"DRESS APPROPRIATELY": A REFLECTIVE, INCLUSIVE AND INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO WORKPLACE ATTIRE

A SELF-REFLECTIVE EXERCISE FOR LEADERS

DARLENE SALAZAR, MASTER OF ARTS CANDIDATE

HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF ORGANIZATIONS, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

PURPOSE

This capstone provides a self-reflective exercise that organizational leaders can use to consider their own biases in regard to appearance and dress. Through the exercise, leaders can identify and enact new norms that combat potentially discriminatory and biased behaviors.

REFLECTIVE EXERCISE

**WHAT UNWRITTEN OR UNSPOKEN RULES ABOUT DRESS AND APPEARANCE EXPECTATIONS EXIST WITHIN MY ORG?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAKE IT RELEVANT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Richard D. Thompson (2022) writes that we often miss dress codes often because we:
| - Blurred gender norms
| - Cross-functional norms
| - Cross-functional expectations for customers |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPRESS BEYOND THE BINARY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Fara Dallenta Thornton (2022), the author suggests leaders consider the following:
| - Can I express the dress code in a gender-neutral, inclusive, and non-sexist way?
| - Is the dress code an affirmation or more than a punitive measure? |

**KEY TERMS**

- **HETERONORMATIVITY**: SOCIAL REGULATORY FRAMEWORK THAT DEFAULTS TO A BINARY SEX DIVISION, NORMALIZING THE DESIRE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN
- **INTERSECTIONALITY**: TERM USED TO DISTINGUISH AND AMPLIFY THE DIFFERENT LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AN INDIVIDUAL BASED ON THEIR MULTIDIMENSIONAL IDENTITIES, AND THE WAYS THAT THOSE IDENTITIES OVERLAP AND PRESENT UNIQUE BARRIERS TO EQUALITY IN DIFFERENT FACETS OF SOCIETY
- **DEIB (DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION & BELONGING) INITIATIVES**: ESTABLISHED TO FACILITATE AWARENESS; UNDERSTANDING; AND, WHEN NECESSARY, CHANGE IN ORDER TO CREATE MORE DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE, AND EQUITABLE SPACES FOR INDIVIDUALS OF ALL BACKGROUND

By recognizing opportunities to be explicit in expectations of appearance and dress, an organization invites the individual to express themselves without judgement, providing a psychologically safe workspace that does more to promote inclusivity, empathy and allyship than the indifference that accompanies vague, or non-existent dress codes.

"Revolution is not a one-time event. It is becoming always vigilant for the smallest opportunity to make a genuine change in established, outgrown responses; for instance, it is learning to address each other’s difference with respect." - Audre Lorde

Acknowledgments. Thank you to my advisors, RG and Clay, for believing in my ideas and for all your incredible support and feedback; to Toshie for never leaving a woman behind; to Carson for holding my hand through it all; to my close friends, family and colleagues that have never stopped cheering me on; and to the amazing HDO cohort, and faculty I learned so much from, thank you all.