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## Life-Centered Design: Bridging the Gap Between Gendered Clothing Systems and Institutional Spaces

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**Life-Centered Design: Bridging the Gap Between  
Gendered Clothing Systems and Institutional Spaces**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Honors Studies  
in Graphic Design

By  
Erin Enmark

Spring 2023  
Graphic Design  
J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences  
**The University of Arkansas**

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## I. Introduction

Over time, we have molded, convoluted, transformed, and eradicated day-to-day wearable clothing. Whether through media-based imagery, practicality, or trend cycles, clothing has become ever-changing and representative of who we are and how we chose to express ourselves. However, in some ways power structures (schools, businesses, corporations) have exploited this expression and implemented guidelines for expressing yourself through this medium. Creating societal, gendered dress codes allows systems of power to reinforce control of individuals. Judith Butler states in her book *Gender Trouble* that “male” and “female” are socially constructed categories. She argued that notions of universal womanhood reinforce the binary upon which gender oppression depends. Gender becomes a performance, a set of repetitive gestures replicating and enacting the gender binary (p.137). Butler’s argument accurately describes how gendered concepts, like girls wearing dresses, repeat and reinforce social rules predetermined by various media. In other words, this is described as “styles of the flesh” which refers to gender performance, ultimately leading to how gendered styles are *roles to play and identities to wear*.

I am interested in the inner workings of how media has influenced contemporary individual understanding of gendered clothing. In particular, I investigated how women and non-binary identifying people have come to understand representation through clothing via the imagery produced through the traditional media canon. When it comes to clothing, society often associates style with gender. For example, it is traditionally understood that while women wear dresses, a tuxedo signifies “black tie” attire for men. These signifiers related to clothing align with thought patterns and categorization strategies we use to understand gender and the role gender plays in cultural identity. What we know about clothing is impacted by the imagery presented to us.

My focus centers around clothing-based systemic stereotypes forced upon women and nonbinary individuals through the traditional media canon and visual communication. I seek to create an inclusive space for clothing without barriers, breaking down “working spaces.” For example, schools, corporations, and governmental institutions have created and enforced dress codes among individuals. I seek to answer the question, how might life-centered design bridge the gap between gendered clothing systems and institutional spaces? This investigation targets non-binary and female-identifying individuals from ages 14-20 with an emphasis on institutional dress codes. This age range captures the specific time in youth when individual expression and autonomy become the main interest; however, it is faced with some of the most rigid institutionalized regulations. Targeting this age range allows room for these individuals to challenge restrictions of expression and demonstrate the damaging effect that dress codes have left on developing non-binary and female-identifying individuals.

When identifying my topic, I was influenced by how media impacts our view of identity. In an article by Rayne Fisher-Quann she states, “it’s become very common for women online to express their identities through an artfully curated list of the things they consume, or aspire to consume — and because young women are conditioned to believe that their identities are defined almost entirely by their neuroses... I wonder what romantic love would feel like if I’d never seen a romantic comedy, if I’d been allowed to figure it out before a commodified version was fed to me.” (Fisher-Quann, 2022). This begs the question of how social systems are influenced by media, just as much as people. For instance, educational dress codes in the public sphere are constantly changing in the eyes of the media. Therefore, they must change their rules based on the ever-evolving trend cycles. In the early 1900s, teachers didn’t have to ask female students if their shorts came down to their fingertips, much less even see

their knees. It has placed a greater emphasis on how much clothing has defined our identity, even so our view of gender. This idea is multifaceted in nature; however, the focus is the outcome- how can design intervene in the systemic issue of gendered clothing? What if clothing wasn't determined by the bounds of media or systemic power structures?

## **II. Secondary Research**

### **i. Literature review**

Considering this topic and its complexities, I have narrowed down my research into four subdivisions: Gender, Dress Code, Media, and Autonomy. These categories highlight a connection between dress code regulations and gender, demonstrating how these systems rely on one another to succeed. For example, the idea of gender is codependent upon our outward use of clothing, which is influenced by the mass consumption of media, taking away individual autonomy. It is a vicious cycle that has only been perpetuated by the growth of the internet, however this research investigates methods to recognize and break down these systemic barriers.

#### **a. Gender**

In Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble*, she questions "male" and "female" as socially constructed categories. She argues that notions of universal womanhood reinforce the binary upon which gender oppression depends (p.18). The ideas she describes are the concepts of the gender matrix, which questions the male/female binary, as well as the concept of gender as performance, a set of repetitive gestures that replicate and enact the gender binary. The gender matrix creates a structure that sets fixed points of desire and identity. The matrix excludes shifts and nuances of identity and desire and requires people to be male or female, dictating desire for the "opposite sex" as the only healthy and natural mode of attraction. The matrix pressures each individual to accept a stable identity and adhere to fixed sexual attractions (p.

28). This idea is supported in the book *Extra Bold*, in the chapter “*length=dignity*”, Sky Cubacub recreates garments that embrace the body which society and fashion reject. They state, “I occupy a body that has been policed by gender norms. The effeminate man undermines standards of masculinity. Aristotle established a tendency in Western society to smooth complexity into transcendental categories– and our bodies, shaped by internal and external forces, wear the scars,” (p. 50).

This feeling of identity at odds with gendered clothing is ongoing and translated to media consumption, even before the internet. In *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*, Linda Nochlin references the work of Rosa Bonheur (Fig. 3) and how she took on the craft of a man and dressed the part. Bonheur states, “I strongly blame women who renounce their customary attire in the desire to make themselves pass for men.” ..., “If I had found that trousers suited my sex, I would have completely gotten rid of my skirts, but this is not the case, nor have I ever advised my sisters of the palette to wear men’s clothes in the ordinary course of life. It, then, you see me dressed as I am, it is not at all with the aim of making myself interesting, as all too many women have tried, but simply in order to facilitate my work,” (pg. 74). Bonheur rejects outward masculine stereotypes, however, accepts that these types of clothing are suited best for her line of work. Bonheur understands that during her time, masculine practices were notable, however she refused to reject her femininity. This ideology is mirrored in her work, *The Horse Fair*, 1852-1855 (Fig.1), by her use of soft brushstrokes mixed with a masculine composition.





*Fig. 1 The Horse Fair, by Rosa Bonheur, 1852-1855*



*Fig. 2 Photograph of Rosa Bonheur in the garden of her home, The Château de By.*

## **b. Dress Codes**

Dress codes have become a system based on comfortability and categorization over time. This idea has been perpetuated by a capitalist society and the traditional “9-5” or in other words, the corporate America. In the article, *Well Suited: Perspectives on Dress and Gender in Art*, Yassana Croizat-Glazer expresses her interest in clothing systems through her love of the black suit, in addition to what the black suit has come to represent. She states how the suit makes her feel powerful and the transformative power clothes can provide. In the article, she covers identifiable moments in art history when the roles between female and male were blurred due to the power of clothing. Her primary example is the Seated Statue of Hatshepsut from the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty (Fig. 3). Hatshepsut declared herself pharaoh and to help preserve and legitimize her special position, Hatshepsut had herself represented in art as an ideal king, a strong young man in a pharaonic dress, whose appearance owes much to long-established aesthetic conventions aimed at supporting Egypt’s religious and political stability. The statues created of Hatshepsut aimed to combine feminine physical traits such as breasts and slender limbs with masculine symbols of power, notably the nemes headdress, the pleated shendyt kilt and beaded belt, ceremonial clothing worn by male royalty. Inscriptions on Hatshepsut’s statuary invariably refer to her as a woman, reminding us that her goal was not to pass herself off as a man, but rather to link her being inextricably to the sanctity and authority of the male pharaoh by way of his image.



Fig. 3 Seated Statue of Hatshepsut (C. 1479-1458 B.C.), New Kingdom, 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty

On a more corporate level, the article, *When do dress codes that perpetuate gender stereotypes cross the line*, Dana Wilkie analyzes corporate dress code policy and the legality of these restrictions. There are numerous lawsuits each year covering corporate dress code policies. However, many end in court based on legality. For instance, "In one landmark case, a bartender sued her employer because it began demanding that she wear makeup to work. In the case, *Jespersen v. Harrah's Operating Co.*, the 9th Circuit Court ruled in 2006 that the makeup requirement didn't amount to sex discrimination against the bartender. Although the [employer's] standards required female employees to wear makeup but prohibited men from doing so, the court ruled that the grooming standards, taken as a whole and not limited to the makeup requirement, did not unduly burden women as compared with men, who had to comply with other standards." Some inclusive and effective language for dress code policies originated from investment bank Goldman Sachs. They told employees that the company was loosening its approach to office attire, moving to "a firmwide flexible

dress code" and asking employees to "dress in a manner that is consistent with your clients' expectations." There are laws moving this direction, like one New Hampshire law prohibiting employment discrimination based on "a person's gender-related identity, appearance or behavior, whether or not that gender-related identity, appearance or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the person's physiology or assigned sex at birth," (Wilkie, 2019).

Similarly, Mirande Valbrune's article, *Gender-based dress codes: Human Resources, diversity, and legal impact*, investigates discrimination in dress-code policy on a corporate level. This work focuses on the law and how transgender employees are targeted within the language of dress code policy language. There are no federal civil employee rights laws explicitly addressing transgender employees or protecting gender identity. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects employees against discrimination based on their gender. If a policy inappropriately targets or negatively impacts employees of a particular gender, it may be deemed illegal. As noted by the Human Rights Campaign, "Employers can legally implement gender-specific dress codes as long as they are not arbitrarily enforced and do not favor or affect one gender over another," (Valbrune, 2018). Thus, the employer should ensure equal and consistent enforcement of the code on male and female employees and should avoid burdening one gender compared to another. However, this idea is subjective and interpreted by courts differently, allowing the gap for clothing bias to inflate.

### **c. Media**

I believe there is a direct correlation between self and media, especially with increasing access to technology. Rayne Fisher-Quann effectively articulates this in her article, *Standing on the Shoulders of Complex Female Characters*. The author illustrates how the idea of self has been manipulated by the media being fed to us, taking away our choices and expression by creating a commodified version that has

been told to us. Fisher-Quann states in her article, “If I can compare myself to just the right amount of things — place myself at the nexus of enough edgy, vaguely feminist media properties — will that eventually start to feel like actualization?” She concludes her article with this statement,

But, oh, it feels so good to be understood, even when it’s only as a caricature. *this feeling is real because I have something to compare it to.* I am in my fleabag era. I am in my yellow wallpaper era. I am in my Phoebe Bridgers era. I am Fiona apple, I am eternal sunshine of the spotless mind...I can only seem to understand myself through the fictions of the more actualized — and, just as I reassure myself that I am drawn to this media because of some predetermined, inherent sense of self, I wonder if it is creating me, too. who would I be if I stopped consuming things? what would there be left to feel? we consume so much, now, that perhaps we don’t know what it means to exist as something unsellable.

(Fisher-Quann, 2022).

The idea that females do not have control over their expression or outward appearance is supported by Claire McCormack in her book *Women in the Pictures: What Culture Does with Female Bodies*. McCormack dives into the historical bias behind women’s bodies used as imagery. She states, “Historically speaking, women have not been allowed to look; held from studying and entry into the professional sphere, they were not allowed to look at book nor at the world- more specifically, they weren’t allowed to look at the world of men, in case they found something that they want to challenge,” (p. 8) She continues by saying, “The anxiety about women looking at naked men in the studio and manipulating their bodies at will with their pen or brush is at the crux of everything. It is an admittance that looking, and who gets to look, and make art, is more about power and control than we might first be inclined to think. It is about who

gets to tell their version of the story and who makes an object out of whom,” (p. 11) Men have been able to control the archetypal constructions of womanhood that have influenced ideas of how women should appear and how they should behave, from the meek and patient Virgin Mother, to the always-available, sensuous Venus pin-up, or the vulnerable damsel in distress to the terrifying witch. This concept has only spread to the dress code restrictions and regulations still cast upon women today.

In the performance work *Cut Piece* by Yoko Ono, the artist sits alone on a stage, dressed in her best suit with a pair of scissors placed next to her. The audience is instructed to one-by-one, go on stage, and cut off a piece of her clothing to keep. This work is considered revolutionary. The first members of the audience only took small pieces of the clothing in places that were not revealing. However, as the performance went on the audience became greedy and would cut larger and larger pieces of clothing off her, in places that it would become revealing. For instance, the straps of her bra or the front of her blouse. Ono sat through the performance motionless and expressionless, not interacting with the audience. She stated after her performance in New York, “When I do the *Cut Piece*, I get into a trance, and so I don’t feel too frightened... We usually give something with a purpose...but I wanted to see what they would take... There was a long silence between one person coming up and the next person coming up. And I said it’s fantastic, beautiful music, you know? *Ba-ba-ba-ba, cut! Ba-ba-ba-ba, cut!* Beautiful poetry, actually,” (MoMA). This work emphasizes the *taking*. This is a representation of how women are treated today. Regulations, rules, shame are all things instilled in women’s sense of expression from when they start grade school. Teachers claiming shorts are too short, no exposure of cleavage, tank tops are prohibited, exemplify authority systems taking ownership away from women. Yoko Ono put that on display, showing that a professional suit could become a scrap of clothing that meant nothing, and barely cover her body.



*Fig. 4* Yoko Ono performing *Cut Piece* at Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, 1965

**d.     Autonomy**

In the book *Relational autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, authors Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar examine the connection between feminist understandings of autonomy and social constraints. They begin their argument by asking, “are women in Western societies alienated by the ideal of autonomy? Many feminist philosophers have recently suggested that women find autonomy to be a notion inhospitable to women, one that represents a masculine-style preoccupation with self-sufficiency and self-realization at the expense of human connection,” (p. 39). In other words, autonomy is something women have not had the

privilege to claim as their own. "Traits popularly regarded as feminine, by contrast, have no distinctive connection to autonomy— social interactiveness, for example. Thus, popular gender stereotypes have associated autonomy with men but not with women; these stereotypes might invidiously infect philosophical thinking about autonomy," (p.39). The most moving argument in the book is by Diana Tietjens Meyers. She focuses on the idea of how autonomy is possible for individuals whose identities are shaped by structures of domination and subordination. The idea of intersectional identity is dependent on one's social experience. The conception is specific to societies that exhibit certain kinds of social stratification. It derives from a social-psychological view about how individuals internalize gender, sexual orientation, race, class, and ethnicity in sexist, homophobic, racist, classist, and xenophobic societies. This view does not purport to capture the whole of personal identity but rather those aspects that are conditioned by membership in subordinated or privileged social groups. It emphasizes that people are categorized according to gender, sexual orientation, race, class, and ethnicity and that these multiple designations interact— sometimes compounding one another and sometimes creating inner divisions and conflicts (p.153). This leads to the conclusion that, "On this view, who we are— what we are like and how we think and act— is significantly influenced by social systems of domination and subordination. Of course, intersectionally constituted subjects may or may not notice attributes that stem from crosscutting systems of domination and subordination, and when they notice such attributes, they may or may not understand them as consequences of these social structures. People are not introspectively clairvoyant, but to the extent that they fail to make these connections, their self-concepts are incomplete and possibly distorted," (p.153). This supports the idea that the authentic self is evolving self and not chained to conventional group norms, however, but is overthrown by societal conventions of conformity.



## ii. Key Findings from Secondary Research

After reviewing these secondary sources, I narrowed down my research to five key findings that accurately represents the topic's complexity through a design mindset:

1. *Currently, the law targets transgender or non-binary employees within the language of dress code policies. There are no federal civil employee rights laws explicitly addressing transgender employees or protecting gender identity.*
2. *Men have been able to control the archetypal constructions of womanhood that have influenced ideas of how women should appear and how they should behave, from the meek and patient Virgin Mother, to the always-available, sensuous Venus pin-up.*
3. *On a governmental level, the law does not evaluate the social differences between male and female dress code regulations claiming that they are equal when it is apparent that female identifying persons are at a disadvantage.*
4. *Male and Female are socially constructed categories, however womanhood reinforces the binary upon which gender oppression is enforced.*
5. *The belief behind who we are and how we present ourselves is significantly influenced by social systems of domination and subordination; the "authentic self" has been overthrown by societal conventions of conformity.*

## iii. Concept Map

Compiling these complexities, I created a concept map to visualize these common themes and understand how they are intertwined (Fig.5). These systems have

become dependent upon one another, and the following map highlights those relationships.

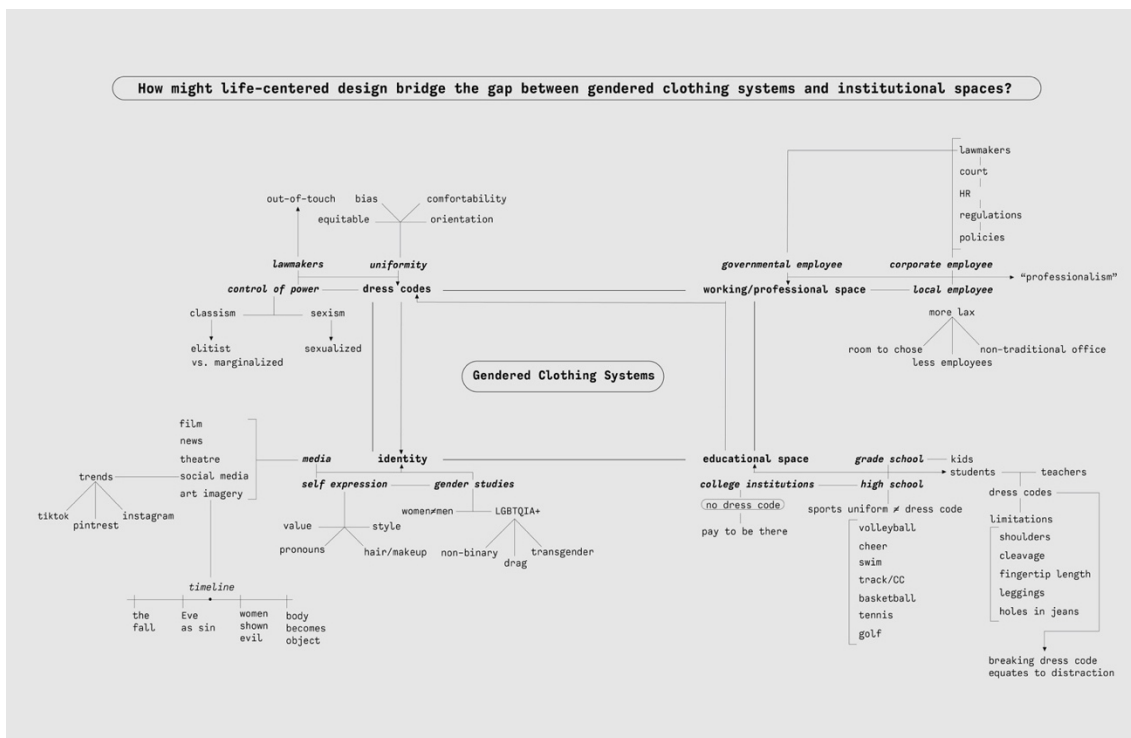


Fig. 5

### III. Primary Research

#### 1. Methodology

To bring context to my secondary research, I conducted two methods of primary research to further my argument: a survey and personal inventory submissions. In my survey, I asked participants about the dress code regulations in school and in the workplace. I asked for personal narratives in response to questions, so participants felt like they had a space to defend their answer or, frankly, let off some steam. Dress codes are a topic that overwhelmingly impact every individual, therefore I felt it beneficial to ask for thoughts, feelings, emotions when encountering these regulations.

The personal inventory was conducted with a participant in high school, asking them to demonstrate how they felt throughout the day in comparison to what they were

wearing. My goal was to demonstrate how the association between clothing worn for school and confidence level– specifically how this is dictated by people or systems rather than what they believe before anyone sees what they have worn.

## **2. Survey**

I conducted a 20-question survey evaluating the correlations between human emotion and dress code regulations. I collected 95 responses to this survey and the responses were overwhelmingly passionate. I had many instances where people wrote long format answers, detailing anecdotes or expressing frustration felt when faced with dress code policy. This survey was conducted through social media using a promotional graphic.

The most common response to the survey was that people felt dress codes were only necessary in instances of safety precautions. For instance, nurses wearing scrubs or construction workers wearing hardhats and protective clothing. This reasoning for dress code has a clear message and doesn't falter when faced with male or female designations because safety is the primary concern.

### **Questions:**

- 1. How do you identify?*
- 2. What kind of high school did [do] you attend?*
- 3. Did you wear a uniform?*
- 4. Do you prefer a uniform or to pick what you wear?*
- 5. Please select dress code regulations that are applicable to your experience:*
- 6. Do you think institutions (school/work) should have a say in what you wear?*
- 7. If you have a job, how would you describe your dress code?*
- 8. Do you feel that the way you dress reflects on your work?*
- 9. Feel free to elaborate on the previous question:*
- 10. Does dress code language in your workplace feel inclusive?*
- 11. Do you feel that 'female' dress codes are equivalent to 'male' dress codes?*

12. Do you think institutions (school/work) have impacted the way you dress?

13. Do you feel that dress codes are gendered?

14. Do you think dress codes are necessary?

15. Feel free to elaborate on the previous question:

16. Do you believe what you wear will distract others?

17. Are you ever distracted by what others choose to wear?

18. Do you think media has impacted the way you dress?

19. How do dress code regulations make you feel?

20. If you have anything you would like to add, feel free:

### 3. Personal Inventory

For the personal inventory method, I had one participant in high school measure the way their mood was affected by the way they dress and institutional dress codes. In the morning they documented their outfit and rated their confidence in what they were wearing on a scale from 1-5. They were also required to submit pictures if they tried on an outfit and changed.

#### Scale:

5: felt confident, loved what I wore and received compliments.

4: liked what I wore and felt comfortable.

3: felt alright about what I wore, didn't hate it.

2: didn't love what I wore, felt uncomfortable.

1: didn't like what I wore and am not going to wear it again.

The student was then required to submit their confidence rating again at the end of the day once they left school to evaluate if the mood changed throughout the day. The findings from this method were extremely interesting and representative of social conventions and regulations. For example, in *Fig. 6* we see that the student changed their outfit in the morning and submitted a rating of 3. The student originally wore a top that is see-through with a tank top on underneath (top 1) and changed into a much

more conservative top with full sleeves, buttoned up over the chest, and shoulders covered (top 2). At the end of the day, the student rated their confidence at a 4, which was higher than their rating in the morning. Interestingly, the student felt more confident in clothing that fully covered their body rather than clothing that accentuated their femininity. One might argue that Top 1 from Fig. 6 is more form fitting or conventionally revealing, while Top 2 leans more “conservative”. Yet, the student felt more confident in Top 2. This observation may be influenced by regulations put in place by the institution they attend. The school follows standard dress code policies like no exposed shoulders, minimal cleavage, covered midriff, fingertip length shorts, etc. If these policies weren't in place, would they have changed their outfit to begin with?



Top 1

Top 2

*Fig. 6* Outfit change on 02-13-2023

#### 4. Key Findings from Primary Research

After collecting the feedback from my survey responses and evaluating the personal inventory submissions, I compiled ten key findings based on my research:

1. *97.9% of people said that they believe dress codes are gendered (Fig. 6).*
2. *90% of women agreed that women were dress coded more than men because of their body.*
3. *Most women felt that high school dress codes were restricting, limited, sexist and unfair.*
4. *Most think that what the institution feels is inappropriate to wear is necessary, but strict rules about specific items of clothing are not necessary. However, all answered that dress codes make them feel insecure.*
5. *86.2% believe that media impacts the way the dress.*
6. *80% don't believe that what they wear will distract others.*
7. *People don't have problems with dress codes that have clear practicality, like scrubs or lab attire, its messaging is clear in that it is keeping you safe.*
8. *Common theme: "dress codes have never affected me, but I can see how they are biased toward women."*
9. *75% of women said that they think institutions should not have a say in dress code (Fig. 7).*
10. *50% of men said that they think institutions should have a say in dress code (Fig. 7).*



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

#### **IV. Concept Explanation**

After completing my secondary research, I considered how these systems of dress code regulations have been ongoing, essentially forever. This led me to believe that the best way of representing my research question was through a historical website foundry to show users historical references of clothing being gendered through media.

I then presented this idea to design faculty for critique and what resonated with them most was the survey responses. This project is a response to a hegemonic or institutionalized way of being/thinking, therefore, I selected three core ideas for my design intervention: personal narratives, user interaction, and gender-neutral design. Initially, this concept was built upon art historical research and how clothing has evolved through different periods. However, the survey responses shifted the direction of the project. Gendered clothing systems are built upon control, classism, and sexism. To deconstruct these systems, my design intervention transformed into a marketing campaign called Second Skin. This movement is a non-binary, anti-dress code campaign aimed to deconstruct the narrative of what has been assigned as “feminine” and masculine.” Second Skin exists on social media as an awareness campaign that would operate upon its interaction with users and the survey data collection. There are submission story highlights, as well as polls that users can respond to and interact with to submit instances where they have felt dress code regulations have limited them. Second Skin will take responses and reverse the feminine or masculine narrative of the submitted language and print them on wearable merchandise to rebel against gendered systems. Second Skin will also operate within a non-binary designed brand identity. To maintain the gender-neutral feel, I created the logo type as a mix between serif, sans serif, and script fonts to reinterpret the traditionally gendered typography as something new.



## V. Research Through Design

Through design research, a user journey map, case studies, and style guide, I was able to address the complexities my research question targets. Design research has emphasized the importance of the survey responses and how with minimal intervention, individuals were passionate about dress code policy change. These research examples offer methods for the campaign to build from.

### a. User journey

The following user journey map illustrates how the user would see the interaction between the campaign platforms. As seen in the map (Fig. 8), what connects the user to the deliverables (Instagram, website, merchandise) is the brand identity. The identity has been created to create a connection between the deliverables and become an identifiable source for the users. The brand identity also draws from the research question, creating a gender-neutral space for the campaign to exist. There is also a correlation between the Instagram, website, and deliverables- being that they would display the same messaging for the campaign.

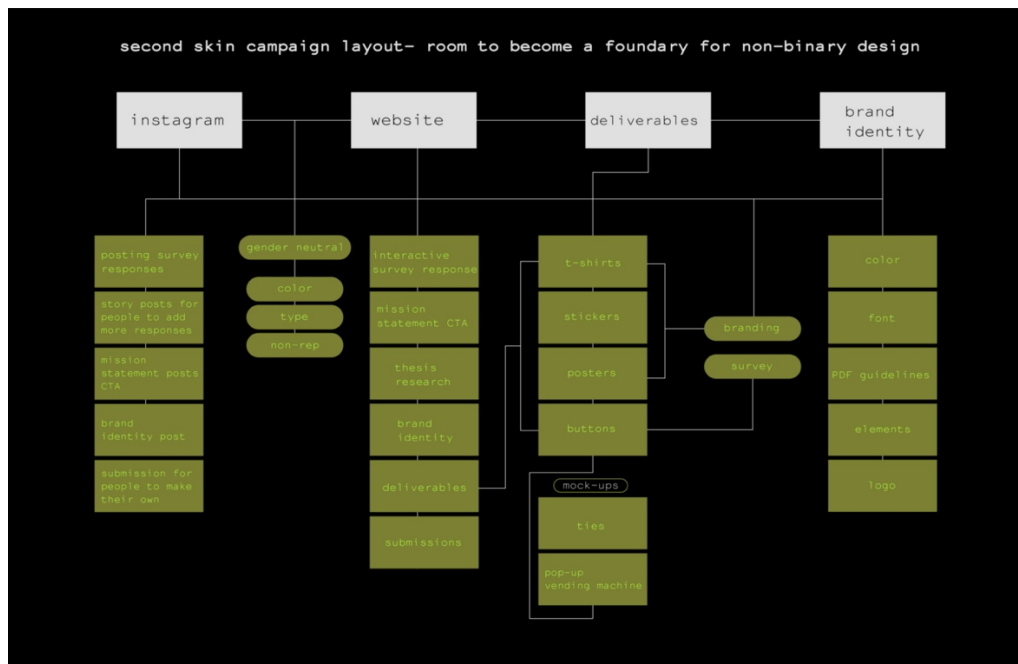


Fig. 8

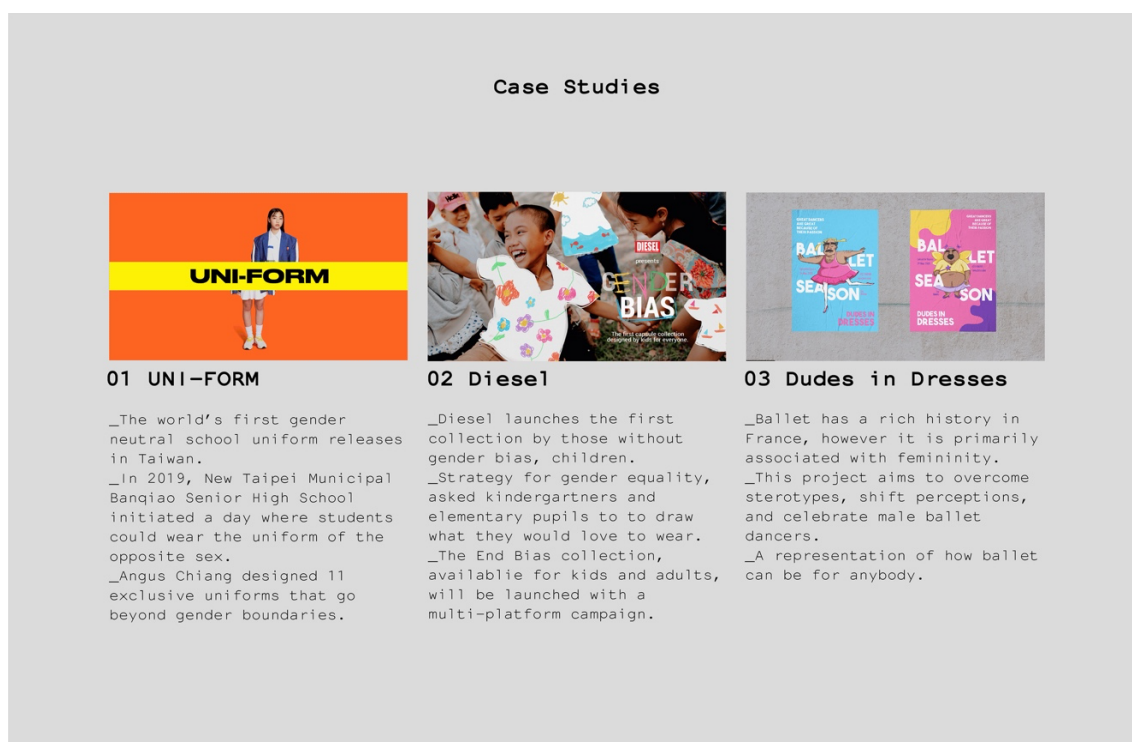
## **b. Case study**

I based my summarized case studies (Fig. 9) on the campaigns of designers or fashion brands. I included three separate campaigns that focused on gendered clothing from Adobe's social platform, Behance. Each of these campaigns included elements I felt important to recognize and include within my own. However, the campaigns I research through Behance targeted a very specific audience, whereas my solution revolves around social change. That said, these campaigns heavily influenced my research, language, and design outcome for Second Skin.

*Uni-Form* is a project started by Angus Chiang for the Taipei Fashion Week. In 2019, the New Taipei Municipal Banqiao Senior High School in Taiwan initiated a day where students could wear school uniforms from the opposite sex to help curb gender stereotypes and bullying in schools. Ogilvy collaborated with Chiang to create a new uniform collection for the school that is entirely gender neutral. Chiang designed 11 pieces that go beyond gender boundaries for the students. This identity is brilliant and perfectly aligns with the messaging behind Second Skin, inspiring an identity that can coexist with *Uni-Form*.

*Diesel* initiated a project called "Gender Bias: the End Bias Collection", conducting research on how we are pushed into different gender experiences since childhood, starting with clothes. They launched the first capsule collection designed by kids for everyone. *Diesel* took part in the strategy for gender equality by asking kindergartners and elementary school pupils to draw what they would love to wear. Their drawings will create an exclusive capsule collection made of unique pieces free from gender bias. Diesel mentions their goal is to raise awareness and to go beyond gender boundaries thanks to a clothing line made for boys, girls, and everyone in-between. I want to incorporate this interactiveness with the users of Second Skin. This is an issue that affects everyone, therefore having the user dictate the outcome of the campaign.

*Dudes in Dresses* is an illustrative campaign representing how ballet can be for anyone. Ballet has a rich history in France, mainly represented by femininity and elegance. This led to prejudice and misconceptions that only women can compete in this field. *Dudes in Dresses* aims to overcome stereotypes, shift perceptions, and celebrate male ballet dancers. This campaign perfectly captures switching the narrative of male and female representing clothing or language. Similar to this campaign, I aim to switch the notion of familiar male or female clothing by counteracting it with gendered language.



*Fig. 9*

### c. Style guide

My style guide (Fig. 10) defines the typography, color palette, elements, and mark for Second Skin's campaign identity and all associated merchandise tags and promotional material. The color usage in this style guide was purposely chosen based on colors that are not commonly associated with gender, avoiding pink or blue. These

colors are high in saturation because neon colors are most commonly unisex, acting as a tool to stand out in dark spaces. The typography adopted was made by two female type designers, Julie Patard and Ludivine Loiseau. Both fonts combine a serif look with a sans serif type, emphasizing unisex type styles. Mark 01 was an original typeface I created to emphasize the importance of a gender-neutral brand. Mark 02 combines the S from the second skin logo while incorporating clothing iconography that is layered on top of each other to reference patchwork. These elements make up a gender-neutral design identity that can be used across multiple platforms.



Fig. 10

## VI. Design Intervention

Second Skin is a non-binary, anti-dress code campaign which targets social constraints that have made clothing gendered. Using key findings from my primary, secondary research, and design research methods, I chose to create a fully functional

campaign that would interact with user submissions through typographical, wearable merchandise. This campaign has three main features: Instagram submissions, branded clothing, and a non-binary brand identity. Second Skin exists as a social change campaign that is designed to empower users through collaboration. I would compare the style of Second Skin to *We Are Not Really Strangers*, but what distinguishes them is Second Skin's mission. Second Skin combines user interaction and user-responses into a wearable design that makes a statement on gendered clothing systems. It is a movement on how dress code regulations have done the opposite of their intention and created barriers for individuals. The name "Second Skin" refers to clothing and how it becomes an outer layer of our skin. It remains equally protected and important to us. Like the logo, all elements of this brand identity (Fig. 10) were built upon non-binary research to maintain an inclusive feel for users.

The Second Skin campaign would exist on social media platforms to promote the messaging of the anti-dress code ideologies. The Instagram would house the wearable merchandise designs, typographic user responses, and user submissions based off gendered clothing biases. These elements create a system that works within itself. Second Skin would pose a question like, "what do you hate wearing to work?", users would submit personal anecdotes, these anecdotes would then be put on merchandise in a way that pokes fun at the idea of dress codes or gender restrictions. Ideally, the money raised from the merchandise would go to a non-binary design foundry to promote the idea of a genderless future.

#### **a. Digital Deliverables**

The digital deliverables would house the messaging behind the Second Skin campaign and give it a space to exist. As seen in *Fig. 11*, Second Skin would be available for users through social media, ideally Instagram. This provides a shared platform for users to easily interact and provide responses for the campaign. The responses warranted from the users would be asked through Instagram highlights or

story posts (Fig. 12). These would ask users to respond with their lived experiences of dress code regulations or how they have felt gender bias when adhering to dress code policies. This platform would be a consistent factor in promoting the brand messaging and exploring new ways to understand and display gendered dress code systems.

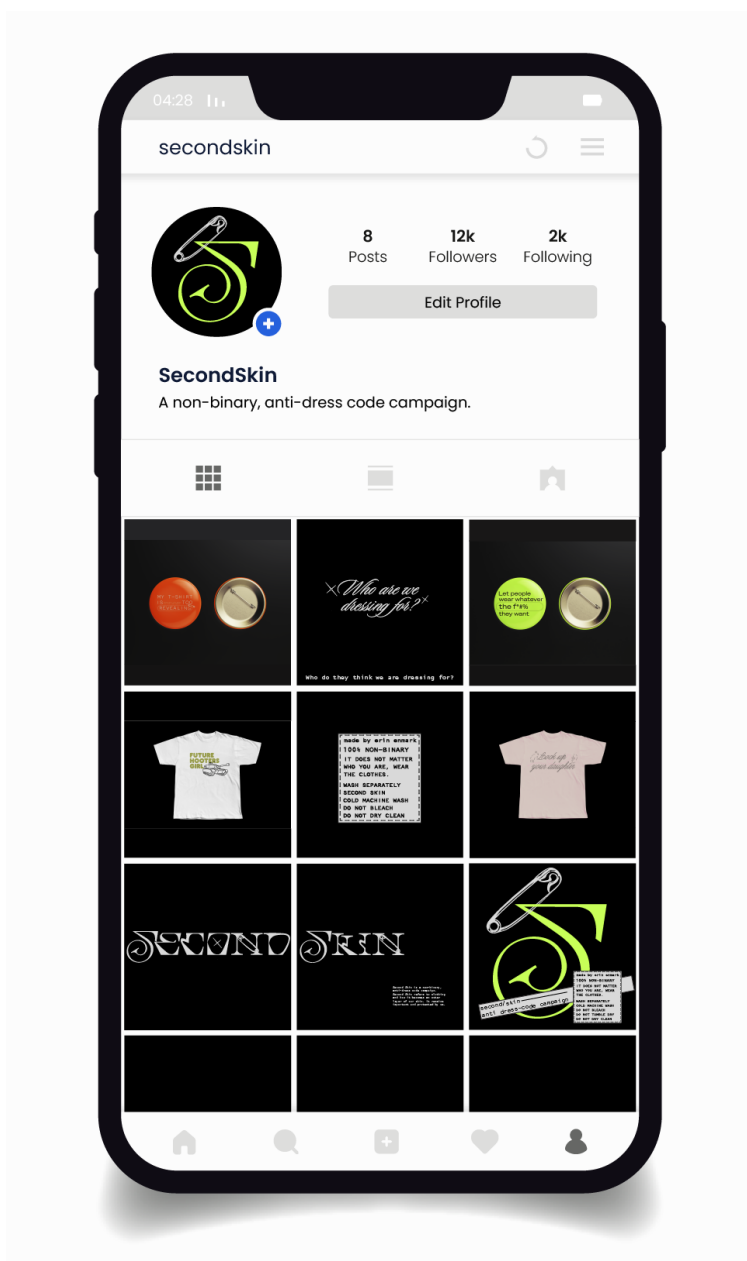
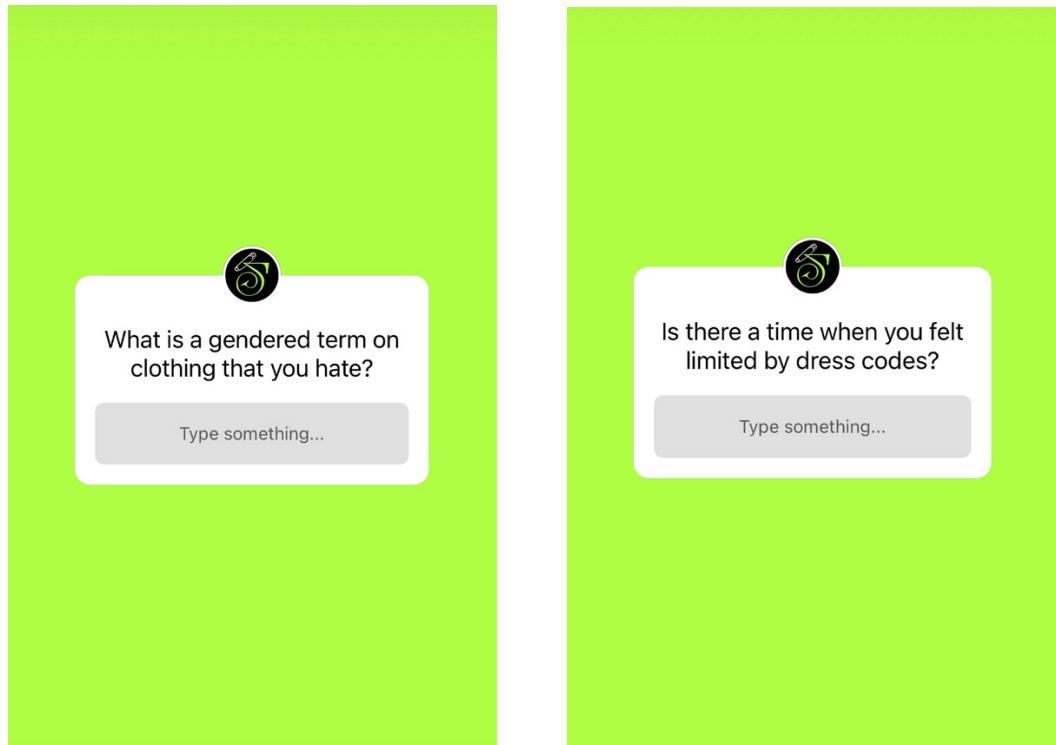


Fig. 11 Instagram Campaign



*Fig.12 Instagram Submissions*

### **b. Physical Deliverables**

The physical deliverables for Second Skin will act in tandem with the digital deliverables. The physical deliverables will further the connection with the users by allowing them to interact with the campaign in the best way possible, wearing gendered clothing. The idea behind the wearable merchandise is to switch the narrative between male and female identifying elements taken from survey responses or Instagram submissions. For example, in a submission about gendered baby clothes, a user submitted the quote “Lock up your daughter” being primarily found on male identifying children’s clothes with key male signifiers like the color red, a police officer, and a harsh, messy typeface. To combat this idea, Second Skin would take the submitted quote and reverse the environment. As seen in Figure 13, Second Skin took the submitted quote and put it in the context of a pink background, bunnies and bow iconography with a script font, all things that have been traditionally found as feminine.

This draws back to the idea of how gender classifications have become silly in a sense. Why have we allowed something so mundane as a bunny hold so much feminine weight?



*Fig. 13 Survey Response T-Shirt 01: Lock Up Your Daughter*

In another example of gendered baby clothes submissions, a user spoke on the sexualization of children through clothing and typographic sayings, specifically female clothing. This user submitted a hot pink baby jumper with the quote “Future Hooters Girl” on the front. Building on the sexual nature of the previous example (Fig.13), this emphasizes the clear difference between how clothing objectifies female identifying individuals. Second Skin played with this idea by putting the quote “Future Hooters Girl” on a t-shirt in a bold, army green font accompanied by a military grade tank (Fig.14). This iconography brings attention to a hyper-sexualized concept and satirizes the complexities which we have built.





*Fig. 14 Survey Response T-Shirt 02: Future Hooters Girl*

The second component of the physical deliverables is associated with the survey submissions research. As seen in Fig.15, these responses are direct quotes from individuals who have been affected by dress code regulations and feel the need for them to change. These responses directed the outcome of my design intervention and became extremely impactful when conducting my research. There was an overwhelming response to the restrictions that have been implemented in schools and workplace environments when it comes to dress codes. For example, one submitted response states:

“I work in a public school where the only dress code requirements are no inappropriate slogans. The kinds of things that are typically banned in schools (crop tops, ripped jeans, hats, hoods, etc) are what the majority of the student base wears. To a certain extent I believe that allowing students to be comfortable in their appearance creates a better learning environment. In the

opposite way, I am expected to maintain a strictly professional appearance though it would be significantly easier to perform duties if I were comfortable in my clothes,” (Fig.15).

| 1    | A     | B   | C  | D                                      | E        | F  | G    | H                         | I              |
|------|-------|---|--|--|----------|--|------|---------------------------|----------------|
| code | theme | subtheme  | megatheme  | events                                 | evidence | example  | code | key                       | sub code       |
| 2    | U-N   | uniformity  | equality, stable sense of professionalism            | regulations provide a sense of comfort |          | I think that dress codes in work and school is important because it allows a sense of equality in a place where everyone strives for the same goals. It also promotes a sense of professionalism that is important throughout life.  | U    | uniformity                | N -not goal    |
| 3    | U-P   | uniform as a standard                                       | regulations doing the opposite of what they intended | conformity with force/control          |          | I originally went to high school at a public school with a "standard" dress code before changing to one with a uniform. I sobbed my first day because of how much I hated it, it was uncomfortable, ugly, and actually caused me to be harassed more even though I was in a polo and khakis. Dress codes are absolutely not necessary unless it's weather related, shoulders and expression of one's self does not negatively impact anyone.   | CON  | conformity                | G -goal        |
| 4    | U-I   | uniform becomes expression                                  | lack of self expression                              | loss of self                           |          | I work at a coffee shop that requires full back attire with a required apron and hat. I can't help but feel I'm like a member to them and they don't care about who I truly am. The dress code definitely plays a role in that.  | COM  | comfortability            | I -interesting |
| 5    | U-G   | individuals can determine what to wear                      | doubt of judgement                                   | clothing has power                     |          | I wore uniforms through 9th grade, and I actually loved them. I was still able to express myself through my shoes, jewelry, and hair. However, in reference to the work place I believe I as a full grown adult that should have the right to choose what I wear. I know right from wrong and what's acceptable where. I understand and support being told to dress "business casual" in a business setting or scrubs in the Healthcare industry. But in High school or other jobs I think rules are biased and too strict.  | OF   | traditional               | P -personal    |
| 6    | U-I   | uniforms can regulate class/image                           | insecurity   | uniformity can provide confidence      |          | I think there should be some form of uniformity as a high schooler because I remember being around other girls in high school who were really confident in their body and seeing them wear super revealing clothes for me as a 15 year old made me really insecure- not to say that principals should have full blown authority on everything a student wears that's excessive : but I think having a boundary of you can't wear a workout lulu set to class as a 15 year old feels like a rule that would have helped me as a young girl // I say this all with the perspective that this can also fall into the ditch of people controlling what young girls wear and it gets too much - there is a fine line. | PRO  | professionalism           |                |
| 7    | U-G   | trust in people's professional judgement                    | trust  | adhering to societal expectations      |          | Sometimes societal expectations of what you wear (depending on the environment) is enough, but I believe that the dress codes were made because someone went against those societal expectations. The concept of a dress code is necessary. But I think the main problem are the codes in the dress code. Not the existence of one.  | D    | clothing as a distraction |                |
| 8    | CON-I | conformity  | servicing others                                     | authority                              |          | It feels like just another lesson in conformity from an authority so far removed from the very people it's supposed to serve.  | O    | objectification           |                |
| 9    | CON-G | control   | hybrid/remote working environments                   | control                                |          | I feel that dress codes are more for control rather than some necessity. people still get good work done while at home in their clothes of choice.   | AP   | anti-patriarchy           |                |
| 10   | CON-I | who are we dressing for?                                    | clothes are JUST clothes                             | existing at the expense of others      |          | It's an incredibly dynamic topic. I can see the benefit of having dress codes in grade school, but I don't know how it can be implemented in a fair/ non-gendered way. The intentionality here is key and begs the question, who are we dressing for? And who do they think I'm dressing for? While clothes can say a lot about you they are also JUST clothes, yet we put so much emphasis on their meaning.  | SEX  | sexism                    |                |
| 11   | CON-N | comfortability  | easy   | routine                                |          | Dress codes make me more comfortable as it leaves less guessing room for what is and isn't allowed rather than just being told something isn't allowed.  | REG  | regulations               |                |
| 12   | CON-G | confidence  | how do rules avoid taking away comfort               | personal autonomy                      |          | I think there should be a few rules but overall should be up to the person so they feel comfortable and confident  | IND  | individuality             |                |
| 13   | CON-G | more equipped to do your job in clothes your comfortable in | comfortable  | performance                            |          | 7 If I am comfortable I perform better   | GEN  | gendered dress codes      |                |
| 14   | CON-I | clothing changing attitude                                  | motivation by clothing                               | professional standards                 |          | 4 when I wear nicer outfits I feel more motivated to work.   | DS   | sexualized dress codes    |                |
| 15   | CON-I | there are practical uniforms                                | servicing jobs, scrubs, construction, etc            | practicality                           |          | 12 Dress codes are necessary in some instances for safety precautions like in a lab  | BS   | body                      |                |
| 16   |       |   |  |  |          | It's only perceived as necessary by those seeking to maintain the status quo. However, the dresscodes applied to public educational institutions are   |      |                           |                |

Fig. 15 Survey Data Coding

To recognize these responses and give their words a platform, I created a secondary merchandise option that includes quotes from the survey responses on buttons. These responses were made into typographical visuals that stated key ideas from their submitted opinions. For example, I received a survey response that stated, “At my job, we could either wear a work shirt or a black shirt, but I got asked to not wear my black t-shirt because it was too revealing,” (Fig.14). These personal narratives would become statement pieces in questioning the authority of dress code regulations and who is enforcing them.



*Fig. 14* Survey Response Button

## VII. Analysis

Second Skin challenges the societal dress code norms that have been reinforced by institutional spaces. Dress codes have been used as a crutch for heteronormative systems, hiding behind feminine and masculine associations. In Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble*, she states:

Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the practices of gender coherence. Gender proves to be performative constituting the identity it is purported to be (Butler, p.24).

Butler recognizes how gender is always the “doing” and never the “being,” therefore stating that gender is a classification that becomes an action. Gender is not definitive of the person or “being” rather that it is the action it is pushing an individual to be.

Second Skin recognizes these forces and provides a space where individuals have the room to just *be*. This campaign has adapted to the current environment of dress code regulations. Recognizing the limits these policies have imposed upon people, the identity of Second Skin breaks barriers of conformity. Some might argue that Second Skin has a cynical or anarchial view of societal systems, however the campaign is built to mold the view of its users. Second Skin creates a space for open dialogue between users on a digital and analog platform, allowing a duality of conversation. Therefore, if the users feel that they need to rebel against these systems, that is what Second Skin will become, just as easily as it can be a forum for people to discuss different parameters of their work environment dress policies.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

Working on Second Skin has been incredibly gratifying. I have felt the frustration and barriers of dress codes since my earliest memories of dressing myself for school. I can remember the shame I felt to be dress coded, how nervous I was to wear anything that revealed my chest. I have always felt restricted by dress codes and incredibly drawn to fashion as a tool to express myself. My junior year, I made icons for awareness about gender fluidity within fashion, and it made me start to think about how clothing is gendered and societally categorized. I want people to know that clothing is simply a tool we use in daily life; similar to a pencil, it serves its purpose. However, the implications of clothing far exceed the idea of it being a tool, but why? Clothing has become status, gender-oriented, and classist, therefore categorizing individuals by a tool they use to be comfortable.

Second Skin resembles the thought, *why can't I just wear what I want*, and creates a space for that question to be discussed. The Second Skin campaign has cultivated dialogue around gendered systems and the constraints of dress codes, successfully leading the way for an inclusive, non-binary space for generations to come.

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