



## **LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Apparel: The Impact Gender Dysphoria and Body Dysmorphia has on the LGBTQIA+ Community.**

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LGBTQIA+ youth are 50-70% more likely to experience body dysmorphia when compared to their cisgender peers (Boroughs et al., 2010). Body dysmorphic disorder is a mental health condition in which you can't stop thinking about one or more perceived defects or flaws in your appearance, a flaw that appears minor or can't be seen by others. You may feel so embarrassed, ashamed, and anxious that you may avoid many social situations. (Body dysmorphic disorder, 2022). It is estimated that gender dysphoria accounts for .014% of the population (Gender dysphoria statistics, prevalence, influencing factors, and treatment, 2022). Gender dysphoria is a sense of unease that a person may have because of a mismatch between their biological sex and gender identity. This sense of unease and dissatisfaction can lead to depressant depression and anxiety and harm daily life. (Gender dysphoria, n.d.). Gender dysphoria crosses many aspects of life, including how you interact with others, how you dress, how you fit into society, how you perceive the world around you, and, how you relate to your own body (TwippingVanilla). For example, for some trans and non-binary people, breasts are a source of gender dysphoria as they are visual reminders of a person's birth-assigned sex.

The LGBTQIA+ community constitutes 7.3% of the US population. (Jones, 2023) and the market segment is estimated to be worth \$890 billion (*LGBTQ Marketing 101: Ten First-Year Steps*, n.d.). Despite the size and potential spending by the LGBTQIA+ community, they are often overlooked by the apparel industry and must adapt their current apparel to accommodate their needs and wants (Barry & Drak, 2019). Moreover, brands and retailers lack knowledge and insight regarding those within the LGBTQIA+ community who experience gender dysphoria and body dysmorphia. Adapting existing garments allows queer and transgender consumers to create the design features they require to reduce the feeling of neglect, discrimination, and oppression (Muñoz, 1999).

However, despite a recent increase by the apparel industry to focus on inclusivity by providing adaptive apparel for people with disabilities (PWDs), producing more items in a variety of skin tones, and increasing attention to size-inclusivity, the LGBTQIA+ community continues to struggle to find apparel that meets their needs and wants (McBee-Black, 2022). Thus, this conceptual study explored the design elements needed to support the apparel needs and wants of the LGBTQIA+ community, specifically those who experience gender dysphoria and body dysmorphia, to support further academic research that might increase the product offerings by apparel brands and retailers.

Anecdotally, the researcher has discussed apparel challenges with several queer and transgender individuals. One person, who identifies as transmasculine, said that the most stressful area of dress for him and his friends was activewear clothing worn at the gym. He said it is difficult having to wear numerous layers of clothing so they often avoided the gym because it can be incredibly uncomfortable and dysphoric.

For many queer and transgender consumers, the use of chest binders and packing and tucking intimate apparel is crucial to affirm their gender identity and expression (Reddy-Best et al., 2022). In fact, several small and large-scale brands have provided intimate apparel that addresses gender-affirming designs for the LGBTQIA+ community and provide packers, packing underwear, masculine-cut briefs, and bras and binders for chest compression. These include TomboyX, Rebirth Garments, and Let's Be Brief.

Packing is a term used to describe a prosthetic penis often used by transgender individuals who wish to express a more masculine identity (Binding et al., n.d.). Tucking references hide the penis and testes so they are not visible under tight-fitting clothing (Malik, M. et al., 2022). Binding is when individuals wear tight clothing, bandages, or compression garments to flatten the chest (Peitzmeier et al., 2016). Binding can include wearing tight sports bras, compression shirts, or neoprene abdominal trimmers, (Peitzmeier et al., 2016). Tucking consists of placing the penis and testes between their legs or taping their genitals between their legs (Binding et al., n.d.). Despite these common DIY approaches, binding and tucking can be uncomfortable and may be hazardous to one's health. Wearing binders for extended periods of time can impact one's ability to breathe, reduce one's skin elasticity, hot during warm climates and skin irritation while tucking can tear or pull sensitive tissue in the genital area (Peitzmeier et al., 2016).

Despite the commonality of binding, tucking, and packing among queer and transgender consumers, most apparel brands and retailers do not specifically design apparel that addresses these needs. Designing garments that address the needs of tucking, packing, and binding could alleviate gender dysphoria or body dysmorphia safely and comfortably. For example, using rib or compression fabric for waistbands and paneling, using V-shaped waistlines to narrow the waist; tank tops that are boxier and loose with built-in compression binders or skirts and dresses with baskets and tucking pockets built in and with gathers around the waist or chest to create fullness.

While these findings help illustrate the need for improved inclusive apparel for the LGBTQIA+ community, these findings are not inclusive enough to represent all possible needs and wants within the LGBTQIA+ community. The apparel industry's increased interest in inclusivity and the increasing impact of the LGBTQIA+ community on the consumer marketplace suggests that inclusive apparel is emerging as an important addition to the apparel marketplace for many apparel brands and retailers. The LGBTQIA+ consumer is ready for apparel brands and retailers to take notice of their unique needs and wants and provide product offerings that address them. Additional research is needed to ensure gender dysphoria and body dysmorphia is addressed when designing apparel for the LGBTQIA+ consumer.

Further, academic researchers can use this data to facilitate cross-functional research teams with other researchers and apparel brands and retailers, focusing on the specific needs and wants of the LGBTQIA+ consumer that addresses gender dysphoria and body dysmorphia in the community. Based on the conceptual insight of this study, we propose that researchers and apparel industry leaders interested in the LGBTQIA+ community join forces with the ad-hoc working group formed from adaptive apparel scholars, apparel brands and retailers, apparel advocates, PWD represented organizations, and PWD to explore and contemplate the different areas impacting the LGBTQIA+ community in the apparel field, including curricula development, research collaboration through funding, interdisciplinary research collaboration, and policy research.

This conceptual study emphasizes that continued research into inclusive apparel is needed for both the LGBTQIA+ consumer and the apparel industry. This study also demonstrates the need to build a community of researchers, industry leaders, and LGBTQIA+ advocates to ensure apparel research continues to focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity. Multidisciplinary collaboration among researchers is suggested to meet the apparel needs and wants of the LGBTQIA+ community. We suggest that now is the time for apparel research to include a more inclusive focus by calling attention to the apparel needs and wants of the LGBTQIA+ consumer.

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