

Business Comfort

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17th October 2019

Abstract

Business attire is very gendered, and attire expectations in the workplace may not allow all people to fully express their identity and still be taken seriously. People should be able to feel comfortable with their personal presentation and be judged based on their abilities, not their attire. We want to make people aware of their unconscious bias and discrimination against women and non-traditional gender conforming individuals. We will create a fashion photography exhibition and campaign promoting forms of gender identity expression through business fashion in an attempt to normalize it.

Project Description

Our project is a photography campaign depicting models in business wear that does not conform to typical, cisgender expression. Our photographs would show men, women, and non-traditional gender conforming individuals in business attire, and outfits would range from masculine or feminine to androgynous. The whole campaign would be on a website detailing descriptions about the images as well as the purpose of our campaign, its contributors, and its methods for reaching audiences. In order to begin raising awareness of the project, we would put up various photographs from the campaign around UMD's campus as a starting point. We would specifically target very populated areas, such as Stamp Student Union, clothing retailers, and places where people and students search for jobs, such as the UMD Career Center. In addition, we would put photographs in the College Park Metro Station to reach people outside of UMD. Each of these campaign spreads would feature a QR code that individuals can scan to find our gallery's entire site.

Significance & Distinction

Most of the time, the things causing awareness of discrimination of gender identity through fashion are lawsuits against schools. This is because schools are allowed to have strict dress codes that can be somewhat oppressive. However, office workplaces often do not have strict dress codes other than the expectation to look professional. There are online articles and guides for gender non-conforming people on how to dress professionally, but these guides rarely include photos. Our gallery would focus on creating visuals non-gender conforming outfits and bringing them to a wide audience. The gallery is meant to show and bring awareness as to how people of all genders can express themselves while maintaining a professional look. By having this gallery open to the public along with a website further detailing different types of non-traditional professional attire, men, women, and non-gender conforming people can be inspired about how they want to present themselves professionally. Furthermore, cisgender people will be aware of different types of non-gender conforming attire so that it can be normalized and accepted the next time they are presented with this alternative way of dress in their day-to-day lives.

Approach

Our project would require a huge collaborative effort between experts in several fields. Firstly, our group would have to take on outreach roles. We would contact students in the fashion design, business, and photography at the University of Maryland. The fashion design students would make up the crux of the project, designing new outfits that are both business-appropriate and non-gender conforming to the wearer's content. Instead of creating an entirely new attire, they would rearrange existing business clothes into a fresh style. Then, volunteers would model the clothes for a photoshoot.

Photography students would take pictures of the models (using either personal or provided cameras of professional grade). Our group would select the best photographs and print them as posters using the printer in the DCC lab. Once again, our group members would reach out, but this time to the places at which we would like to display the photographs: locations such as clothing retailers and career resources at UMD would be our main targets. That way, people who are actively shopping for business attire will see our gallery, which will hopefully encourage them to dress in a way that they feel adheres to their identity in the workplace.

Timeline

First, we will apply for grants. Once we figure out our budget, we will divvy up our responsibilities. Since most of our job is managerial, our time frame will be highly dependent on the schedules of the other people involved, but we have outlined a tentative ideal timeline.

A few of us will spend a good four weeks gathering information on the subject, looking at what already exists and contacting people affected by our cause. At the same time, a couple of us will be contacting fashion design and photography students from other schools, as well as professionals in the area. Our goal will be to start our photography shoot at least three months after the start of our project. This should give us enough time to plan the shoot but also leave time to select and edit the photos in a timely manner so we can present them to the physical locations.

While this is going on, two of us will begin setting up our web platform and contacting spaces in the area to see where we can put our physical platform. Contacting them with our idea at the beginning will make it easier once we have everything to show them what we've got, since we had already talked to them before.

All of these processes should be completed by the time the photos are ready so the project can be presented to the physical platform locations four months after the start of our project. As soon as we get approval, we will print the photos and set up our gallery.

Our web platform will stay open as long as we have someone to maintain it. Our physical gallery will remain up as long as the venues will allow, hopefully during events such as the career fair.

Audience

This project primarily addresses the white collar workforce and people preparing to enter that workforce, mostly UMD students. It would address the non-gender conforming workers who would be represented in the gallery as well as the more traditionally-dressing workers that they would be interacting with in the workplace.

This project would mostly have a local scope, as the posters would be put up in the UMD/College Park area. The website broadens the reach of the project to anyone with Internet access, although the project would not be advertised outside of the posters, so the website could be difficult to find if the person looking is outside of the local area.

Budget & Sources of Funding

We were very fortunate to be awarded a \$500 Do Good Institute Mini Grant as well as a \$10,000 Future of Information Alliance Spark Grant. Our expenses include paying college students for their services, such as designing, modeling, and taking photos. The designers will receive \$20 per hour. Their estimated

work time is six hours each for four of them. The photographers will also receive \$20 per hour, but they are only expected to spend three hours each working for two of them. The photographers will bring their own equipment. There will be four models, working as volunteers. They will do one hour with the designers and three hours with the photographers. The wages all equate to \$600.

Our most expensive endeavor will be booking the art gallery to display our photos. This is estimated to be \$500 for a full day, and then \$100 per day to occupy only a small section of the gallery. We will have a grand 2-day weekend opening and then hope to keep the small section around for three weeks (21 days). The opening will be catered for \$1,000. This totals \$4,100. This leaves us with \$5,800 for extra expenses, our time, and any extra ideas we add into the project.