous attire to effectively “pass” through everyday life without “eliciting comment or notice” from the public.<sup>21</sup> This gay man actively “dressed down” to blend in and remain “respectable” amongst the middle class – his appearance remained heteronormative.<sup>22</sup>

Today, notions on invisibility, blending and passing through everyday life continue to exist amongst urban gay men (such as myself). They have led me to pose the following research questions:

- 1) How do cultural constructions of masculinity influence a [cisgender]\* gay male’s dress choices?
- 2) Why and how do some gay men choose to conceal sexual identity through traditional menswear choices?
- 3) How does a heteronormative appearance affect a gay man’s agency and citizenship?

So far, a great deal of the current literature on menswear, sexual identity and gender binaries seems to focus on gender bending fashion and its social/political agendas or Generation Y [heterosexual/metrosexual/homosexual] men and their battle

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\*Cisgender: Denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.  
*Oxford Dictionaries*, s.v. “cisgender,” (accessed 23 March 2016).

against the “stigmas against men’s interest in fashion.”<sup>23</sup> Older studies focus on the utilitarian aspects of menswear – business suits and uniforms – or opportunities that arose throughout the twentieth century with the significant shift in traditional menswear to leisurewear by middle-class men.<sup>24</sup> Majority of these studies are from the perspective of heterosexual men who either wish to challenge or conform to socially constructed men’s fashion norms, or from homosexual [queer] men who resist and break down gender binaries in dress. A gap in the literature comes from the perspective of the gay male whose style can be defined as “heteronormative”; the way he uses his clothes to articulate his gender and masculinity, but, more importantly, disguise his sexual orientation. Generally, using clothes to hide or disguise one’s sexual orientation is a theme underexplored in fashion studies altogether.

Thus, the scope of my research will contribute new knowledge on the heteronormative appearance of cisgender homosexual men. Studies conducted by Shaun Cole, Andrew Cooper, R. W. Connell and Ben Barry on the construction of masculinity, sexual identity and dress have paved the way for further investigation into gay men’s motivations for actively upholding masculine hegemonies through their heteronormative appearance. Grounded in Judith Butler’s theoretical assertions on predetermined “scripts” to gender performativity, this study will uncover insights into the ways gay men consume fashion in their everyday lives as a means of constructing what Cooper refers to as “liveable identities.”<sup>25</sup> Additionally, drawing on aspects of queer and post-modern theory, my work will build on the idea of a *new* gay masculinity – one that subverts all gay stereotypes within Western

communities and, according to Steven Seidman, aims at “normalizing and purifying gay identity”<sup>26</sup> – which is free of all historical social stigma and whose focus is equality and inclusion.

The approaching chapters build a narrative on the limitations, struggles and motivations some gay men have constructing an identity that is ‘masculine,’ yet ‘gay.’ Chapter two, literature review, focuses on the lived experience of gay men from the early twentieth century till today. Combined with scholarly theory on dress and identity construction, it is broken down into three sections that trace the experience of heteronormative gay men through the development of gay stereotypes, subcultures and neoliberal politics: (1) Hegemonic Masculinity and Invisible Homosexuality; (2) Identity Construction and Preforming Gender; (3) Normalizing Gay: Fashion and Politics. Chapter three, methodology, provides an overview of the techniques employed to collect data from twelve gay men who currently construct heteronormative identities in an urban landscape. It discusses the purposes of recruiting a specific sample of gay men and how their personal experiences can contribute new knowledge to the existing literature on fashion, gender and sexuality. Chapter four, findings, dives into the lived experience of the gay men who use their clothing to “pass.” Broken down into three themes, it explores gay men’s perceptions of gay stereotypes, their experimentation with fashion and their motivations to uphold masculine hegemonies through dress: (1) What Does Gay Even Look Like?; (2) I Don’t Dress Gay, But...; (3) But Are You Masc.?

## **CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW**

### HEGEMONIC MASCULINITIES AND INVISIBLE HOMOSEXUALITY

In the 1950s, anxiety over the growing invisibility of gay men in England led to the publication of newspaper articles that “offered advice on ‘how to spot a homo.’”<sup>27</sup> Homosexual men who broke accepted gendered codes of dress, sexual behaviour and public respectability, started to pose a real threat to heteronormative ideals within Western societies. In previous decades, homosexuals (i.e. “fairies”) were “intelligible to straights” as their appearance paralleled femininity.<sup>28</sup> Post World War II gay men, however, exposed to a life of uniformity, sought refuge from the effeminate stereotype and found alternative [masculine] ways of dressing to disguise their sexuality – yet, remain active homosexuals.<sup>29</sup>

The invisibility of Western gay men is a fairly new – and somewhat troubling – topic of discussion amongst academics who explore contemporary constructions and expressions of identity. In his book *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*, however, Shaun Cole’s chapter “Invisible Men?” is dedicated to the history of collapsing effeminate and hyper masculine stereotypes associated with gay men’s dress. In it, Cole notes that, “adhering to normative dress codes was seen as an important factor in the progression of the early gay rights movement.”<sup>30</sup> Unlike the fairies, bohemians, skinheads and clones who actively subverted traditional menswear norms to enhance their ‘otherness,’ many gay activists in the second half of the twentieth century believed it was “important to look ordinary” in order to be heard – they did not want the public to be “turned off by appearances.”<sup>31</sup> Maintaining their

middle class 'respectability' was, in part, one of the main concerns of homosexuals who sought inclusion into the norms of everyday life.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, in his chapter "Are You a Fag? 'Cos You Look Like a Fag!" Cole calls attention to the overall subversion of gay stereotypes by the end of the twentieth century. He picks up on David Forrest's assertion that the young gay man "appears to have moved away from seeing himself and being seen by others, as a 'gender invert', a 'feminine' soul in 'male' body, and towards seeing himself and being seen as a complete (that is, 'real') man."<sup>33</sup> This post-modern claim, while accurate in addressing the emerging breakdown of gendered codes of dress, assumes that people no longer use dress as a signifier of gender or sexual orientation. It also contradicts Alison Lurie's claim that fashion can be used as a language of "misinformation."<sup>34</sup> In *The Language of Clothes* Lurie argues that people use clothes to misrepresent who [or what] they really are in everyday life.<sup>35</sup> Lurie does not, however, go into great detail about the ways many gay men in history, who were afraid to signal sexual orientation, could have used clothing (i.e. the suit) as a heteronormative disguise. Like most fashion scholars, Lurie's study focuses on the ways "dress can indicate occupation, religious affiliation, social status, and gender," and sexual identity is left out of the equation.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, while current fashion trends may remain "indifferent" to the "gay and non-gay *us* and *them*," hegemonic dress codes still proliferate through the everyday dress of gay men who misrepresent their 'inversion' with masculine styles.<sup>37</sup>

Self-presentations can vary from space to space, however, and the gay man's heteronormative 'disguise' might be compromised when not in the public eye.

Eicher *et al.*'s typology of the three selves is effective in outlining manifestations of the self through dress "via the public, private, and secret."<sup>38</sup>

According to this model:

In communicating an identity, the public persona is revealed to everyone, signalling the demographic features and professional garb of the wearer, whilst the private self, familiar to friends and family, is based on the clothing of relaxation and leisure, and the secret self is a restricted zone reserved for the individual and intimates based on the wearing of fantasy dress.<sup>39</sup>

For some gay men, the private or secret selves often come out in spaces where they can liberate their gay identity through clothing. Underwear, for instance, is commonly associated with gay identity and, because it remains largely private, acts as a non-verbal catalyst for sexuality.<sup>40</sup> Away from the scrutiny of middle class respectability, gay men are free to experiment with the colours, fabrics and fits of underwear that are not always well received in public. It is also an opportunity for them to buy into branding and quality, a non-concern for many "straight gay" men who shop for function and need instead of aesthetic purposes or fashion capital.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, in Jose Blanco's study, "Revealing Myself: A Phenomenological Approach to My Underwear Choices Through the Years," he explores the role of underwear in shaping a gay man's identity in both the private and public. Blanco argues that in shaping sexuality, masculinity and other Western cultural conventions, underwear allows the gay man an opportunity to construct identity and habitus.<sup>42</sup> A sexually charged symbol reflecting the lifestyle and activities of gay men, underwear also constructs what Blanco refers to as the "gay body as habitus: reflecting a specific lifestyle and a set of values or appearance variables that are praised and expected within the gay subculture."<sup>43</sup> Beyond the realm of traditional masculinity, gay men

often feel pressured to assimilate to gay ways of being and presenting in order to be accepted into specific social environments. For heteronormative gay men, then, underwear may also serve as their tickets into the public gay spaces they inhabit that 'expect' certain non-traditional appearances.

The YouTube channel, *The Underwear Expert*, is just one of many examples showcasing underwear's importance in gay culture. On one of the channel's more popular segments, predominantly masculine and muscular gay men interview other groomed men on their intimate choices, asking the ultimate question: Boxers or Briefs? Designer underwear brands such as Calvin Klein, 2(X)IST, AussieBum, DIESEL and Andrew Christian are commonly featured in the segment, providing cultural capital to the gay men exhibiting their underwear choices. This cultural capital allows gay men the ability to adapt and survive within both the heteronormative and homosexual social environments they inhabit.<sup>44</sup> While it is accepted that some gay men may disregard fit or brand when constructing an outward appearance, ill-fitting underwear with no designer logo is deemed "straight" and not accepted in the homosexual realm. Thus, although the heteronormative gay man may use his outward appearance to disguise his sexuality, his underwear choices may connect him to the people, places and contexts that make up the gay minority to which he belongs.<sup>45</sup>

In terms of the public persona [which is the focus of this research], Foucault's theory on governmentality also provides an effective framework in which to discuss self-presentation in accordance with social context. This framework "connects abstract societal discourses (or mentalities) with everyday material practices" and

looks at identity construction through “techniques of power” – “calculated tactics that guide everyday citizen-subjects to act in accordance with societal norms.”<sup>46</sup> Foucault claims that these techniques of power engage in “governance at a distance” and “conduct” the everyday activities and decision making processes that are unconscious to citizens in a specific time and place.<sup>47</sup> People within these frameworks are “produced by an external gaze” and effectively establish the codes and hegemonies we deem “normal.”<sup>48</sup> For men in the West, these codes often materialize themselves according to traditional mentalities of masculinity (i.e. the functional shirt and pant uniform).<sup>49</sup> As such, many gay men who abide by masculine codes of dress are often simply unconscious of the systems of governance that dictate their identity construction; their clothing may not be used consciously to disguise homosexuality, but merely used as a method of assimilation into the places they exist. However, at the point when people become conscious of the “external gaze” that “conducts” their decision-making, they have the choice to either maintain assimilation or engage in what Foucault terms “resistance.”<sup>50</sup> This resistance leads into Foucault’s theory of the “inner gaze,” which challenges the system of domination. Foucault argues:

Whereas the governance of a population entails governance at a distance, the governance of the self permits an individual to create distance between herself or himself and a system of governance by recognizing and critically situating oneself in that system. Such resistance to a system via critique and proactive self-enlightenment entails a perpetual process that requires ascetic practices of self-discipline to maintain proactive reflexivity. Little wonder, then, that norms are questioned relatively infrequently, by relatively few people. Consequently, norms persist.<sup>51</sup>

For gay men, if they choose to go against the accepted, “prescribed scripts” of masculinity, they go against the powers of governmentality that, in this case,

regulate heteronormative behaviour and practices.<sup>52</sup> Even in urban spaces where experimentation with fashion is better tolerated, a man in a dress can stimulate fear and confusion from people who follow dominant codes of dress. This fear and confusion, more often than not, results in the “alienation” of bodies subverting heteronorms.<sup>53</sup> It explains why drag queens, trans and gay people of colour continue to be marginalized in Western societies that attempt to promote diversity and inclusiveness. It also explains why Twenty-First Century gay men continue to conform to heterosexual ways of acting and presenting, despite having more access and freedom to experiment with fashion. Although a gay man might be aware of the mentalities that condition his identity and ways of being, he limits his identity construction at the “risk of alienation.”<sup>54</sup>

#### IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND PERFORMING GENDER

In terms of ‘gender performativity,’ Judith Butler has theorized gender as an act of “doing” in which both men and women make conscious dress choices to construct their perceived gender identity.<sup>55</sup> Butler describes the enactment of gender as a determined “script” limiting the number of “costumes from which to make a constrained choice of gender style.”<sup>56</sup> For men, Diana Crane highlights these limitations and breaks [heteronormative] menswear choices down into two sections – work and leisure – that correspond to men’s general ‘disinterest’ in fashion.<sup>57</sup> In her analysis of “Men’s Clothing Behaviour” Crane asserts that contemporary hegemonic masculine dress codes express four principle features: (1) physical power and control, (2) heterosexuality, (3) occupational achievement, and (4) a patriarchal family role.<sup>58</sup> In the past, these notions of masculinity were disassociated

with the stereotypical dress of gay men who challenged the heterosexual assumption and took pride in their appearance.<sup>59</sup> The effeminate gay man was never considered powerful or economically successful, and the hyper masculine [fetishized] gay man was certainly not heterosexual in appearance, nor commonly pursued a patriarchal family role.<sup>60</sup> Heteronormative gay men, however, who subscribed to gender scripts and manifested masculine expressions of power and success, fluctuated somewhere in the middle of the heterosexual assumption and homosexuality. These gay men blended in, equating homosexual identity with masculine identity. They upheld heteronorms but remained active homosexuals. They opened up the idea of a “straight-gay,”<sup>61</sup> which continues to be a topic of great discussion amongst scholars and somewhat of a novelty in the overall understanding of a *new* homosexual identity in Western communities.

This coming together of gender identity and sexual identity opens up the ultimate question of gay identity: “Who or what made me gay?” For many, this question then leads to a secondary question that attempts to define gay identity: “And what does being gay look like?” At the end of the nineteenth century, sexologist, Heinrich Ulrich, argued homosexuality an “inborn state.”<sup>62</sup> He claimed, “homosexuals had a female soul trapped inside a man’s body.”<sup>63</sup> This notion, coupled with degeneracy theories on homosexuality, gave rise to the effeminate homosexual stereotype – i.e. the fairy.<sup>64</sup> These theories, based solely on “sexual acts,” did not, however, properly account for gay men who identified as male – or presented themselves as masculine.<sup>65</sup> They simply targeted the effeminate gay men who presented in dresses and challenged the patriarchy. Contemporary theories on

homosexual identity tend to disregard fixed gender and heterosexuality as the given norm to which some 'degenerate'. Scholars like Diane Richardson and John Hart, instead, offer a new theoretical model that strays away from the polar beliefs that few are "born gay" or "become gay." In their chapter, "The Development and Maintenance of a Homosexual Identity," Richardson and Hart focus their study on the assertion that, "we should really be asking questions about the development and maintenance of *any* sexual identity, rather than assuming a natural inevitability about the development of a heterosexual identity."<sup>66</sup> According to Richardson and Hart, the development of any sexual identity varies on the experience, knowledge, beliefs and values of an individual in any given space and time.<sup>67</sup> As such, their interpretation of the heteronormative gay man's construction of identity may be based on his sexual repression; he performs masculinity because he has not been given the knowledge or freedom to experiment with other gendered styles that could suggest his homosexuality. For other openly gay men who have freedom and access to fashion, their clothing options may be limited to masculine styles in an effort to show professional or financial success, or simply to blend into their heteronormative spheres. They may not wish to silence their homosexuality, but may be forced to in order to gain the same agency and privilege as their heterosexual counterparts. Either way, these "straight-gay" men use masculine clothing to construct masculine identities, which ultimately allows them to blend into the environments that have conditioned them into upholding heterosexual societal norms.

Yet, assimilation into the heteronormative sphere can be a problem for some gay people who have had negative reactions to the development of their homosexual identity. As Richardson and Hart also note, being a minority group:

Homosexual men and women are generally censorious about behaviour which appears to contradict a homosexual identity, [...] partly because it may seem that the person is taking on the values of the society which is stigmatizing them as homosexual.<sup>68</sup>

For many gay men, dressing in feminine styles or performing in drag may be a way of actively opposing the norms that have historically oppressed them. For some who continue to experience oppression, their rejection of strict gender codes and those who uphold them (i.e. gay men in “non-gay” underwear) are meant to counteract the people and systems that reject and/or stigmatize gay identity.

Conversely, the gay men who uphold hegemonic masculinities have either had [mostly] positive reactions to their sexual development – and thus have no reason to reject them – or fear any type of “change” in their accepted identity construction.<sup>69</sup> While majority of people consider sexual identity a “permanent characteristic” after it has been developed, they also understand that identity construction is not fixed and can be altered by experience.<sup>70</sup> This general knowledge of identity construction commonly elicits confusion in the homosexual who fears that his sexual experience presents a “threat” to his overall understanding of gender roles and “social reality” – and, in particular, to “the fundamental ways in which he construes himself and others.”<sup>71</sup> For some, it leads to a time of experimentation with feminine or stereotypically ‘gay’ clothing to properly construct a truer version of themselves. For others, it means continuing to reject female or androgynous dress choices that challenge masculinity in order to maintain a masculine, yet still gay,

identity – a hint of the “post-gay” in queer theory that suggests that it is not necessary to define or restrict sexual identities in a postmodern world.<sup>72</sup>

Andrew Cooper, who studies the construction of gay male identities, has posited that modern gay men struggle to create a unique self in the life-long process of “identity work.”<sup>73</sup> Through his study of men across different social axes (i.e. age, race, class, gender, orientation), he claims that gay men must “negotiate” various identities in order to construct “liveable identities.”<sup>74</sup> Due to social constraints – such as hegemonic masculinities and the heterosexual assumption – Cooper also claims that gay men construct what he refers to as “fortress identity,” which is “resistant to attack from others in society.”<sup>75</sup> This theory is consistent with Jane Hegland’s argument in *Drag Queens, Transvestites, Transsexuals: Stepping Across the Accepted Boundaries of Gender*, that men who cross-dress to break gender binaries and signal their sexual orientation are still viewed as “humorous, peculiar” and threatening to societal norms of dress.<sup>76</sup> She notes that, though it is important to study the [political] agendas of those who break gender codes of dress, “equally [...] compelling are the cultural, social, and personal issues that *discourage* more people from cross-dressing.”<sup>77</sup> Yet, Hegland does not identify the motivations or characteristics of queer men who play “dress up” in an effort to “pretend” to be something they are not.<sup>78</sup> This gap correlates to the restricted agency of heteronormative gay men who have difficulty producing an identity that is not seen as “deviant” against the heterosexual assumption.<sup>79</sup> As a result, their “same-sex desire is silenced” and they actively pass through every day life disguising their sexual identity with masculine sartorial choices.<sup>80</sup>

## NORMALIZING GAY: FASHION AND CITIZENSHIP

The fact that gay men and women are forced to “silence” their sexual identity and fight for civil rights has led many to view them as a kind of “ethnic minority.”<sup>81</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, several gay liberation movements – particularly, the Gay Liberation Front (1970s) who embraced the style known as ‘gender fuck’ – fought to “expose fixed notions of sex and gender as artificial.”<sup>82</sup> In doing so, they also effectively helped diminish segregation and social stigmas of the “polluted homosexual” within the “pure heterosexual” world.<sup>83</sup> Although recognition of multiple sexual identities, political rights and the overall confidence of gay bodies has flourished in the West over the past few decades, Steven Seidman in, “From Identity to Queer Politics: Shifts in Normative Heterosexuality and the Meaning of Dress,” proposes that:

Normalization [of the homosexual] leaves in place the norm of binary gender identities and the ideal of a heterosexual marriage and family. Ultimately, normalization is a strategy to neutralize the critical aspects of a gay movement by rendering sexual difference a minor, superficial aspect of a self who in every other way reproduces an ideal of national citizen.<sup>84</sup>

His claim is that the heterosexual assumption still persists in contemporary societies and that “managing homosexuality may involve episodic practices of concealment,” which “do not create a primary gay identity or a distinctive gay way of life.”<sup>85</sup> Therefore, while the “era of the closet” is coming to a steady decline, gay men are still compelled to hegemonic masculinities and heteronormative ways of living – and presenting – in order to avoid being considered a “threat” to the norm.<sup>86</sup>

Scholars researching gay identity and politics have even gone so far as to

categorize gay men adopting a heteronormative lifestyle as “homonormative.” Lisa Duggan, for instance, in “Equality, Inc.” talks about “*the new homonormativity*” as:

A politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.<sup>87</sup>

In Duggan’s analysis of post-9-11, so-called “neoliberal” American politics, she claims that there was a “multicultural shift” in Twenty-First Century politics where both democrats and republicans embraced notions of diversity and equality to include members of the LGBTQ community; a shift that had already happened in the media’s and public’s acceptance of gay communities and lifestyles later in the previous century.<sup>88</sup> With a lengthy overview of Twenty and Twenty-Frist Century gay civil rights organizers, organizations and movements, Duggan comes to the conclusion that this neoliberal politics only included (and continues only to include) those members of the LGBTQ community who assimilated to Western traditions, morals and systems, all the while exhibiting a strong sense of patriotism.<sup>89</sup> Those ‘other’ members, the “flamboyant in-your-face gay activists,” were denied access to the rights and benefits of public life by both the governments and organizations who cheerleaded progression narratives on the condition of assimilation.<sup>90</sup>

We see this assimilation also exhibited in popular film and television shows that aim at “normalizing and purifying gay identity.”<sup>91</sup> For example, in *The New Normal*, a short-lived American sitcom run by NBC from September 2012 to April 2013, a young, white, wealthy gay Los Angeles couple embark on a journey to have a child – the only thing missing from their otherwise respectable, “homonormative” life together. The message is clear throughout the series that, in the wake of

neoliberal politics, you can be gay as long as you assimilate to middle-class white respectability; get a job, dress like a man, go to church, act American. Bryan Collins (played by Andrew Rannells) and David Bartholomew Sawyer (played by Justin Bartha) both dress like men and uphold their civic duties, which allows them the freedom to practice their homosexuality.

Yet, the couple does not completely escape discrimination from their heterosexual counterparts. In season one, episode three, titled, “Baby Clothes,” Bryan kisses David upon his uncontrollable – homosexual – desire to shop, and is challenged by a man offended by two men kissing. In the outlet store with his wife and young daughter, the man argues, “Please don’t do that in front of my daughter – kissing another man. This is a family store and I shouldn’t have to go home and explain that to my kid. [...] I’m trying to protect my family here.”<sup>92</sup> Outraged by the man’s intolerance and the example of bigotry set for his daughter, Bryan responds, “Well, we’re having a family too!”<sup>93</sup> The subtext is that gay people are also able to live “normal,” family-oriented, non-threatening lifestyles that form heteronormative ideals, but the man then simply responds, “Well that’s disgusting. I feel bad for that poor kid.”<sup>94</sup> The overall aim of the episode is to show that, while the North American landscape has developed an inclusive attitude towards LGBTQ minorities, discrimination and inequality still exists. Bryan and David are able to practice their love for each other, but only in the privacy of their own home or in segregated spaces where gay activity is tolerated. According to the heterosexual man in the episode, “there are places where you’d get your ass kicked for that crap.”<sup>95</sup>

Thus, fear of the homosexual 'other' continues to infiltrate the mindset of many heterosexuals – the heterosexual man in the outlet store needs to “protect” his family from the gay men. The fact is that some gay men, although open about their sexuality, are still pressured to take part in acts of concealment in order to avoid being verbally or physically accosted for their sexual orientation. In the case of people who live in rural or underdeveloped – heteronormative – environments, invisibility may even be life saving. “Managing homosexuality” then goes beyond simply dressing “straight” to actively avoiding any type of contact or affection with the same sex (despite that monogamous marriage was spearheaded as the “solution to promiscuity” and “disease prevention” in light of 90’s AIDS activism).<sup>96</sup> Even domesticated and ‘respectable’ gay men must further condition themselves to pose as little of a threat as possible to the heterosexual hierarchy and family model, otherwise they risk losing their freedoms, rights and, sometimes, safety.

Risk of rejection or alienation from the dominating realms of heteronormativity may be what continues to motivate gay men to reject the feminine.<sup>97</sup> Till today, stereotypically “gay” clothing is paralleled with feminine styles of dress that represent the frivolous acts of consumption practiced by women.<sup>98</sup> Because this cultural stereotype persists, some gay men actively dissociated themselves from the fashion world and spend more time focusing on accepted “men’s activities” – like business, sport and the objectification of women – to fit into the heteronorm.<sup>99</sup> On the other end of the spectrum are gay men who embrace femininity by dressing in drag, making a farce out of female bodies and their acts of consumption. While drag queen’s do well in exposing the fixed, artificial

notions of sex and gender construction, Josh Morrison argues that the queen's also take part in a "sadistic camp" that objectifies women, trans and other queer bodies of colour as it "promotes normative gender roles and homonormative political causes."<sup>100</sup> In his article, "'Draguating' to Normal – Camp and Homonormative Politics," Morrison compiles an analysis of the popular television show, *Rupaul's Drag Race*, and discusses how both the contestants and judges of the series "lovingly assassinate" the women and minorities they impersonate.<sup>101</sup> He outlines the misogyny that takes place in the show as the queen's criticize each other for not accurately presenting the "caricature of femininity that has historically been read onto gay male bodies."<sup>102</sup> Through the same "male gaze" of the straight audience the show attempts to inform and entertain, "female masculinities" are not an acceptable self-presentation."<sup>103</sup> Each contestant must perform a heightened sense of femininity – i.e. smooth skin, large breasts, loads of makeup, elaborate hairstyle, sequined dress – that is completely separate from masculine norms, in order to be understood and accepted by the judges and straight audience who interpret the show as a camp performance.<sup>104</sup> This type of gender policing "allows gay men into mass society," showing that they are willing to engage in "patriarchal oppression, which reduces the cultural threat of gay subjectivity."<sup>105</sup>

Interviews conducted by Ben Barry and Dylan Martin in *Dapper Dudes: Young Men's Fashion Consumption and Expressions of Masculinity* prove that constructions of masculinity and heterosexual norms continue to infiltrate the closets of Generation Y [homosexual, heterosexual and queer] men. Today, with a growing menswear market and a booming fashion industry filled with male workers, the

stigma against men's interest in fashion seems archaic. Yet, Barry and Martin found that "participants perceived menswear as focused on functionality" and "the limited styles and emphasis on functionality restricted how menswear was perceived and presented."<sup>106</sup> Their study also revealed that, while contemporary men have a "desire to make strong fashion statements," men are still constrained by social constructs in fashion and continue to use it as a vehicle to signify their manliness.<sup>107</sup> Like other scholars, however, Barry and Martin's study focuses on the experience of the gay male pushing the boundaries of gendered dress or the straight man whose sexual orientation is challenged through his fashionable appearance. Considering the majority (12/20) of the participants in their study were gay, it could have been valuable to explore further the ways their gay participants used clothing as a heteronormative disguise – a way of *not* making a statement.

Thus, the affects of sexual repression on heteronormative gay men are twofold. As Seidman notes, beyond the success of gay identity politics in "weakening the heteronormative logic," gay men who construct a masculine, heteronormative appearance benefit by being integrated into public life, receiving greater civic rights and respectability.<sup>108</sup> Their "straight-gay" appearance exhibits their "normality" and possession of the civic qualities, "such as discipline, rationality, respect for the law, family values and national pride," which warrant them integration into a national community.<sup>109</sup> The downside is that they must limit their consumption of fashion to traditional, functional menswear garments in order to construct 'liveable identities' that disguise their sexual interests; and these sartorial restrictions sufficiently

uphold gender conventions and the heterosexual view of the non-heteronormative gay man as 'other.'

Although we have come a long way in breaking down gay stereotypes, it is evident that they still exist within Western communities. The homosexual man is still often associated with the feminine or hyper masculine, while heterosexual man is associated with the "real" masculine.<sup>110</sup> The gay community itself is broken down into socially constructed subcultures that correlate to gender: hyper masculine leather daddies or bears versus effeminate twinks. Society often forgets the gay man that does not fit within these subcultures – i.e. the average gay man who takes on a heteronormative appearance – because they cannot identify his visual codes as stereotypically homosexual. According to Cole, he gives rise to a *new* gay masculine identity that is not "defined by an obvious dress choice" but, instead, more of an "anti-choice" through his "desire not to dress in any style that is perceived as gay."<sup>111</sup> He is not wearing leather pants or a sequined dress; he fits into the 'norm.'

### **CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY**

Drawing on Sophie Woodward's wardrobe interview method, this study combines a qualitative ethnographic methodology with object analysis to understand gay men's relationships with material objects that elicit their own agency.<sup>112</sup> Central to this methodology is the notion that material objects send non-verbal messages that are "co-constitutive" of socially and culturally constructed hegemonies – i.e. the 'masculine.'<sup>113</sup> Individual wardrobe interviews were conducted with twelve male participants, providing each of them the space and freedom to discuss their feelings and experiences with clothing and constructions of masculinity in relation to gay identity. By observing participants' understandings, feelings and memories of the "visual, sensual, material and intangible" properties of things, their articulation, interaction and use of gendered garments shed light on how certain objects hold socially constructed [subjective] meanings in various social contexts.<sup>114</sup>

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

To unpack the motivations and practices behind gay men's heteronormative appearance, twelve wardrobe interviews were conducted for this study. The sample included self-identified, cisgender gay men, 25 to 68 who crossed various "axes of social positioning" (i.e. class, ethnicity and body type).<sup>115</sup> To ensure anonymity, participant names were not included in the findings sections and no participant faces were photographed with garments.

TABLE 1: Participant Demographic Information

PARTICIPANT	AGE	OCCUPATION	RACE/ETHNICITY
PARTICIPANT 1	36	RESTAURANT MANAGER	CAUCASIAN
PARTICIPANT 2	40	BANK CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER	SOUTH ASIAN
PARTICIPANT 3	25	GRADUATE STUDENT/SERVER	CAUCASIAN
PARTICIPANT 4	68	THEATRE PRODUCTION	CAUCASIAN
PARTICIPANT 5	30	DANCE INSTRUCTOR	CAUCASIAN/JEWISH
PARTICIPANT 6	30	WORKPLACE SUPPORT COORDINATOR	CAUCASIAN
PARTICIPANT 7	48	HUMAN RESOURCES/COMMUNICATIONS	CAUCASIAN
PARTICIPANT 8	28	ARTIST/DESIGNER	ABORIGINAL
PARTICIPANT 9	25	PERFORMER/WEB DESIGNER	CAUCASIAN
PARTICIPANT 10	30	NURSE COORDINATOR	CAUCASIAN
PARTICIPANT 11	32	FINANCIAL ADVISOR	SOUTH ASIAN/CAUCASIAN
PARTICIPANT 12	29	MARKETING COORDINATOR	CAUCASIAN

Participants identified as cisgender male in order to successfully determine how masculine hegemonies and predetermined “scripts” affected their gender performance since birth.<sup>116</sup> Cisgender male identification eliminated a transgender aspect to identity construction, which was beyond the scope of this research. Participants also had to be ‘out’ to ensure their dress choices were not intended to completely deny a homosexual orientation, but merely conceal it in an effort to construct “livable identities.”<sup>117</sup> According to John Hart and Diane Richardson, coming out is a “complex business” involving three stages: (1) coming out to oneself; (2) coming out to the gay world; (3) coming out to the straight world.<sup>118</sup> All participants were understood to be past these three stages – in variation – in order for them to provide thorough overviews of the extensive processes of constructing sexual identity. Having all participants in the same ‘coming out’ stage also provided the study with a somewhat unified perspective, which would not be possible if few

participants were not open about sexual identity or revealed it only in certain contexts.

Participants were initially recruited utilizing a snowball sampling technique. A poster with the study's research objectives, participant requirements and contributions was spread to family, friends and faculty and asked to be shared with their corresponding networks of gay men (see APPENDIX – *Figure 1*). This sampling technique was intended to help establish preliminary comfort and trust levels with many participants, whose homes and wardrobes I would be entering for the first time.<sup>119</sup> It was also intended to make relationship building with the twelve gay men easier, as I would be asking them to reflect on their past and present experiences constructing identity, which could have triggered traumatic life memories and/or elicited emotional responses.<sup>120</sup> This sampling method, however, was only somewhat successful as few participants were referred to me that fit the requirements of the study.

The second mode of recruitment occurred online, using an application popular to gay men: Grindr. The application uses location software to connect people within certain geographic zones to one another.<sup>121</sup> Thus, over the course of two weeks, I sat inside a coffee shop in Toronto's gay village and recruited gay men sitting around me within the space. This was not deceptive, as I sent potential participants on Grindr the same recruitment verbiage – approved by Ryerson's Research Ethics Board – as I did all other men referred to the study or existing in my personal network.\* I would message potential participants on the application and

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\*Using various social media platforms to recruit potential participants was made explicit in my application to Ryerson's Research Ethics Board.

introduce the research study and objectives. Upon expressing interest, participants were sent recruitment documents via e-mail, which outlined full participation requirements. After receiving, reviewing and proposing questions on the research and methods, the men then committed to participation.

Using this application to recruit the remainder of participations also served two specific purposes. First, it eliminated the aspect of assumption in approaching men in public and addressing their gender or sexual orientation. Unfortunately, though Toronto is home to a more liberal body of people, heterosexual men still often express anxiety when their sexuality comes into question. Alternatively, some gay men also express anxiety when their homosexuality comes into question. Secondly, it allowed me to engage with gay men who asserted their own masculinity, instead of me asserting masculinity onto potential participants. Profiles on the application frequently read, “masc.,” “masculine,” “masc4masc,” or other culturally understood text surrounding masculinity, which made it easier to engage with men who actively constructed versions of masculinity on their own accords. I often reached out to men with this type of text on their profiles, as their clothes exhibited their masculinity and they varied in age, race and body size.

Finally, the purpose of increasing the maximum age of participants – from 65 to 68 years of age – was to gain a revealing account of the changes and development in the rights and privileges gay men have today in comparison to the mid twentieth century. Hart and Richardson also make known in their research a prominent lack in the literature on gay men from the perspective of elderly gay men who have either been institutionalized (and often silenced) or historically repressed to the point

where their sexuality was never revealed.<sup>122</sup> As such, participants from different walks of life were chosen to provide diverse perspectives on the influences, motivations and challenges of constructing a masculine, gay identity with clothing. Older participants reflected on an oppressive past that has developed to a more inclusive environment in the West, while younger participants reflected on the increasing dominance of masculinity within gay culture.

#### DATA COLLECTION

Prior to wardrobe interviews, a semi-structured pre-interview took place where participants were asked the same series of questions to reflect on their history, family, friends, occupation(s) and other people, social activities and/or spaces that influenced their dress choices. While discussing their personal style, participants were probed to elaborate on experiences consuming menswear and what messages they wished to convey about themselves through their style choices – and how these style choices allowed them to “pass” through their everyday lives.<sup>123</sup> This led to an in-depth wardrobe interview, where participants were asked another set of questions, which allowed them to engage with specific garments in their closets. Participants then recollected their lived experience(s) in the chosen garments that constructed their heteronormative appearances.<sup>124</sup> They were probed to expand on their perceptions of masculinity – whether some articles of clothing were considered more ‘masculine’ than others – and how or if their style choices actively rejected stereotypical conventions of ‘gay’ dress. It also allowed the men to reflect on how other people might perceive the intended message of the clothing they consumed to construct masculine identity.

This type of “life-history” method also provided gay men the space to put forward their experiences and struggles constructing identity, asserting “unheard voices” into the “public discourse.”<sup>125</sup> Each participant was able to reflect on his consumption of garments and how they were dictated by or contributed to the social structures, institutions and communities that made up his everyday life.<sup>126</sup> These interviews shed light on the continued development of inclusive politics and institutions over time and a growth in the pioneering of human rights that seeks to provide gay men the same privileges as heterosexual men.<sup>127</sup>

Interviews took place in the home of each participant in order to observe their interactions with selected garments and how material objects “evoke the sensory experience of wearing.”<sup>128</sup> Interview times varied from 45 minutes to 75 minutes, depending on the amounts of garments in each participant’s wardrobe and which garments they chose to reflect on. In addition, photographs of the participants’ selected garments were taken as visual evidence to support the men’s oral accounts and research outcomes.<sup>129</sup>

## DATA ANALYSIS

After interviews were conducted and recorded, they were transcribed and coded over the course of two months. Each of the interviews were analyzed individually and then compared to determine patterns, contradictions and links to major themes and sub-themes. Using a visual coding system with corresponding descriptive labels<sup>130</sup> – such as “femininity,” “body,” “upbringing,” etc. – interviews were examined several times from the view point of each of the three major themes: (1) the construction of varying homosexual identities (i.e. gay stereotypes and

subcultures) in a neoliberal landscape and the culturally understood garments and/or indicators of such identities; (2) gay men's experimentation with fashion, negotiations of masculine styles, and the perceived limitations behind deviant experimentation; (3) motivations behind constructions of masculine identity that allow gay men to 'pass.'

While the wardrobe interview method was effective in gathering multiple and varying experiences of identity construction from a specific group of individuals, it was not without flaws. As mentioned by R. W. Connell in her use of the "life history" method, there are "imitations of conscious memory, difficulties of corroboration," which lead to "laborious data gathering and time-consuming analysis."<sup>131</sup> Few participants mixed up dates and times when retelling stories from their past and some had difficulty remembering minute details about their garments, such as brand names or places of purchase. Beyond that, participants often contradicted themselves by confusing gender and sexual orientation, making it difficult to organize the contribution from all twelve men into three cohesive themes. After doing so, however, the "goal was to explore the similarities and differences between the trajectories of men in a given location and their collective involvement in the historical dynamic of gender" and sexuality.<sup>132</sup>

All twelve participants in this study reside in Toronto, Ontario and discussed their experience constructing a heteronormative identity in this one location.<sup>133</sup> Their contributions reflected the greater cultural happenings and the "predominant style of sexuality" that exists in Western urban centers such as Toronto; "it included no drag queens, leathermen, or aficionados of sexual exotica," which also make up a

minor portion of the city's gay community.<sup>134</sup> While a small sample like the following could never represent the individual experience of every gay man constructing a masculine identity, these participants' experiences are certainly not "atypical" to that of any gay man who engages with masculine clothing on an everyday basis.<sup>135</sup> As such, to account for lacking representation of all gay men and to ensure for [almost] equal representation of all collected data, details from multiple cases are used within each major finding section to indicate "variations or alternatives" to research questions and conclusions surrounding homosexual identity, experimentation with fashion and masculine gender construction.<sup>136</sup>

## **CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS**

Examination of the wardrobe interviews revealed that participants were relatively conscious of heteronorms and the masculine hegemonies that dictated their consumption of fashion. These men experimented with fashion in different ways, but often engaged in processes of concealment to “pass” through their everyday lives without eliciting any extreme indication of homosexuality. The following three themes outline these gay men’s experiences constructing homosexual identities that correlate to greater cultural understandings of ‘gay’ identity in relation to heterosexual ‘male’ or ‘female’ identities. Theme one, “What does gay even look like?” deconstructs participants’ views of stereotypical ‘homosexual’ presentations in a growing neoliberal landscape. Theme two, “I don’t dress ‘gay,’ but...” outlines how participants would find minor ways to subvert masculinity and/or express homosexuality in safe spaces. Finally, theme three, “But are you ‘masc.’?” discusses how gay men are still confined to ideals of masculinity and often tailor masculine garments to construct “straight gay” identities.

### ***THEME 1: WHAT DOES GAY EVEN LOOK LIKE?***

Participants recognized that there was more than one way to construct homosexual identity. They talked about various indications of homosexuality and referred to certain garments, styles or subcultures as stereotypically ‘gay.’ These men, however, rejected flamboyant or sexualized garments and chose to wear culturally accepted ‘masculine’ garments in their everyday lives.

## HOMOSEXUALITY = FEMININITY

Participants frequently associated gay identity with constructions of femininity. While majority of the men seemed to have a basic understanding of the differences between gender and sexual orientation, when asked to describe, “what gay looks like,” some of them resorted to stereotypical constructions of gay identity that paralleled traditional femininity. Words such as “femme-y,” “sparkly” and “flouncy” were used to describe gay men who did not conform to hegemonic masculine ways of being or presenting. At other times, words such as “flamboyant” or “faggy” were used to describe gay men who actively showcased their “inversion” with female styles deviating from the heterosexual norm.<sup>137</sup> Participant #8 talked about a time when his grandmother refused to let him purchase a pair of silver tearaway pants (inspired by the Spice Girls) at the fear of them being too “faggy.” Looking back now, he agreed that they were a “dead giveaway” of his homosexuality. These descriptors seemed to stem from the historical renunciation of fashion by heterosexual men who perceived fashion as a feminine pursuit.<sup>138</sup> Throughout history, men have been conditioned to reject the frivolous acts of consumption practiced by women to construct patriarchal roles that rely on dress as function.<sup>139</sup> As such, for some participants, looking ‘gay’ meant taking pride in their appearance and effectively breaking the traditional boundaries of accepted masculinity. From his experience growing up in small-town Alberta, Participant #6 exclaimed: “If you’re wearing anything that suggests that you put a lot of time and effort and specificity into your look, then that is a ‘gay’ trait – it’s something that a female usually possesses.”

In other instances, participants referred to specific items and materials of female dress to describe stereotypical gay identity construction. Participant #4, who grew up in the later part of the twentieth century, stated the following: “Back in the 70s I had a friend who wore scarves; he was a skirt-type, a chiffon guy. He was pretty effeminate.” His experience of the effeminate gay man is consistent with Shaun Cole’s assertion that from the beginning of the 1920s, “gay men accepted the equation of homosexuality with effeminacy.”<sup>140</sup> For participants, however, impersonating and adopting female characteristics did not alter the gay man’s gender – it was either a natural ‘gay way of being’ or a ‘camp’ performance. Unlike the Twentieth-Century fairies and queens, who appropriated femininity to escape abuse, gay men today did not appropriate femininity to gain “tolerance.”<sup>141</sup> Instead, participant #7 claimed that he recently wore a “girly” tank top to make people laugh at a Christmas staff party: “It had little jewels all over it, in the shape of a wine glass and it said, ‘This wine is making me awesome.’ It was a women’s size medium and I’m a 6’2” man.” Like the queens and fairies that came before him, his sexualized tank top upheld the constructed binaries between gendered clothing, making a farce out of outrageous constructions of femininity; and, like all the participants, his day-to-day dress did not pose a threat to hegemonic constructions of masculinity.

Participants did not wear feminine clothing in their everyday lives because they did not want to be perceived as feminine. For many gay men throughout the twentieth century, experimenting with gender construction made them “visible and attractive to potential ‘straight’ partners” – “the ‘normal’ men were active/male, while the queen was passive/female.”<sup>142</sup> This adoption of femininity resulted in the

sexualisation of 'gay' dress, which participants did not want to radicalize. Yet, gendering of clothing continued to proliferate through the mindset of gay men who equated their homosexuality with femininity, but did not identify as female.

Participant #5, for example, claimed that he wore high heels in gay-friendly spaces or during dance classes – but only as a “performance” (see APPENDIX – *Figure 2*).

For him, it was fun to express that part of gay sexuality: “which is a little more feminine.”

On the other hand, for participants who did not experiment with make-up, heels or female dress, fitted or revealing clothing was considered stereotypically 'gay.' Participant #6 described the tight-fitting clothing that he used to wear in his 20s as “obviously gay” and “feminine.” This sexualized view of homosexuality is in keeping with traditional gender codes that dictate female dress sexual and objectifying in comparison to male dress, which is loose-fitting and modest to exhibit power and success.<sup>143</sup> According to Judith Butler, from the moment a man is born, he is provided “predetermined scripts” to construct and maintain masculinity – and, in retrospect, an expectation of heterosexuality.<sup>144</sup> Thus, “exemplars of masculinity” (i.e. business wear, formal wear, work wear and sportswear) often limit the colours, fabrics and styles of menswear in order to maintain heteronorms.<sup>145</sup> These 'predetermined scripts' were evident in all participants' wardrobes who used traditional 'masculine' clothing to exhibit power and success where 'gay' or 'feminine' clothing would not be accepted. Participant #7 confirmed that in his 20s he would wear things to gay bars on Toronto's Church Street that were more “revealing or sparkly – valour or whatever was popular at the time.” Off

Church Street, or at work, he would wear things that were more “presentable” in the “sense that they weren’t sexualized, revealing or garish” and, instead, exhibited his assimilation into middle-class respectability.

Majority of participants dispelled the effeminate stereotype and considered it out-dated. Like Twentieth-Century “clones,” these men challenged cultural associations of homosexuality to femininity and took ownership of their “manliness” through dress. The clones appropriated looks of Western cowboy or lumberjack archetypes (straight Levi’s 501 jeans, plaid shirts, sweatshirts, short hair and moustaches) and enhanced their physical appearance to outdo their heterosexual counterparts, establishing a new macho, rugged and aggressive version of masculinity.<sup>146</sup> In the same way, rejection of the ‘feminine’ and appropriation of the ‘masculine’ was evident in many of the participants’ wardrobes. Participant #10, who donned a thick beard, and whose wardrobe contained a significant amount of plaid shirts, described his clothes as “typical ‘straight guy’ clothes” (see APPENDIX – *Figure 3*). While he argued that his tighter fitting jeans might be regarded more “feminine,” he also declared that he did not wear anything “super flamboyant or gay,” like feminine “skirts and high heels.”

Rejection of the feminine did not necessarily denounce participants’ sexuality. Although none of the participants outwardly identified with the clone subculture, which made a parody of masculinity, some did refer to ‘masculine’ pieces of clothing that became sexualized by clichéd gay bodies.<sup>147</sup> The clones adopted a practical, yet hyper sexualized uniform that was masculine with a difference – “a camp difference” – and participants’ agreed that masculine gay men

continued to exhibit this difference.<sup>148</sup> Younger participants referred to slim-fitting 'short shorts' as a "campy" appropriation of a functional, masculine garment, and a common visual indication of gay identity. Participant #3, who stated that he "performed masculinity on the daily" and did not "fuck with it or try and subvert anything," claimed that: "I don't think my clothes necessarily, especially in the winter, give it away. In the summer, it's more likely to, because the cut of my shorts read, 'homo.'" Participant #9 agreed that shorts he would wear in the summer would be described by other people as, "gay," and participant #12 recalled a time when his friend was called a "fag" on the street for wearing "really short shorts."

#### SUPERFLUOUS HOMOS

Participants regarded anything revealing, colourful, or patterned as 'gay.' While these garments were not necessarily 'feminine,' they stayed away from anything "crazy", "loud," or "flashy" and opted for more muted styles to "blend in." Participant #9, for instance, described a tight, navy sheer shirt he once owned as "hard to wear" (see APPENDIX – *Figure 4*):

I didn't realize how sheer it was until I wore it. Anything that is sheer, that you can actually see my skin or my hair and nipples through, I don't like. That makes me uncomfortable. Some t-shirts make me uncomfortable if they're way too tight – but they were great when I worked out!

For a few participants, the gym was a place where they felt they could experiment with tighter fitting clothing and not be noticed. For participant #7, putting together an appealing outfit for the gym was important. Attending the GoodLife in Toronto, which he described as "super, super gay," he said:

I'll almost always wear a tank top; and my shorts are not too short, but probably mid-thigh. And I try to coordinate, maybe less than day-to-day clothes, but I want to make sure it doesn't look silly together. [...] I have

this goal, for when I'm working out, that I can wear a tight light knit. There's nothing fancy about this shirt, but it's very curve hugging. So when I'm working out, I'm thinking about the fact that I can look good in this material.

Going out to gay or positive spaces (bars, clubs, festivals, etc.) also allowed men to experiment with "questionable" clothing that they would not wear on a day-to-day basis.<sup>149</sup> For some participants, these spaces allowed them to "step out of their comfort zones" and "reject the passivity of the 'default world' by further expressing themselves" through dress.<sup>150</sup> Many participants talked about having "going out tops" at some point in their life. Participant #3 described these as "tank tops and different things with prints on them." Participant #1, who said, "People generally assume I'm straight," no longer wears the rainbow-coloured shirts he used to wear when he was a "raver." However, now, when he goes to gay events or bars, he "trades the hooded top for the singlet or tank top."

Beyond clothing, participants also suggested that accessories and jewellery were common indicators of gay identity. Whereas heterosexual men throughout history experimented with minor bespoke details or masculine accessories (i.e. buttons, cravats, ties, cuff links, hats and shoes), gay men took accessorizing to a new level by wearing things such as earrings, bracelets or purses.<sup>151</sup> Like the 1920-1930 bohemian men, with their "unconventional behaviour (ranging from long hair, colourful dress and interest in art)," which was equated with homosexuality, participants considered any accessory unconventional to menswear as "fun" or "crazy" and, ultimately, "gay."<sup>152</sup> Participant #2 said that his "embellishments" usually alluded to homosexuality, even though he consciously dressed more masculine in his daily life. His bright-coloured pocket squares or wooden bracelets

(that he was cautious of wearing) were considered more 'gay' than his grey zip-up sweaters that did not catch attention in his corporate environment (see APPENDIX – *Figure 5*).

I like things that are highly ornamented. When you're a guy, you wear a clean white shirt and a black suit and there's really not much else happening. So you have your fun little details; but I think when there's too much detail, it can be really over the top. When I show someone what I'm passionate about and when I present that passion, I get, "Oh, you're so gay!"

Participant #11, who also wore a bracelet, claimed that his friends would comment if he "tried something new." He was not sure what about his bracelet was 'gay' – it was plain silver and did not "have diamonds or anything on it" – but claimed:

My friends, these ones are straight by the way, also have this idea of what 'men' should wear and what 'women' should wear. I guess I was crossing over into the women's realm for them in the case of the bracelet. My gay friends haven't commented on it.

Purses or bags, which are commonly gendered 'feminine' in the Western world, were also mentioned as 'gay accessories' – something that heterosexual men, who use wallets, do not typically carry. Participant #5, who often got called gay for the way he presented himself, recalled a bag he used to carry in undergrad: "For years I used to wear a messenger bag that I called my 'murse.' When I wore that, I'd often get called, "fag," by strangers."

#### TRIBAL GAYS

Participants, who considered strict gender codes of dress out-dated, referred to "twinks," "jocks," "daddies" and "bears" when describing 'gay dress,' instead of the older fairy/queen or clone stereotypes. Into the twenty-first century, gay stereotypes broke down into a number of "tribes" to categorize gay men. Ages, body types, body hair and garments formulated groups of gay men into culturally

accepted tribes. For example, from his experience in Toronto's gay village, participant #7 talked about what "twinks" looked like in comparison to "jocks," saying:

For 'muscle Mary's' it would be tank tops or short shorts. Then you'd have twinks and all these other categories. So I was probably in the twink category and it meant that I was skinny – but I wouldn't wear stuff too revealing because I didn't have the body for it.

Integration into gay tribes often restricted gay men from wearing pieces of clothing that did not necessarily fit a specific tribe's mould. At other times, participants described how some gay men would actively wear certain garments as a "costume" in certain spaces to assimilate to the gay culture or tribe they identified. Participant #4, who claimed he was not interested in presenting "that kind of sexuality," talked about the "leather or vinyl" that the 'daddies' or 'bears' might wear on Church Street. For him, clothing was a representation of the "narrow, straight-presenting scope" that he felt comfortable in: "The Black Eagle people, they feel good in their clothes; the 'twinkish' people, they feel good in their clothes – so God bless them. I feel good in my clothes."

Majority of participants, however, did not explicitly state they considered themselves part of any one tribe within the gay community. In fact, when asked if they experimented with clothing in gay spaces, a lot of the men expressed that they no longer felt pressured to dress a certain way in order to fit in in gay spaces. For some, it seemed like too much time and effort to construct any stereotypical gay identity, while for others it was not appealing to categorize themselves. Participant #11, who argued that people did not read his clothing as 'gay,' expressed anxiety about assimilation into any gay tribe:

People always assume I'm straight until they get to know me. [...] Then when I tell them, they're usually like, "But you don't look gay." Then I wonder if I'm doing gay wrong. I know the stereotypes and what gay people are 'supposed' to look like, but I just don't jive with that look. There's nothing wrong with dressing stereotypically gay, I just don't do it. I don't think I ever will.

Besides the tank tops or short shorts that some participants saved for the gym or the bar, most of the men stated that there was no distinction between their "normal" leisure clothing and the clothes that they would wear out at night. Like participant #12, other participants actively rejected any type of clichéd clothing in favour of more 'straight-looking' dress options. According to participant #5:

Gay men are starting to dress more masculine and straight than they used to. [...] The ones who do go effeminate or flamboyant will take it to an even further extreme, but the ones who don't will really suppress it and try and look as straight as possible.

Obvious suppression of sexuality, however, did not seem to be a concern to any participants when constructing male identities. Although some were regularly misinterpreted as heterosexual, they did not find it necessary to emphasize one orientation over another. Instead, comfort, fit and price were the main concerns of participants who did not want their clothes to speak for them.

As a result, participants found it difficult to describe any contemporary fixed 'gay uniform' or definite construction of gay identity. For all, it was not a matter of 'looking gay,' but a matter of being "comfortable" and looking good. These men wanted to construct "regular" identities that did not stand out, but at the same time, did not limit them to any drastic "gay" or "straight" way of being. Participant #4, who experienced the shift in extreme cultural repression to cultural acceptance of gay bodies, expressed his view of neoliberal identity construction:

40-50 years ago, only a tiny amount of men – straight or gay – would dress outside the norm and they would automatically be assumed to be that kind of gay person. Now you can be two kinds of gay people at the same time in one person. [...] The roles, to me, over years and years, have appeared to have dissipated and have gradations that didn't exist years ago. There's less cliché across the board.

This desire to subvert gay stereotypes links to Steven Seidman's argument that homosexuality has become a minor detail to the homosexual, who in every other way, assimilates to heteronormative ways of living and presenting.<sup>153</sup> To R.W. Connell, these gay men no longer have to fight for their rights and freedoms, therefore can "negotiate or reject" historical gay identities.<sup>154</sup> Indeed, younger participants seemed to have "little awareness or commitment" to the gay liberationists who fought for their neoliberal "inheritance."<sup>155</sup> According to participant #7:

The clothes that I wear, I could see a woman wearing who doesn't care about looking feminine. It's just t-shirts, a button down or jeans – that's pretty much my standard wardrobe. [...] I think that everybody has it in their head now that you can do whatever you want, especially if you're not caught up in the past.

Thus, although the gendered stereotypes and tribes continue to exist, participants seemed to want to continue finding ways to escape them.

Participants sought ways to construct identities that rendered their homosexual orientation 'normal' or non-threatening. In a democratized world of fashion, participants considered sexuality somewhat irrelevant in environments where straight men experimented with fashion – or looked like 'gay' men.<sup>156</sup>

Participant #4 talked about how, now, "Straight men can dress in a 'metrosexual' way, which does have the sharpness and spiffiness of a gay man. That attention to detail." When asked about gender binaries, Participant #8 also referred to

increasing neutrality in marketing fashion today: “I think there’s a good – in terms of advertising out there – spectrum of all kinds of ads that people see; so I think it’s pretty even.” These neoliberal notions, however, were dependant on time and place.

Participant #6 mentioned context as an important prerequisite to neoliberal freedoms:

Let’s just say this, if you were from a small town, you would look at me think, “He dresses gay.” If you’re from the city, you may not think I dress gay because I dress, in many ways, like a lot of straight men here. So it depends on who’s looking at me.

Living in an urban environment, like Toronto, afforded participants the ability to effectively neutralize their sexuality through clothing. Consuming fashion to express sexual difference was no longer the primary objective of participants who did not feel segregated or “deviant” from the “heterosexual norm.”<sup>157</sup> Some men felt able to experiment with different styles, fits and colours, yet chose to stay “muted” in order to diminish preconceived notions of their identity. Participant #9, who did not care about how people conceived his “gender identity,” discussed his look as a “white board” that he used to “invite people in,” while participant #3 claimed he wanted his clothing to say: “Oh, look, that guy must be really chill! Let’s be friends with him!” Ultimately, ‘looking gay’ was usually a secondary concern for participants who pioneered “inclusivity.” Wearing ‘masculine’ clothing was not about deflecting homosexuality, but just an influence of a “mixture of styles” that happened to be more ‘masculine.’ For participant #5, it was simply about showing people that he was “happy” with himself: “I don’t need anything crazy fancy, but I like to dress well and I like to look good. I don’t need it to be too much – or more.”

## ***THEME 2: I DON'T DRESS GAY, BUT...***

Participants admitted that they liked to experiment with fashion, but that there were limits. Access, body ideals and fear of segregation were some of the main issues blocking these men from exploring colours, fits and styles outside the accepted masculine hegemony. As such, participants found safe ways to engage with fashion that neutralized their sexuality and posed little threat to the heteronorm.

### **ACCESSORIZING THE BASICS**

Participants emphasized that they did not dress outrageously 'gay,' but would not be afraid to wear something that signaled their homosexuality. Though most perceived their wardrobes "basic" or "muted," they often mentioned breaching traditional menswear codes with colours, prints or cuts. Participant #4, who collected ties and shoes in a variety of sizes and colours, talked about "normal" menswear (see APPENDIX – *Figure 6*):

It's kind of a restricted palette. You go from skinny ties to wide ties; you go from wide collars to button-down collars; there's not a lot of expressiveness on the standard style of men's clothing. You can express yourself with colour and cut, but it's a narrow range.

Negotiating the colour and print of 'masculine' accessories was often described by participants as an easy way to experiment with fashion and – possibly – exhibit their sexual orientation. This type of controlled experimentation with 'masculine' accessories alludes to Andrew Cooper's assertion that gay men struggle to construct a unique sense self in a heteronormative world.<sup>158</sup> Limited by hegemonic masculinities, gay men commonly reject the feminine to construct "livable identities."<sup>159</sup> At other times, men actively construct "fortress identities" to resist negative attention from the heteronorm.<sup>160</sup> For participant #11, rejecting the

'feminine' for more 'masculine' styles was in an effort to reject outward notions of his "inversion":<sup>161</sup>

I'm still not a huge fan of pink and you probably won't catch me dead in a skirt, but I do like to play with accessories a bit more. Men are allowed to play with accessories, right? That's a man's way of saying, "Hey, I like fashion, but I'm not a 'sissy.'"

Up against a heterosexual assumption, participants often felt anxious expressing themselves through clothing in their everyday lives. Filtered with ideals of masculinity, some participants felt compelled to construct 'masculine' identities that, in minor ways, expressed their knowledge or interest in fashion, but did not disrupt their conformity.

Negotiating the colours and prints of 'masculine' garments was another way some participants pushed the boundaries of traditional masculinity. Participant #10 claimed that he only liked "basic" things, but also experimented with basic things in print: "I do like bold print; something that's going to take up all the space. Like sweaters covered in flowers or birds, or t-shirts in floral print or paisley or plaid." In the 70s, the "Peacock Revolution," participant #4 talked about all the new possibilities in menswear, but noted, "I did not go full paisley, bell-bottomed." Instead, he paid attention to the styles and negotiated his uniform to blend in: "There was a time when I had eleven suits. They were the standard black, brown, grey, but I also had a wheat-coloured suit. That's as far as I would go."

Some participants, however, would purposely use minor elements to offset their wardrobe, which was otherwise heteronormative. Like early Twentieth-Century gay men, who wore red neckties to silently indicate their homosexuality, participants used these details as "gay signifiers."<sup>162</sup> To offset the inherent

'masculinity' of his suits, participant #5 stated, "I'll put a feather in my suit or sometimes a broach instead of a pocket square to jazz it up a little bit." These participants sought creative ways to subvert the basic functionality of menswear garments and make an artistic or individualistic statement – one that did not completely deviate from the norm, but allowed them to express their personal style.<sup>163</sup> Participant #2, who also regarded his "silk or brocade" accessories gay signifiers, noted the limitations he felt when experimenting with fashion: "I'm not that guy who would wear an extremely bold print or a bright shiny pink suit. I'd be the one who wears a black suit, or a grey suit, or a blue suit – have a basic suit with hot pink, butterfly pocket square on" (see APPENDIX – *Figure 7*). Like him, majority of the men did not want their clothing to subvert their masculinity, so continued to confine their wardrobes to culturally accepted menswear garments or accessories.

Few participants, on the other hand, would negotiate wearing inherently 'feminine' garments or accessories, provided they served a specific function or did not elicit an 'androgynous' look. These participants grew up in more liberal households surrounded by family whose interest in fashion manifested onto their experimentation with gendered styles. Participant #9, for instance, who grew up with his mother and two sisters, claimed that he presented himself more "masculine" because he identified with that gender. He also owned two pashmina's, however, which he described as completely functional (see APPENDIX – *Figure 8*):

When I travelled, [...] I liked to dress light. When I worked in South East Asia I could also use it as my beach towel and sit on it. [...] I always had a scarf, either in the bag or attached to the bag, because it had so many purposes. I like these muted patterns – sort of gypsy-inspired.

Like the bulk of his wardrobe, he felt comfortable wearing these women's accessories because they did not make a political statement and allowed him to maintain the, "I don't care," approach he took to clothing. Participant #5, who grew up in a "very metrosexual household," which "rubbed off" on him, also talked about possibly wearing women's clothing: "I do dress how a typical guy would dress – I wear pants. [...] But if I see something in women's that fits me better then I'll buy it. But it would be something that is unisex; I'd never buy a woman's crop top."

Experimentation with colours, fabrics and styles also largely depended on context. Participants felt more comfortable wearing expressive things in spaces where other people were doing it too, so not to stand out. For participant #2, attending Indian weddings provided him the space to break Western gender codes of dress. He argued that Indian culture "lends itself to this feminine side with colours and embellishments" and felt he could get away with more at these cultural events than in his everyday life. Yet, he would continue to monitor the jewellery he wore in front of Indian family outside events, because they would not "understand" and declaring homosexuality was still "a big no, no." For participant #12, attending school in Toronto allowed him to wear more fashionable clothing than he would in his rural hometown because, according to him, "Ryerson is a very attractive school for young gay people." He could wear more stylish clothes and continue to "hide from any message" because more guys dressed that way in the city. Participant #3, who works in a restaurant, also mentioned the freedom he experienced living in an urban center:

In Toronto you can get away with a little more, especially if you're working in service industry jobs. If you're working in retail you can get

away with being a little more expressive. [...] But if you wanted to be in an office setting, they'd expect you to be more uniform.

Participants agreed that outside their corporate environments, the city provided them a liberal landscape to experiment with non-traditional menswear styles.

Liberal environments did not, however, completely free participants from masculine hegemonies, cultural constructions or 'codes' surrounding dress.

Although participants felt they could experiment with fashion and non-masculine styles, some chose not to at the fear of facing shame or criticism. Participant #5, who throughout his childhood wore his sister's dance costumes out in public, stated that, today, he envied a friend who fully expressed himself through fashion: "He works in makeup, but he also works in fashion. He wears these crazy outfits and I just love them. I don't have the balls to wear what he wears." Participant #3 followed this sentiment, saying that he wished he were more "adventurous." He admitted that while his red hair colour "limited" the clothing he could wear to "neutral tones," he also did not have the "outgoingness or confidence to pull off something that really fucks with gender norms." As such, a number of participants "envied" certain types of clothing that they felt were only appropriate for certain other bodies.

#### DOESN'T COME IN MY SIZE

Body ideals presented additional limitations to participants' experimentation with fashion. Some participants expressed frustration in being excluded from fashion because trendier styles did not come in their sizes. They talked about "light" materials and revealing styles not being available to them in fast fashion stores (i.e. H&M, Zara or TOPMAN) where other men regularly shop.

Participant #1 claimed many of the stores he would like to shop at did not have a

“selection of clothing for bigger dudes.” According to him, it’s a real issue in fashion: “Especially in terms of fringe fashion – leaving the norm of a masculine male style. There’s absolutely nothing available for anybody that’s over a size 36 waist.” Thus, to try and escape the “mould” he felt “forced to work within,” he decided to teach himself how to sew to try and keep up with the fast fashion industry. In other instances, many participants who did have access to fashion and owned revealing styles declared that they no longer had the body to wear them. When asked if he felt uncomfortable wearing tight garments in public, participant #6 answered, “I guess I wouldn’t wear extremely tight t-shirts anymore because I don’t have the body I used to have. You know how some guys wear tight muscle shirts? [...] But that’s something I used to wear a lot when I was in my 20s.”

Some participants experienced explicit body shaming, which made them cautious of clothing they would wear in public. Participant #7, who described his style as “neutral,” also talked about a situation on Facebook where three friends commented on a picture of him wearing a Speedo in Costa Rica:

They were basically saying that I shouldn’t wear a Speedo, and then I accused them of body shaming me. I was like, “Well, if you saw a picture of a woman in a bikini, would you tell her she couldn’t wear that? You’re telling me I can’t wear it because I’m a man.”

This type of criticism is in keeping with R. W. Connell’s assertion that homosexuality is often condemned “in a patriarchal society in which hegemonic masculinity is defined as exclusively heterosexual.”<sup>164</sup> Gay men who challenge the hegemony are often cast aside or shamed for their subversion of masculinity.<sup>165</sup> This was the fear of some participants, who did not want their clothing to suggest any challenge to the heteronorm. Participant #2, who felt that his weight confined him to traditional

masculine styles, claimed, “But I do feel if my body was different, I would dress different. I’d be more fashion-forward, I guess.” Yet, although he did lose over 150 pounds post weight loss surgery, he still felt cautious of wearing trendier styles in front of family who shamed him for being overweight. After revealing his homosexuality at the age of 37, he continued to wear simple grey sweaters and jeans from Mark’s Work Warehouse or WINNERS, so not to get reactions: “With the weight loss my fashion didn’t change, but I took a few more risks and it was more around accessories” (see APPENDIX – *Figure 9*).

#### I’D DRESS GAY THERE

For some participants, underwear was another area where they could experiment with ‘gay’ or revealing styles. Hidden from the criticizing eyes of the public, participants who did not “dress gay” experimented with colours, materials and styles in this private area. Under his suits and jeans, participant #2 stressed he needed to buy “pretty” underwear:

I still have 50-60 pounds to lose, so I’ll probably buy sluttier underwear at some point – let’s be honest. Doesn’t matter the brand; they just have to be pretty. I think there are a couple of generic pairs that you get, but the others have to be pretty. I have DIESEL, Calvin’s and Adidas.

As Jose Blanco suggests, selecting and wearing underwear allows the individual to embody and engage in greater cultural contexts surrounding gender, social class and status codes.<sup>166</sup> This type of “authorship” between the body and underwear is deliberate and is dictated by communities and the places gay men inhabit.

Participant #7 mentioned selecting the “fun and silly” underwear under his more professional garments at work as an important part of his daily routine. Participant #11, whose homosexuality did not alter his traditional “boy” upbringing, noted that,

“My underwear choices also changed since coming out and living on my own. I wear ‘gayer’ underwear now that my mom doesn’t buy them for me anymore, or do my laundry” (see APPENDIX – *Figure 10*). These sexually charged garments allowed gay men to construct a gay identity and connect to a gay lifestyle that they did not necessarily feel comfortable exhibiting in their public lives.<sup>167</sup>

For gay men, though, underwear can become a public garment. In gay spaces, homosexual men commonly use underwear as agents to signify assimilation into gay culture or certain tribes. Participant #1, who identified himself as a ‘bear,’ talked about “funderwear” as something he discovered a few years ago:

I’ll go to an underwear party and it’s like, “What is this? You’ve got this whole unspoken world of crazy wrestling singlets and hot underwear with missing pieces.” Whereas, on the outside, it’s all t-shirts and jeans.

Constructing the “gay body as habitus” through underwear affords gay men acceptance into both the heteronormative and gay spheres they frequent.<sup>168</sup> It gives gay men agency and fashion capital in gay spaces where certain dress is expected and rewarded, while it maintains acceptance into the heterosexual world that encourages the hegemonic t-shirt and jeans uniform.

Beyond underwear, few participants revealed that they would love to experiment with drag. For these men, it was a way to go out of their “comfort zones” and experiment with women’s clothing without negotiating their masculinity.

Participant #3 declared it would be fun to try drag at a party:

Not performance-wise, but just the dress of it. [...] One of my friends wants to host a party where all the guys come as women and all the women come as men. I think it would be fun to put myself out of my comfort zone, in terms of the way I dress. I would never do that on a daily basis.

Participants seemed to still view the idea of cross-dressing as something “humorous” or “peculiar” that could only be practiced in positive or safe spaces.<sup>169</sup> To them, dressing in drag was still considered a threat to the heteronorm, which, en masse, discouraged people from breaking gender codes of dress. Participant #5 discussed his wish to try drag as a performance in a gay space:

That’s where it would be performed [...] they don’t want drag queens in straight bars. [...] I want to dress up and do a performance. If I wanted to dress like a woman then I’d dress like a woman; but I don’t want to dress as a woman. It’s more about how crazy and big drag queens’ get with their makeup and their hair.

This performance aspect alludes to Josh Morrison’s argument that drag queens’ take part in a “sadistic camp,” which objectifies female bodies and promotes normative gender roles.<sup>170</sup> By radicalizing constructions of femininity, gay men reject “female masculinities,” which affords them acceptance into mass society.<sup>171</sup> Participant #2 suggested that there was a “fantasy” aspect to dressing in women’s clothing that he no longer “prescribed” to. When he was younger, he used to play dress up all the time, but now it was something forbidden he could not engage in as a man.

Experimentation with drag or stereotypical ‘gay’ styles was either temporary or short-lived for all participants. “Tight” or “crazy” outfits were considered juvenile or saved for special occasions where “fun” clothing was deemed appropriate.

Participant #6, who said that he would often get called “gay” in his early 20s for dressing more “obvious,” spoke about his style changing:

It has changed because when you first come out you want to try and belong to the community. What you see is that other people coming out as well are dressing feminine – a lot more extravagant – and so I did that to see if that was really who I was. Eventually I realized that that wasn’t really me, so I grew out of it.

This is in keeping with John Hart and Diane Richardson's argument that in the development and maintenance of homosexual identity, gay men become conscious of the people and ideologies that stigmatize homosexuality.<sup>172</sup> As such, some gay men actively challenge the hegemonies that repress their sexuality or freedoms of expression by adopting stereotypical or 'feminine' styles.

Overall, participants commonly stated that they did not dress 'gay,' but would not be afraid to wear something that indicated homosexuality. Experimentation with 'gay' or 'feminine' garments, however, was often policed by outsiders and warranted caution. They would negotiate wearing accessories or non-masculine garments, provided that they served a function or would not elicit negative attention. When asked if they felt pressured to appear more fashionable because they were gay, many of the men said they no longer felt they needed to adhere to any "gay expectation." Participant #7, who used to dress 'gay' in his 20s, affirmed that:

At this stage in my life, no – I'm 48. Definitely at an earlier stage in my life I felt like there was an expectation that because I was gay I had a fashion sense. I had that same feeling about my friends. So if my friend showed up in a felt plaid shirt or something, I probably would have commented on it back then.

Majority of the participants made note that there was a shift towards looking 'normal' amongst gay men in the community. The heterosexual man's 'masculine' uniform was no longer used as a way to make a statement, but used as a tool to *not* make a statement because gay men no longer had anything to hide or fight for.<sup>173</sup> When asked if they would feel uncomfortable wearing garments in public, which may be perceived 'gay,' majority of the men acknowledged that they no longer

owned anything that would ostensibly signal homosexuality. If they did, those sexualized or feminine garments were saved for special events or performances in safe spaces, where they would not become a threat to the heteronorm. In their everyday lives, as participant #6 argued, “subconsciously, the goal is always to look more masculine” and “blend in.”

### ***THEME 3: BUT ARE YOU MASC?***

Participants constructed masculine identities with culturally accepted ‘masculine’ clothing. Raised to conform to masculine hegemonies, they continued to construct identities that were recognizable to the heteronorm and valuable to other gay men. These men, though, did not care to make homosexuality ‘invisible.’ Instead, they tailored their masculine looks, putting effort into their construction of identity that could be recognized as ‘gay.’

#### **I WAS RAISED THAT WAY**

Participants described their clothing as masculine. While some hesitated at the dismay of committing to a strict ‘masculine’ way of being, all of the men agreed their clothing was, at the very core, culturally ‘masculine.’ When asked to expand on what defined their wardrobes as masculine, participants used words such as “classic,” “casual,” “traditional” and “functional” to describe garments “cut” a certain way or exempt of colour. Majority of the men also referred to the everyday uniform of “t-shirts, jeans and hoodies,” which they felt made their presentation more masculine. Participant #3, who mentioned that, “gender is a construct,” talked about his construction as intentionally not feminine:

I wear pants, not skirts and I wear pants and a shirt, not a dress. I don’t shop in the women’s section; I only wear men’s clothing. I’d say that makes my

performance masculine. [...] T-shirts because they're simple – you can't really read them as being too much else. The hoodies are really utilitarian.

Rejecting femininity as a means of asserting hegemonic masculinity was common amongst participants who blended with the heteronorm. Although their presentation did not necessarily alter their perceived homosexuality, it was constructed – somewhat – consciously in relation to cultural understandings of traditional femininity and what heterosexual men are expected to wear.<sup>174</sup> For participant #11, his t-shirt and jeans “uniform” stemmed from an archetypical script of masculinity:

I guess I also feel pretty masculine in my t-shirt and jeans – it's that classic cowboy look, right? I don't really put clothes on and think, “Does this make me look ‘masc.’? But at the same time, I also purposely don't buy clothes that would make me look ‘femme.’ I guess it's just all part of the unconscious – maybe I'm just a robot programmed to look and act a certain way.

This idea of ‘programming’ masculinity ties into Foucault's theory on governmentality, which deconstructs how societal discourses get translated into “everyday material practices.”<sup>175</sup> For all participants, dressing masculine was part of constructing a “male” gender identity that was distinct from their sexuality and familiar to a greater Western society. Their feelings towards masculine dress choices were accurately summed by participant #11, who stated, “I've been conditioned to look and act like a boy – it's not going to change at this stage in my life. I'm not going to start wearing dresses or heels because I'm gay. Plus, I'm still a man, I just happen to be a gay one.”

For all participants, constructing masculinity was not so much a choice, but an anti-choice of not wearing garments that would alter their perceived gender identity or suggest any stigmatized image of the homosexual as ‘other.’ Although

some men liked to explore fashion trends, the “small town” hegemonies “engrained” at a young age carried over into their adult lives and made them regulate their everyday presentation. Participant #6, who liked to purchase garments with interesting design details, admitted that he still felt repressed by ideals of heterosexual masculinity exposed to him in a small French town in Nova Scotia. Although he felt safe dressing more stylishly in Toronto – because he could “blend in” – he mentioned that:

But in terms of being raised very masculine and being, in a way, penalized by my father for being feminine, definitely, that’s carried through my life. Even today that voice is still there, even though my father isn’t telling me what to wear. I still have it innately in me to wear something that fits into the “norm.”

Participant #8 also talked about how small town, North-Western Ontario influences his designs and makes him mindful of blending in. From his experience, being masculine meant dressing in very “basic,” “clean” and “put together” clothes inspired by Mark’s Work Warehouse (see APPENDIX – *Figure 11*). Being gay is still not accepted in certain spaces, so his clothes helped him deflect any preconceived notion of sexuality:

I think I found a way, through clothes, to just blend in and not be singled out as, “That guy looks pretty gay. Look at the way his clothes fit!” So I think, over the years, I’ve just learned to not be that showy through clothes. Just as a survival thing, you know?

This construction of masculinity lends itself to a “gay sensibility” in history where gay men did not regard themselves “real men,” but made efforts to “pass” as heterosexual in “non-gay” situations.<sup>176</sup> Born out of the “need for invisibility,” this “strategy of passing” manifested itself out of narratives that stigmatized and condemned homosexuality.<sup>177</sup> Stemming from this oppressive history, participants

seemed to continue using their masculine presentation to diminish stigmas or avoid negative reactions to their “inversion.”<sup>178</sup>

### THE NEW STRAIGHT-GAY

Participants regarded themselves real men like their heterosexual counterparts and did not feel it was necessary to radicalize masculinity or femininity in their everyday presentation.<sup>179</sup> Like the clones that came before them, they dressed masculine to take “ownership of their manliness,” but did not prescribe to the clone’s rugged, sexualized overcompensation.<sup>180</sup> Instead, participants adopted a ‘normal’ presentation inspired by the dress of “straight guys.” When asked what straight men wear, participant #6 explained: “Straight leg, loose jeans and loose t-shirts – non-fitted clothing. No effort at all. ‘I don’t put any effort into my clothes because I don’t want people to think I’m really into my body or really gay.’”

Participants did, however, put effort into buying and wearing their clothing – even if they did not regard themselves fashionable. Participant #6 also stressed, though he wanted to present more masculine, he could not wear anything loose or ill-fitting. Wide leg jeans were his “worst nightmare.” Participant #5 made an effort to roll up his slim fit jeans and buy easy-care t-shirts and shirts that did not require ironing, but emphasized that:

Subconsciously, I really like looking like I don’t care – because I really don’t care. For example, finding a good t-shirt that will fit me is not a priority. I’d rather find something that is relatively ill fitting. I love ill-fitting clothing because it’s just something I can throw on.

Thus, unlike stereotypical heterosexual men who actively disengaged with fashion, these gay men used their knowledge of fashion to negotiate a look that was “normal,” but also on trend.

Living in the city gave participants access to fashion that was not available to them in rural settings. They commonly mentioned the small town's "proximity to stores" or "limited options" as an obstacle when consuming fashion at a young age; an obstacle they had now overcome. Participant #8 also mentioned that moving to the city opened up a new world of fashion that did not exist in North-Western Ontario:

Up there, there's not much opportunity to find a lot of clothes that are – stuff I would normally wear. There's one store to buy clothes from, and it's all Billa Bong and shit like that. That doesn't appeal to me. So living down here, you get the opportunity to draw something up and then go get it made. You can do it in a day.

This increased access to fashion did not, however, necessarily compromise participants' conformity to constructions of masculinity. Conversely, as noted by Jennifer Smith Conway and Kim Stanway, having access to trends can often limit individuality, as mass-produced products repeatedly alter the individuality of people who buy them to conform or seek social approval.<sup>181</sup> As such, participants who sought refuge from traditional masculinity through fashion items were continuing to negotiate their expressiveness by conforming to a culture of men engaged in similar consumption of masculine fashions. Participant #6 confirmed this idea by claiming that presentations of masculinity have advantages in all contexts: "You're rewarded in a small town to fit in, not stand out. Then, depending on the area, I think dressing fitted and more put together is actually an advantage. You will attract people with higher status and higher taste."

The functionality and ease of the participants' wardrobes did also have an aesthetic purpose. Some participants recognized the 'normcore' trend in fashion,

which influenced their style. When talking about pressures to appear masculine, participant #3 mentioned, “I think that’s a huge trend right now. Guys trying to build themselves more, physically, and dress in blank shirts – ‘normcore.’” This trend made it easier for participants to pass, as both homosexual and heterosexual men started to wear the same garments in urban spaces. Though, before this trend’s existence, many homosexuals who did not identify with stereotypes or subcultures practiced active assimilation into the heteronorm. These men sought inclusion into the privileges of everyday life and used their clothing to gain acceptance into the norm. In the popular film, *Paris is Burning*, documenting 1980s drag queen culture in New York, an introductory scene shows a competition at one of the “balls” where contestants are challenged to look like “real” men or women.<sup>182</sup> Monitoring how you dress, walk, talk and act to match your “straight counterparts,” and effectively “pass” the trained eye, determined the winners of this category.<sup>183</sup> Importantly noted in the film, however, was that performances were not a “satire.”<sup>184</sup> Assimilation to the heteronorm was seemingly “a case of going back into the closet” to erase the flaws, stigmas and “giveaways” of being a homosexual.<sup>185</sup> Participant #9 affirmed this performance aspect still existed, saying, “I’m very normcore. [...] There’s a consciousness of functionality. I also like that no one ever comments on how I dress. [...] I don’t like that kind of attention.”

Today, however, participants updated the “straight guy’s uniform” by emphasizing the fit and “quality” of the clothing. Tailoring masculinity, according to some participants, was an “indication” of homosexuality that did not provoke negative attention. Participant #12 noted, “I think, when I think of homosexual dress

– whatever that means – it is the amount of tailoring that goes into it.” While participants did not want to stand out with their dress, they also did not want to present like careless straight men disassociated from fashion. Participant #12, who used his clothing to “hide,” also stated that:

People judge by the amount of effort one puts into how nice they look and that doesn’t necessarily, automatically, mean you’re gay anymore. I feel like a lot of girls will think I’m straight because, maybe, there’s no indicators that I am gay.

This “sophisticated and modern” construction of masculinity is one disconnected to an oppressive history, as argued by R.W. Connell.<sup>186</sup> Gay men are no longer excluded from masculinity, and thus, are able to construct “straight-gay” identities that are not socially stigmatized, but “agentic” – they are more the “products” rather than the “producers” of history.<sup>187</sup> As such, for participants, it was no longer about acting like a heterosexual man, but simply negotiating to look like one in order to pass. These modern gay men were not like participant #5’s straight friends who “didn’t give a shit” about their clothes but, instead, “cared” about their appearance:

There’s gay men I follow on Instagram; they’re pretty to look at and all work out, but they dress in a more contrived masculine look. It’s not thrown together schleppey Roots sweatpants and some gross old t-shirt. It’s a very designated straight look. They know exactly what they’re doing and what they’re looking for and they plan it out. It’s a different kind of masculine look. One is very put together, and one is, “I don’t care.”

For younger participants, these social media influencers contributed to the growing “normalcy” of masculine homosexuality. They exhibited the resolved conflict between gay men’s sexuality and their social presence as men.<sup>188</sup>

Participants were influenced by masculine styles they saw both on and offline. They followed bloggers and read men’s fashion magazines, but also took to

the streets for inspiration. Participant #10, who argued that he's more influenced now by the rural "denim and flannel" look that's "very commonplace" in Nova Scotia, also spoke about people in the city and social media: "Instagram, I use quite a bit. And I would say I consider what's in style, what's changing in style and what looks good now; and that sort of stuff influences what I buy." Like other participants, he favoured the layered look of a long t-shirt under a crewneck sweatshirt, which he considered fashionable, yet still masculine (see APPENDIX – *Figure 12*). Participant #12 adopted this trend because he claimed that "t-shirt dresses" are "comfortable" for "bigger guys" and participant #6 associated this look with the rapper's uniform, affirming its masculinity:

I have the long necklace, the long t-shirt and the fitted jeans. Every guy and even pop stars are wearing fitted jeans now, so it doesn't make me feel more feminine. That look makes me feel very fashion forward, but masculine at the same time.

Older participants talked about greater societal influences responsible for their straight-gay appearance. For these men, masculine hegemonies limited their experimentation with fashion and dictated their masculine presentations.

Participant #4 discussed his conservative upbringing accountable for his current "mainstream, straight" style:

I went to a Jesuit Catholic boy's high school where we had to dress in suit jacket and tie. At that point, we looked like little bankers in the early 60s. That's part of the reason why I've continued that look – I liked it and it worked for me. [...] It was expected of us.

At this stage in his life, although he acknowledged that younger people were "freer" to experiment with identity construction, his affinity to masculinity was not going to change because it had allowed him to effectively pass through his repressed life.

ONLY INTO MASC.

Participants also discussed their work wear as distinctively masculine. Participant #1, who liked to experiment with vibrant colours, stated, “This dress shirt is super masculine, even though it’s a deep purple (see APPENDIX – *Figure 13*). Most of my work shirts make me feel pretty masculine. That’s just the style of dress clothes.” These men regarded suits, shirts and ties the “quintessential” – corporate – garments that highlighted the success of any “man that ever had a job.” Culturally, they echoed Diana Crane’s assertions that the objective of masculine clothing was to represent patriarchal success and a heterosexual assumption.<sup>189</sup> Participant #12 recalled that he once purchased “a bunch of blazers” when he thought about going to business school because he felt “intimidated” in places where guys were in suits: “MBA culture is very weird, bro-ish – I feel like it’s very judgemental of what you wear.” As such, many participants talked about their corporate uniform as a way of assimilating into a respectable masculine culture. Though some found it limiting, they adopted this look in order to blend and maintain the same agency and privileges of heterosexual men. Complaining about tucking in his shirt and his “straight” friends who put effort into their clothes to “network,” participant #9 remembered his artist days:

I used to do plays and act like this suicidal teenager. [...] The moment I got hired to work in China, I got asked to chop my hair off and there was this kind of switch and I became corporate.

For some participants, this “black on black dress code” suppressed their freedom of expression. Participant #4 accurately pointed out that in some environments, strict gender codes still exist: “People are trying to become freer and freer and other

people get scared by it.”

Some participants used their ‘masculine’ clothing to disguise their homosexuality. Those that did guaranteed that their voice, mannerisms or personality would make their orientation evident, but argued that, at first glance, their clothing would not be an indication of sexual identity. These men actively dressed more masculine in order to avoid negative attention or even physical abuse. Participant #3, who was conscious of his masculine presentation, recalled a time when he changed his shoes because he thought he was being “too gay” (see

APPENDIX – *Figure 14*):

I was wearing these short shorts that were midway up my knee [...] and this cute little shirt and brown loafers with a bit of a heel. I was walking down the street and was like, “Don’t want to get beaten up today,” so I went to a store and bought a pair of cheap shoes (I think low-rise Converse) and then I felt better.

Participants who regarded their mannerisms more ‘gay’ or ‘effeminate,’ feared being rejected from society even when they were in liberal urban centers like Toronto.

They did not challenge the heteronorm at the risk of “alienation” and, instead, heightened their everyday constructions of masculinity to avoid “gay bashing.”<sup>190</sup>

For participant #6, masculine presentations worked towards eliminating stigmatized messages surrounding HIV and perversion associated with homosexuality. He continued to manage his dress with those stigmas in mind:

Even today, though it’s more acceptable and more people are coming out, when I look at myself in the mirror and think about how I dress, I still am limited in many ways by this confining message that if I come out looking really feminine and gay to people, I’m going to be that perverted and non-trustworthy older guy who is going to snatch away the kids.

With these oppressive notions still lingering in the public mindset, participants continued to monitor the “modesty” of their clothing so not to “stand out.” As noted by participant #4, who did not want his clothing to exhibit any type of extreme sexuality, clothing is a “costume and disguise” you can “change”: “If you’re not emotionally successful, sexually successful, financially successful, it’s a small area of your life you can change and vary if you want. [...] It’s something you control.”

Having control over their clothing allowed participants to make themselves more attractive to potential partners. Many of the men talked about masculinity as a quality that other gay men prized, and constructed their identities according to this “object choice.”<sup>191</sup> For participant #2, looking masculine was a large part of sexual attraction: “The reason I like appearing masculine, or lean toward more traditional masculine styles, is because I find men attractive. I like men who look like men. I like men in suits; I like men in everything masculine.” From the perspective of “men who have sex with men,” hegemonic masculinity was exhibited by participants in muscle shirts or “baseball shirts” to engage with other homosexuals and, according to participant #11, get “laid.” Married participants, in particular, often referenced ideal masculinity as an attractive quality they sought or projected onto their partners. Participant #1 referred to masculine tank tops, which made him look “butch and beefy” and “date shirts,” which were “simple and classy,” but also made his “shoulders look big.” Participant #7 referred to his husband’s “straight” uniform of cargo pants and plaid shirts as stereotypically masculine. This adoption of masculinity linked with a heteronormative lifestyle alludes to Lisa Duggan’s theory of “homonormativity.” Participants did not contest “dominant institutions” or a

“privatized, depoliticized gay culture” because it afforded them a normal life of “domesticity and consumption.”<sup>192</sup> Even for many younger participants, dressing masculine and blending into the norm was all part of the bigger narrative of becoming successful, finding a partner and living a respectable life.

Generally, participants constructed masculinity in order to feel a sense of belonging or acceptance into spaces where they felt masculinity was valued. At the same time, however, they did not want to construct a completely heterosexual version of masculinity that overshadowed or repressed homosexuality. Some participants alluded to the idea of “authenticity” and expressed frustration over gay men who continued to “overcompensate” and assert masculine identities to reject “female masculinities.”<sup>193</sup> Participant #6 commented that he gets annoyed when he sees any type of man emphasize masculinity:

I think it’s a socio-economic thing. It’s what they see as appropriate and cool. Otherwise, if they were at home and uninfluenced by their surroundings, they would probably not be so, “Look at me, I’m so hot, I’m so masculine.” I don’t think it’s something you’re born with; it’s something you learn.

Participants, instead, promoted the idea of apolitical or “neutral” appearances that were neither feminine nor drastically masculine. To these men, masculinity was not inherently bad, but when it was constructed to oppress non-masculine or queer bodies, it became problematic. Participant #11 talked about masculine identities both on social media and in real life:

I just feel like gay men feel like they need to be super masculine these days in order to be accepted. [...] Even online, gay men put “masc.” in their profiles because they think that’s a good quality that other men are looking for in a partner. So I guess that translates into their clothes too. A lot of gay men, even if they do have more feminine mannerisms, dress really masculine in

order to be something that's ideal.

For some, adhering to masculine ways of being and presenting was in an effort to construct an identity that was familiar and non-threatening to their "social reality."<sup>194</sup> For others, it was simply a matter of adhering to cultural hegemonies in everyday life and finding alternative ways to challenge those hegemonies in safe spaces. Either way, it was a representation of the self that required knowledge of the people and systems that dictated normative 'masculine' dress in relation to homosexual identities.<sup>195</sup> As put by participant #6, fashion is a "mentality": "I think that it's about connecting who you are and what you think – your internal code – to that piece of clothing that perfectly matches who you are." Yet, the people and cultures that surrounded participants influenced their perception of masculinity and also shaped – and limited – these individual "mentalities." Though he needed to buy clothes that perfectly matched his personality, when he looked at himself in the mirror, Participant #6 also noted that, "There's a voice that's saying, 'Do I look masculine right now? Do I pass?'"

## **CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION**

Scholars such as Cole, Connell and Seidman have briefly talked about the existence of a *new* gay masculine identity within their research – one that subverts stereotypical ‘gay’ dress and upholds masculine norms – however, have missed out on the opportunity to expand on the motivations behind gay men’s constructions of masculinity.<sup>196</sup> By interviewing twelve gay men, I hope to have further unpacked the personal, cultural and political influences that govern the heteronormative gay man’s dress choices. Furthermore, I hope to have expanded on the concept of “straight-gay” and the ways in which gay men experiment, negotiate and conceal sexual identity with everyday dress.

As noted by Connell in “A Very Straight Gay: Masculinity, Homosexual Experience, and the Dynamics of Gender,” contemporary gay men have disconnected themselves from a gay history of challenge and change – they have been regarded the *products* rather than the *producers* of history.<sup>197</sup> It has also been suggested, however, that by passing, blending and remaining invisible amongst the heteronorm, these gay men slowly change stigmatized perceptions of homosexuality as campy, forbidden and festival-like.<sup>198</sup> Therefore, by allowing participants in this study to reflect on their “apolitical” appearances, they were able to reassess their clothing choices [and constructed meanings] within greater cultural contexts.<sup>199</sup> They situated their clothing within the masculine hegemony and offered insight to how codes of dress can clarify the differences between gender and sexual orientation, eliminating the – non-natural – feminine, sexualized perception of the homosexual as deviant.

Yet, the fact is, gay men still use clothing to construct heteronormative identities to survive within dominant heterosexual frameworks. Even though they are not as oppressed as the men that came before them, they are pressured to reject gay stereotypes, reject “female masculinities” and engage in acts of concealment to construct tolerant identities.<sup>200</sup> They construct these identities for a number of reasons: (1) To avoid any stigmatized representation of homosexual identity; (2) To receive the same rights and privileges as their heterosexual counterparts; (3) To avoid abuse in non-gay contexts. Assimilating into middle-class respectability effectively allows these gay men the freedom and space to exercise homosexuality, which would otherwise not be accepted.

But it is also important to note here that access to the freedom and space to practice homosexuality is largely dependent on context. Because gay men are free to construct any form of identity in a neoliberal landscape, there exists the misconception that we have reached the end of the progression narrative – and that is not the case. From the perspective of this study’s participants, it is evident we still have a long way to go in breaking down gendered stereotypes and erasing homosexual stigma. Although gay men may have the freedom to construct varying identities, it does not mean they are not continually burdened with shame or anxiety for practicing that freedom. Thus, moving forward, the fashion industry has the opportunity to promote the diversity and inclusiveness of all constructed identities. By providing men of all shapes, sizes, ethnicities, religions and sexual orientations access to fashion, we may be able to further disrupt “orderly gender relations” and an oppressive heterosexual assumption.<sup>201</sup> We may also be able to re-evaluate a

patriarchal model, based on constructions of masculinity that oppress non-masculine bodies, and recognize all constructions of identity as equally worthy and beneficial to a greater cultural experience in the West.

Finally, outside the scope of this project, further research into online identity construction could provide insight to the ways fashion could promote diversity and inclusion. Social media is a powerful tool revolutionizing the way we perceive and consume fashion and research on the construction of LGBTQ appearances and lifestyles may offer interesting alternatives to the limits of real-life identity construction. Interviewing fashion bloggers and ‘influencers’ may highlight the democratizing affects of social media platforms that showcase varying identities, making them more recognizable and popular amongst the dominant class. Interviewing bisexual, trans and closeted men who construct heteronormative identities, could also shed light on the power of dress and the developments – or setbacks – of masculine hegemonies both on and offline.

Beyond the realm of academia, government officials and gay [LGBTQ] organizations may find this study useful in understanding the everyday lived experience of gay men who adopt heteronormative appearances. While there has been great development in programming for gay men in urban cities such as Toronto, there has been a gap in the amount of programs available to “invisible” gay men – many of which feel excluded from their respective gay communities. It may also provide insight to policy makers in developing more inclusive policies for people of varying ethnic, queer and sexual identities.

## APPENDIX

Figure 1: Recruitment poster.

**HELP DEVELOP NEW KNOWLEDGE ON  
GAY MEN AND FASHION**

**A graduate student in Ryerson's School of Fashion is looking for self-identified gay men to voluntarily participate in academic research on fashion. Gay men who follow traditional menswear codes are encouraged to apply. Participation is open to gay men between the ages of 25 and 65 of all ethnicities, body types and abilities.**

**THE STUDY WILL INCLUDE:**

- A 75-MINUTE INTERVIEW WHERE YOU WILL DISCUSS YOUR WARDROBE
- PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN OF YOUR GARMENTS

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:  
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: DANIEL BERNARD, GRADUATE STUDENT, SCHOOL OF FASHION, RYERSON UNIVERSITY, [daniel.bernard@ryerson.ca](mailto:daniel.bernard@ryerson.ca)**

This research study is being conducted in fulfillment of the principal investigator's graduate degree. Findings from the research may be shared at academic conferences and in publications. This research has been approved by the Ryerson Research Ethics Board. For further information, please contact Ryerson's Research Ethics Board at: [rebchair@ryerson.ca](mailto:rebchair@ryerson.ca)

**THE SCHOOL OF FASHION** **RYERSON UNIVERSITY**

*Figure 2: Participant #5 High Heels*



*Figure 3: Participant #10 Plaid Shirts*



*Figure 4: Participant #9 Navy Sheer Shirt*



*Figure 5: Participant #2 Wooden Bead Bracelets*



*Figure 6: Participant #4 Tie Collection*



*Figure 7: Participant #2 Suit with Pocket Square*



*Figure 8: Participant #9 Printed Pashminas*



*Figure 9: Participant #2 Grey Zip-Up Sweater*



Figure 10: Participant #11 Underwear



Figure 11: Participant #8 Self-Designed Shirts



*Figure 12: Participant #10 Long T-shirt and Sweatshirt Trend*



*Figure 13: Participant #1 Purple Dress Shirt*



*Figure 14: Participant #3 Brown Loafers*



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