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(Un)Contained Breasts: A Phenomenological Analysis of Flesh, Femininity and Feelings

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Geography and Environment

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Abstract

This thesis offers an original examination of the affective relations between bodies, clothing, and space by examining women's experiences and feelings towards their breasts and wearing a bra in public. Exploring participants' contained and uncontained experiences with their breasts provided an opportunity to interrogate how heteropatriarchy requires a fashioning or containing of both feelings and flesh in public. Drawing on feminist and queer methodologies including 'dirty participation' and autoethnography, I report on insights gathered from twelve walking interviews conducted in Edmonton in the summer of 2019. Walking interviews included participants navigating their everyday geographies twice: once while wearing a bra and another while bra-less. These interviews demonstrate how social discourse on breast containment shapes women's embodied experiences and their engagement with their bras. Utilizing the bra as an object of study, I offer an analysis of the corporeographies of how wearing—and not wearing—a bra impacts women's spatial experiences. Findings include that participants differentiated between physical, social, and psychological comfort in relation to bralessness, using a range of strategies to navigate daily trade-offs between these categories. The concept of abjection provided a useful lens for interpreting participants' experiences of feeling vulnerable and out of place. Finally, I propose some preliminary features of a 'braless geography' based on women's feelings of (dis)comfort, safety and vulnerability in a range of urban spaces (e.g. particular neighbourhoods) and specific locales (e.g. bars, hair salons). This research affirms that the bra acts as a potent social and physical force in shaping and containing bodies spatially, socially, and psychologically.

Keywords: Braless, abjection, comfort, subjectivity, walking interviews, embodiment

Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis asks: why it is normal for women to wear a bra in public—and what happens when we break this unspoken rule? By researching women’s experiences of bralessness in public spaces, I consider how a seemingly mundane object, the bra, has a major impact on women’s physical experiences and feelings because of social norms. In 2019 I interviewed twelve women about their bra wearing experiences. Together, each participant and I visited several public places in their everyday lives, like a coffee shop, grocery store, etc. While walking, we talked about their feelings towards their breasts and bras. Then we took our bras off and visited the same spaces a second time, talking about how we now felt while braless. Women discussed how they used a bra to prevent looking out of place; they feared appearing “sloppy” or “slutty” without a bra. Additionally, women described specific places and situations where they felt that bralessness would never be acceptable, like at the office. The interviews revealed how wearing a bra requires a negotiation between social, physical and psychological comfort. This research affirms that breasts without a bra are considered ‘out of place’ because they move and are fluid, something Western society rejects under patriarchy. I also discuss participants’ relationship with vulnerability, specifically how wearing a bra is a strategy to manage the body and protect oneself from rape culture. Finally, I provide maps visually showing where—within the city and in specific settings such as a shopping mall—women reported feeling more and less comfortable or safe while braless.

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Chapter 1 : Introduction

1 Introduction

Why is it considered ‘normal’ for women to wear a bra in public—and what happens when we break this unspoken rule? Questioning normative gender constructs, and their role in shaping corporeal geographies and subjectivity, has informed my Masters research.

Examining social norms proves valuable to uncovering how highly structured our daily lives and spaces are (Seamon, 1980; Longhurst, 2001; Reinharz, 1992; Valentine, 2001). Escaping unscathed from what is normative is nearly impossible, as hegemony demands a response through (sub)conscious engagement, or rejection, of social norms (Young, 1990). Thus, negotiating social norms surely must produce visceral feelings, emotions, and our sense of place as what is normative informs the gaze we are evaluated through. Exploring women’s breasted experiences, this thesis analyzes the complex ways normative attitudes of gender, femininity, bodies, and space shape women’s embodied experiences. Specifically looking at the constraints heteropatriarchy places on women’s bodies, we gain insights on the associated corporeal experiences of women trying to “fit in”. Without literature on women’s breasted experiences, we lack information on the subjective experiences of living under the constraints of heteropatriarchy.

Based on ethnographic research of women’s breasted experiences, this thesis presents a record of the disciplinary measures used to manage and contain their comfort, in relation to heteronormativity. By providing a critical geographical examination of the corporeal experiences of participants contained and uncontained breasted experiences, this thesis aims to offer a novel analysis on the body. Utilizing the bra as the object of study, I offer a perspective of the complex ways normative attitudes shape our embodied experiences based on the affective relations that exist between bodies, clothing, and space. Drawing from empirical research completed in 2019—including a series of interviews conducted with twelve women from Edmonton, Alberta that attends to both their dressed and fleshy bodies—I affirm and extend others’ work on how we conceptualize the gendered body, affording a deeper exploration into the relations between embodiment and place. I offer an analysis on

women's negotiation of normative feminine constructs by describing how it impacts our engagement with everyday space.

By attending to how the body moves and experiences daily life and drawing attention to embodied acts of heteronormativity, I contribute to literature that critiques how mundane practices comprise complex systems that actively (re)produce everyday sexism (Eldridge, 2010; Enwistle, 2000; Fanghanel, 2019). By investigating the affective relations of bodies, clothing, and space at a microsocial scale—such as whether or not a woman is wearing a bra—I contribute insights on how the body lives (and how it is allowed to live) under heteropatriarchy.

Through the research topic, I am enabled to examine the prevalence of everyday sexism and rape culture and how such constructs contribute to women's experiences and attitudes towards our sense of selves (Fanghanel, 2019). Attending to women's breasted experiences is a useful avenue to explore as women's breasts are uniquely positioned culturally as objects. Exploring the ubiquitous sexual objectification and commodification of breasts is useful in understanding how bodies: women, men, trans, intersex, and gender non-conforming, are impacted by the cultural subjugation of essentialist femininity and masculinity (Longhurst, 2004). I argue that attending to such constructs is useful to understanding the ubiquity of rape culture covertly experienced under patriarchy.

Women's reported feelings of (dis)comfort and (mis)fit are explored through participants' reported fears of appearing "unprofessional", "sloppy", "slutty" or "out of control" while braless in public. Such reported judgements represent the slippery boundary present when grappling with perceptions of society and self. Maintaining this distinction requires the ongoing negotiation and management of spatial, social and bodily boundaries. Since it is normative for women's breasts to be sexually objectified and commodified, as well as (paradoxically) bound, contained, and covered (Longhurst, 2004; Young, 1990), this thesis discusses how such social constructs shape women's corporeographies and attitudes towards their breasts. Perceived stereotypes related to bralessness prompted participants to engage in spatial and social mitigation techniques such as covering, concealing or contorting their bodies to manage feelings of comfort and fit. For example, an internalized negotiation of

containment offers women a mechanism to maintain control—to avoid being cast as abject—when subjected to the gaze of others.

The inquiry into how physical, social, and imaginary spaces shape anxieties about one's own bodily appearance enables a phenomenological analysis of the spatial significance of the bra in containing the fleshy body and shaping subjectivity. This research finds that both the bra and real or perceived social expectations and norms shape women's experiences: in the same way that the bra physically contains women's chests, so too do perceived societal expectations of bralessness contain women's imaginations.

1.1 Research Questions

Considering the bra as a significant gender affirming garment, I pose the research question: **do women experience public space differently whether their breasts are contained or uncontained, and if so, where, when, and why?** To answer this question, and unpack the significant role that the bra plays in shaping gendered bodies and experiences in space, I conducted ethnographic “breasted” research with twelve Edmonton women between the ages of 25 to ‘50-something’ years old. Utilizing walking interviews to extract rich embodied data, I asked women to visit a few of their everyday public spaces where we talked about their bra wearing habits and experiences being braless in the past. Then, we removed our bras and walked back through the same spaces, noting our experiences and feelings.

In this thesis, I resist any notion of a universal womanhood. Instead, I emphatically notice similarities and differences of women's relations with their bras. Connecting insights from the interviews to literature on bodies, comfort, and abjection, I discuss how heteronormativity shapes women's embodied and emotional geographies.

1.2 Research Location

This research occurred in Edmonton, Alberta. Edmonton offered the best opportunity I felt to have success in achieving my research objectives within the desired project timelines. Being situated in Canada, it is not law but assumed that it is ‘normal’ for women to wear a bra in public. My personal background as an urban planner motivated my interest in engaging with the radical potential of place as a transformative site for social justice where everyday sexism

and patriarchal norms can be challenged through the body. I draw from a variety of genres and theories including feminist, queer, postmodern, poststructuralist, psychoanalytic, and phenomenological.

1.3 Definitions

For clarity and context, in this section I define key feminist and geographical concepts that I employ throughout this thesis.

- Space – most generically refers to the geometric container in which life takes place and matter exists (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers, 2013). Space provides the spatial ordering and arrangement of the world produced through social relations and practices (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers, 2013). From the early 1980s, feminist geographers have understood space as “complex, situated, often unrepresentable, and contradictory, producing multidimensional and messy spaces” (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers, 2013; Rose, 1993).
- Sense of place - The specific feelings, perceptions, and attitudes generated in people by the particular qualities of a locality, or the events that they experience there (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers, 2013). A sense of place arises through specific relationships to a site’s built or natural environment and is a subjective appraisal (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers, 2013).
- Subjectivity refers to our internal relationships that shape our being. Feminist poststructuralists such as Probyn (2003) recognise that subjectivity is not fixed or absolute but is temporally and spatially contingent. Robyn Longhurst (2005a, p. 435) acknowledges the spatial imperative of understanding subjectivity as “subjects are interpellated by a range of ideological systems which means that often people inhabit quite conflicting subjectivities which are experienced differently in different contexts.”
- Heteronormativity is the assumption that normal and natural expressions of sexuality in society are heterosexual in nature (Rich, 2003). Heteronormativity shapes moral, social, and legal entities, positioning forms of sexuality that are not heterosexual as deviant (Blunt and Wills, 2000). Compulsory heterosexuality positions

heteronormativity as being paradoxically asexual (Blunt and Wills, 2000; Rich, 2003).

- Patriarchy – “a system of social relations that produces inequalities that favour the interests of men over women, or otherwise empower men in general over women.” (Castree, Kitchin, Rogers, 2013). The dominance of patriarchy creates an inequitable system that is embedded in social, political, and economic institutions and is reflected and reproduced through popular discourse and the media (Castree, Kitchin, Rogers, 2013; McDowell, 1999). The result is various forms of discrimination and restricted access to power, resources, goods, and services based on gender (Castree, Kitchin, Rogers, 2013).
- Sexism – Dahl (2015) explains sexism as a concept with inheritance with double meaning and implications. Dahl (2015) outlines sexism as “prejudice or discrimination based on sex; especially discrimination against women” and “behaviour, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex”. These two definitions provide a distinction between how sexism lies in views and actions as well as a cultural and ideological problem as it shapes roles and stereotypes.
- Rape culture – describes a status quo in which sexual violence and exploitation (in all its forms) is normalised (Fanghanel, 2019). Sexual violence occurs along a continuum, with rape, sexual assault, intimate partner violence at one end, and stalking, harassment, cat-calling, flashing, unwanted sexual attention and objectification, at the other (Kelly, 1987). Rape culture also sustains heteronormativity as it designates normative and idealised constructions of masculinity and femininity along heteropatriarchal lines (Fanghanel, 2019). Fanghanel (2019) argues that one of the reasons why rape culture is able to thrive is because it manifests itself in so many places, and appears in so many guises, including our vernacular. For example, the representation of female characters in many films or TV programmes, the use of certain types of women’s bodies in advertising, sexist jokes, the normalisation of heteronormative romantic tropes, or dynamics of sexual encounter inform and normalize rape culture (Fanghanel, 2019; Rubin, 1984).

1.4 A Feminist Endeavour

Feminism examines systems of social relations that produce inequalities. Feminist theory offers a framework to consider how power is created, wielded, and reproduced to generate unequal social relations such as sexism, ableism, and racism (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers, 2013). Rose (1997) acknowledges that we cannot survey power as if it can be fully understood or controlled. A feminist epistemological approach takes into consideration questions relating to how socially constructed norms, such as gender and race, influence what knowledge is and how it is legitimized, represented, and reproduced. I adopted a feminist approach in all stages of my research from forming my research question to selecting my research methodology, the interpretation and analysis of data, and the final representation of results.

Like Cooper (2011), I position this research as a form of radical scholarship as I critically examine the systemic structures of power and ideological issues that manifest as a wicked patriarchal problem. My embrace of radical scholarship asks participants to try a subversive experience, as I offer a suggestion, to experience bralessness in public space and to notice and report upon what they feel. As Sibley (1995) suggests, in rejecting the emotionless disembodied voice and turning towards other people, the geographies presented become 'radical and emancipatory'.

1.5 Overview of Thesis

Through this research project, I ask why is it normative for women to wear a bra in public? Relying upon a feminist ontology and epistemology, I aim to answer this question through the observation of the social and spatial experiences of bralessness by exploring women's imaginary and lived corporeal geographies. In the next chapter, my literature review, I explore the topic of bodies and emotions within geography, specifically looking at how feelings of abjection and experiences of othering shape our spatial experiences. I conclude the chapter by examining literature on bras and breasts.

In Chapter 3, I explain the methodological framework and methods used to embrace an embodied research project. In Chapter 4, I introduce each participant's background and

experiences with their breasts and wearing a bra, and provide an overview of the walks we conducted. In Chapter 5, I present the research findings according to themes that emerged from the bra/less walks. In Chapter 6, I provide further discussion based on the findings and literature reviewed in the chapter 2 to explore how bra/lessness shapes women's geographies, feelings, and experiences of space. Focusing on comfort and vulnerability, I move from feelings of the body to feelings on the body in space in relation to heteronormativity. Finally, in Chapter 7, I provide a brief conclusion of my findings and future directions for research on topics on women's breasted experiences.

Chapter 2 : Literature Review

2 Introduction

In this literature review I critically review the work of a small group of feminist scholars who look at the body and dress. I focus on the small niches of scholarship on bodies, femininity, and flesh within geography, explaining how this work helps position my research. In this section, I explore literature relating to, 1) the body (its material, social, symbolic qualities; its solidity and fluidity; how bodies shape and are shaped by place; bodies as the home of embodied knowledge); 2) gendered social discourse (norms around abject bodies/ women's bodies needing to be disciplined; efforts to resist or reclaim the messy body); and 3) clothing, breasts and bras as more specific focal points for exploring gendered experiences of bodies in society and bodies in space. I focus on these three themes as they provide a framework for considering women's breasted experiences. The first section on bodies situates embodiment and emotions as being central to this work. The second section on gender(ed) social discourse provides an overview of how women's bodies are subjected and objectified and the feelings this produces. Finally, I explore literature on women's clothing, breasts and bras as it provides a framework to consider women's breasted experiences. Together these topics comprise the background to how I conceived this research project.

2.1 A Feminist Ontological Approach

A feminist ontological approach to research challenges positivism and objectivity by embracing embodiment as a site of data production (Rose, 1993; Valentine, 2001). Feminist theory resists the disembodied nature of academic inquiry that assumes men can transcend their embodiment while women remain to be ruled by their emotions and bodies (Rose, 1993). Like other social sciences, geography historically embraced positivism (Rose, 1993). As a result, the body was positioned as other to the mind with the assumption that the geographer is an objective and disembodied observer; able to detach from the subject and research to perform research rationally and objectively (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014). However, qualitative, postmodern, Indigenous, postcolonial, critical, feminist, and queer scholarship has been challenging positivist and Cartesian approaches for decades (Longhurst

and Johnston, 2014; Rose, 1993). It is through our bodies that we come to see and be seen in the world as the body is indicative of our cultural locations that are spatially and temporally specific (Valentine, 2001). In this way, our bodies are symbolic of the contexts in which we are situated in as the body moves through time and space with a sense of itself as gendered and intelligible based on the social setting we are situated in (Entwistle, 2000). Feminist ontology has informed my research project specifically in how I consider bodies and emotions as sources of data as I focus on women's embodied experiences.

2.2 Bodies

“There is no natural body - the body is always culturally mapped” (Valentine, 2001)

Our bodies are constantly contested within the conditions of our social and spatial realms as our bodily boundaries are defined by and constantly defining space. Longhurst (2001) describes, “the body is as political as the nation state”. Robyn Longhurst, a significant contributor to research on subjectivity, argues for the importance of attending to the relationship between the body and space and based on her geographical approaches along with the various literature described within this chapter, I argue that we need to acknowledge the political significance of the body in relation to space as our bodies provide the material basis for our connection and experiences with the world.

In addition to providing us with our corporeal forms, the surface of the body performatively symbolizes the self through embodied activities and representations (Valentine, 2001). Rich (1986, p. 212) describes the body as “the geography closest in” and calls for more attention to be given to the significant ways corporeal form shapes our embodied experiences. Considering the body as its own geography, as a space that is imbued with meaning, offers a useful lens through which we can begin to consider the structures that are responsible for creating meaning across space. Longhurst (2001) describes how historic and modern discourse continue to favour Descartes' separation of mind and body, which within western knowledge positions the body as distinct, separate, and historically sexualized. This distinction has caused topics related to the body to be viewed as derogatory, easily dismissible and unworthy of geographic attention (Longhurst & Johnston, 2014). Drawing attention to the socially constructed dualism that implicitly genders the mind as masculine

and the body as feminine, Grosz contends that, on the one hand, the mind has traditionally been associated with positive terms such as “reason, subject, consciousness, interiority, activity and masculinity” (1994, p.22), whereas the body, on the other hand, has been implicitly correlated with negative terms such as “passion, object, non-consciousness, exteriority, passivity and femininity” (Grosz, 1989, p. xiv). She notes that although men and women both ‘have bodies’, in Western culture it is culturally suggested that (white) men are able to transcend their embodiment in particular contexts, whilst women are understood as being closely tied to, and ruled by, their bodies in time and space (Grosz, 1989, p. 162). As a result, research topics on bodies historically have been positioned as “other” within the geographic discipline as the body has been viewed as subjective while the mind has long been associated with rationality and objectivity (Longhurst, 2001).

Cover (2003) notes that the body serves as a site in which we notice signifiers that inscribe differences. For example, we can consider both how we think about our breasts and how our breasts make us feel—imaginatively, physically, and discursively. Bodies play a significant role in people’s experience of place, making it a topic worthy of geographic attention (Longhurst 2001). Attending to the relationships between people and places can be addressed from a range of geographical scales. Longhurst (2001) recognizes that temporal and spatial attendance to the variation in appearance, practices, comportment and motility of bodies across cultures globally reveals variation in embodiment that is socially constructed. Attending to such cultural variability shatters the social illusion of a ‘natural’ (i.e. universal) body, along with the fallacy of normativity (Longhurst 2001). Feminist interventions seek to challenge what is considered normative (Johnston, 1994), an approach I embrace in this research. Throughout this literature review and my discussion of women’s breasted experiences, I aim to deconstruct why bodies are positioned as other and contribute to scholarship on the gendering of spaces and bodies within spaces. Specifically how women embody feminine norms to fit in socially by wearing a bra to contain their breasts which contributes to normative images of woman’s breasts as hard, smooth and contained (Young, 1990).

2.2.1 Fleshy, Fluid, Feeling, and Feminine Bodies

In this section I discuss how the fleshy, feeling, and feminine body can enrich geographic scholarship. Directing our attention to the fleshy, feeling, feminine and fluid body is useful as geography affords us the tools to consider affect and subjectivity from a variety of temporal and spatial scales. Since we often ignore the fleshy materiality of bodies (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014), referring to the fluid and indeterminate nature of flesh and space is useful to learn about subjectivity. Body fluids and fluid bodies:

flow, they seep, they infiltrate; their control is a matter of vigilance, never guaranteed. In this sense, they betray a certain irreducible materiality; they assert the priority of the body over subjectivity; they demonstrate the limits of subjectivity in the body, the irreducible specificity of particular bodies” (Grosz, 1994, p. 194).

This quotation illustrates how we are in some ways controlled by our body’s materiality and its fluidity and fluids. In “Bodies: exploring fluid boundaries” Longhurst (2001) provides a series of essays explaining how our bodies make a difference to our experience of places. Throughout these essays, Longhurst (2001) specifically discusses the “fleshy”, “fluid” and “leaky” body which is seen as perverse in geography. Longhurst has helped in identifying significant gaps within geographic research, as such, I refer to her work frequently. Her theoretical framework has played a particularly significant role in inspiring and positioning this research.

Longhurst (2001) identifies a trend within geography and the social sciences to employ postmodernist metaphors of fluidity and materiality when referring to subjectivity, bodies, and spaces, however, the actual materiality and fluidity of the body is seldom referred to. What remains absent is the flesh and boundaries of sexed bodies and bodies that are fluid, volatile, messy, uncontained, and leaky¹ (Longhurst, 1997; 2001; 2004; 2005b; Longhurst &

¹ Within geography, little attention has been given to the naked body as geographers have considered the geographies of nudist practice to consider the spaces in which the naked body appears in public, such as nude beaches and nudist colonies (Cover, 2003; Bell & Holliday, 2000). However, there remains a lack of literature that considers the nude or lewd body within urban contexts.

Johnston, 2014; Morrison, 2007). Longhurst (2001) speculates that embodied knowledge, or knowledge obtained from the fluid margins of the fleshy body, is seen as unscientific and too intimately subjective to count as knowledge; corporeality is viewed as threatening to spoil and taint objective knowledge. Longhurst (2001) advocates for attending to bodily boundaries as doing so dares to break geography's and academia's social and disciplinary boundaries and protocols. Longhurst (2001) argues that this work is imperative, as perpetually ignoring the fleshy body will permit heteropatriarchy to retain its dominance. To further feminist agendas, the body's specific materiality can no longer be denied (Longhurst, 2001). Longhurst (2001) advises that perhaps in thinking, writing and talking about bodily fluids, abjection, orifices, and the surfaces/depths of specific bodies we can consider a new lens to understanding the social relationships between people and places. The various work completed by Longhurst (2000; 2001; 2004; 2005a; 2005b) has informed my research project by providing a venue to think of bodies in a "fluid" and "leaky" sense. I became interested in the ways the fear of a fluid body shaped women's experiences while braless.

Because of the historic rejection of corporeality in the social sciences, we lack discourse to articulate the embodied aspects of space including emotions, fluidity, and femininity (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014). However, some geographers such as Eldridge (2010) have attended to the body in its leaky form. Eldridge (2010) explores practices of public urination, intended to circulate themes of disgust, intimacy, and civility, invoking tensions that act to separate us along axes of moral/immoral, clean/dirty, male/female. Exploring the moralistic discourse that arises when controlling the body, Eldridge (2010) argues that our notions of morality and virtue become representative of the disgust we feel towards the out of control, disorderly body rather than towards the hygienics of the urine itself. Eldridge (2010) notes the minimal research on the abject body as it questions lines of morality, gender, and dirtiness that threaten the exposure of the so-called unscholarly, anecdotal, irrational and unscientific dimensions of the research process. As an abject topic, public urination tells us a great deal about shifting geographies of embodiment and civility. In looking to the sites of transgressions, Eldridge (2010) identifies that we can expose our embodiment forcing us to consider the limits of our own body's governance, control, and singularity. Eldridge (2010) informs my work as the braless body in public challenges boundaries of moral/immoral and

clean/dirty as bralessness is typically seen as an action that transgresses norms of containing the fluid or leaky body.

Biological essentialism traditionally positions women's bodies as leaky and fluid in opposition to men's hard bodies (Rose, 1993). The feminine body is as viewed leaky—experiencing menstruation and childbirth—and is read as inferior (Longhurst, 2001). Women's bodies are seen as untrustworthy as they seemingly lack control of their bodies while men's bodies are perceived as solid and self-contained (Valentine, 2001). Grosz (1994, p. 203) interrogates how the feminine body has been constructed as formless and “leaking, uncontrollable, and lacking.” Considering the fluidity of feminine experience that exists and that no shared women's history exists, there only exists historical records of feminine styles and covering of the flesh that are spatially and temporally specific, lacking a collective record of feeling and experiencing of heteronormativity on the body (Young, 1990).

Longhurst (2000) asserts that it is therefore no surprise that clothing and other forms of adornment, which operate at these “leaky” margins, are subject to social regulation and moral pronouncements as “the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived.” The feminine is seen as monstrous and horrific through her representation and because of her leaky volatile boundaries (Russo, 1995). The grotesque woman is used as a warning. Women's bodies have been historically feared and objectified. Constructed as biological freaks, Russo (1995) argues that women's bodies represent a fearful and threatening form of sexuality. Being clothed and contained in public space is a way of managing these cultural representations.

2.2.2 Comfort and Sense of Place

In beginning to conceive this thesis, my motivation was to facilitate talking with other women about their everyday experiences and what it means for them to negotiate normative femininity. My motivation for studying sense of place—“the lens through which people experience and make meaning of their experiences in and with place” (Adams, 2013)—is rooted in an interest in what it means to be in place or out of place. Within this framework, being “in place” means a person can extend into and experience public space comfortably as being in place is ascribed to a normative identity and body (Ahmed, 2006). Places emerge in

habit, through the repetition of practice, performance, intricacies, and routines (Ahmed, 2014). Utilizing a framework of in/out of place is useful to comment on power structures and privilege while providing a way to talk about belonging. Being out of place can feel uncomfortable or unsafe; those marked as different are viewed as out of place and become visible. Being in/out of place is relational and affective. I am interested in participants' feelings towards their breasts based on heteronormativity and how their sense of place and feelings of comfort shape these experiences. Paying attention to comfort is valuable because when people feel their comfort is threatened and the other is to blame, violence can occur.

Scholarship on geographies of comfort looks at the Anglo-American obsession with comfort (McNally, Price & Crang, 2020) in its many manifestations including physical, moral, emotional, spiritual, and political. McNally, Price & Crang (2020) identify that within global capitalism or our comfort-oriented society is consumerism, where material comfort is prioritized over morality. Comfort is related to ease or luxury, where discomfort invokes sorrow, melancholy, gloom, or physical irritability (McNally, Price & Crang, 2020). There is a sensory experience of comfort that can be explored as comfort is a negotiated sensibility managed through different types of clothing (McNally, Price & Crang, 2020). Exploring feelings of comfort involves looking at the relations between place and emotion—the senses, affect and materiality.

2.2.3 Emotional Geographies

Historically, academic geography has favored the visual thereby ignoring the other sensual dimensions of people's geographies (Johnston, 1994; Morrison, 2007). Like other disciplines, geography has had a tough time expressing its emotions (Bondi, 2002). Castree, Kitchin, & Rogers (2013) define emotional geography as the study of the significant role emotions play in shaping our sense of place, our behavior, our perception of the world, and our sense of self. Emerging from a growing exploration of embodiment, emotional geography is an emerging field of research that critically considers the affective relations between human emotions and space (Bondi, 2014; Davidson & Milligan, 2007). Emotions can be viewed "as a form of connective tissue that links experiential geographies of the human psyche and physique with(in) broader social geographies of place" (Davidson & Milligan, 2004). Attending to emotions offers us the opportunity to consider additional subjective, spatial,

cultural, and social information within a specific geographic context, permitting a venue to reflect upon the affective relations that shape our geographic spaces, interactions, and experiences. I am committed to remaining attentive to emotions, participants' and my own throughout the research process. Specifically I attend to emotions as a source of data, by comparing women's reported feelings while braless in public space together.

2.3 Gender(ed) Social Discourse

In this section I explore how gender(ed) social discourse shapes women's corporeal experiences and subjectivity. Specifically looking at how women's bodies are viewed as abject and need to be controlled and contained in public space. I rely upon psychoanalytic geographies and theories—"a form of geographical analysis that draws on the theories of psychoanalysis to examine how the relationship between self, society, and space is mediated through the psyche and the unconscious mind" (Castree, Kitchin, and Rogers, 2013)—to situate this discussion and to explore how women discipline and control their own bodies due to the fear of material repercussions that come from not following heteronormativity. Psychoanalytic geographies critically examine feelings of being in place/out of place and processes of othering and exclusion (Castree, Kitchin, and Rogers, 2013). It is necessary to note that the application of psychoanalysis has been met with some skepticism within the discipline, critiqued as being acultural, ahistorical, and empirically unverifiable (Castree, Kitchin, and Rogers, 2013). Nonetheless, several geographers continue to draw on its ideas and methods. I include psychoanalytic literature as similar geographic work on the body, specifically the few accounts that speak to the boundaries of bodies, relies upon such psychoanalytic theoretical locations.

2.3.1 Defining Abjection

Abjection, as defined by Kristeva (1982), is the revulsion for the 'Other' as the other threatens the 'Self'. The abject is what disturbs identity, system, and order as it fails to respect borders, positions, or rules, whether intentionally or not (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Kristeva (1982) argues that the abject provokes fear and disgust because it exposes the fragile border between self and other. The abject threatens to dissolve the subject by dissolving the border. The abject is also fascinating, Kristeva (1982) explains, as though it draws the subject

to repel it. For example, one may gaze at something horrific, knowing the consequences, but engaging anyway to confirm the boundaries of separation. Kristeva (1982, p. 4) argues that the abject is unsettling because it exposes the boundaries of the fragile binary that we use to define ourselves through. When bodies disrupt binaries, such as civil/uncivil or masculine/feminine, our fragile and tenuous social constructions are exposed.

Ideas on abjection have been shaped by Douglas (1985), who describes the significance of place in othering by using the metaphor of dirt: wherever dirt is located, there is “matter out of place.” For example, shoes in their “proper place” are just shoes, but shoes on a table become dirt and out of place. When dirt appears, it demands appropriate behavior to return to the original state and proper place. In providing order, difference is produced and maintained, having very real social impacts on bodies and spaces. Based on Kristeva (1982) and Douglas (1985), I argue uncontained breasts are constructed to appear “dirty” as well as out of place becoming abject. Wearing a bra is a way of maintaining order between the self and other.

2.3.2 Scales of Abjection

Sibley’s (1995) work on geographies of exclusion offers a valuable way to consider how we engage with the abject at the urban scale. Sibley (1995) considers how we create social and spatial boundaries to exclude and expel the abject, producing exclusionary landscapes. Sibley (1995) draws on object-relations theory, suggesting the urge to exclude others from one’s proximity is connected to our unconscious desires to maintain cleanliness and purity in efforts to maintain order. Our abject fear of the self being defiled or polluted is projected onto others—usually defined by bodily appearance (e.g., disabled, black, female) or body codings (e.g., dress, style) (Longhurst, 2004). Social boundaries between groups are thus maintained largely unconsciously, enacting processes that create spatial separation.

Kitchin (1998, p. 343) explores the marginalization and exclusion of disabled people in ‘mainstream’ society arguing that space, as well as time, are instrumental in (re)producing and sustaining disablist practice as spaces are currently organized to keep disabled people “in their place”. Using metaphors of weeds, disease and secretion, Creswell (1994) asks us to think about how discourse shapes our thinking and acting such as having geographical and political implications. Looking at metaphors of displacement, which are used to imply the

inappropriateness of actions in particular places, Creswell (1994) provides us with a context to consider how social power shapes conflict. Creswell (1994) argues that looking at the geography of metaphors is fruitful as such literary devices are culturally and spatially located, providing broader social and political insights where they question what common sense is. Women's breasts are located at the scale of the body but women's experiences are socially inscribed. Women contain their chests to stay "in their place", to avoid being cast as abject and to maintain social separation from what bralessness suggests.

2.3.3 The Objectification of Women

In relation to the privileged image of breasts women are not passively positioned in relation to cultural discourses; rather the contrary, women are active agents in negotiating complex and contradicting discourses, gazes, and spaces (Millsted & Frith, 2003). Sandra Bartky (1997) uses Foucaulian theory on disciplinary bodies and looks specifically at the "cult" of femininity. Bartky (1997) argues that women are uniquely positioned as both active and passive agents of their own subjectivity. Women participate in femininity as it is performative and (re)enacted through the body (Bartky, 1997; Butler, 1990). Under heteropatriarchy, women discipline their bodies to conform to a masculine gaze of heteronormative femininity (Bartky, 1997). Some women may choose not to discipline their bodies as there is no active disciplinarian enforcing femininity, however, opting out of what is normative has material consequences as women's bodies cannot escape the criteria they are judged through (Bartky, 1997, 143). The bra itself has no disciplinarian, however, women continue to engage in practices of containing their breasts to fit in with what is heteronormative to avoid being cast as abject.

Kim et al (2007) looks at the ways heterosexual content pervades television by looking at a small sample size of teenage dramas and comedies. Kim et al (2007) finds that heterosexual scripts and sexual double standards are present throughout this programming. Heterosexual scripts shape how men and women navigate heterosexual interactions where women are expected to perform and manage their bodies for men. For example, Kim et al (2007) found female characters were depicted as willing to objectify themselves and were judged for their sexual conduct. Femininity is to be managed so the status of "good girl" is maintained to

avoid slipping into the “slut, whore or ho” category (Kim et al, 2007). Articles of femininity like a bra are used to maintain a woman’s image.

Containing the body is necessary for women with the prevalence of rape culture. Women cannot afford to slip into the slut, whore, or ho category out of fear of violence. Sexual harassment is a mode of controlling the female body in space (Fanghanel, 2019). The threat of sexual harassment accompanies a raft of systems of control, exclusion, and sanctions that affect women’s bodies in public spaces in ways that simply do not affect men’s bodies (Fanghanel, 2019; Kelly and Radford, 1990; Olney, 2015). The ubiquity of rape culture controls women as sexual harassment reminds women that her body is open for male commentary (Fanghanel, 2019). Women expect to be evaluated in public space and that “she does not belong, and that she is first and foremost, a sexual object within a heteropatriarchal striation of public space.” (Fanghanel, 2019). The threat of sexual harassment shapes women’s corporeal and embodied experiences, rendering them vulnerable and subject to scrutiny. As a result, women use a bra to contain their chests and protect themselves from objectification and potential sexual violence.

2.4 Clothing, Breasts and Bras

In this section, I explore literature on clothing, breasts and bras. Specifically looking at women’s subjective experiences and how clothing, breasts and bras shape women’s corporeal experiences.

2.4.1 Clothing the ‘Abject’ Body

When considering the way spatial environments shape embodiment, a critical component to consider is how the body engages in some form of dress, constituting a major component of our social and lived experiences (Entwistle, 2000, p. 323). People live their lives not just as bodies but as clothed bodies who inhabit particular spaces (Banim, 2001). Through clothing, bodies become signified and contain meaning as clothing acts upon the body, inscribing cultural meaning by emphasizing bodily difference. Attending to clothing intersects various dimensions that are economic, aesthetic, cultural, social, and psychological in nature (Longhurst, 2005a).

Dress is significant as it represents a negotiation between the personal and the social (Longhurst, 2005a; 2005b). Our clothing speaks to our subjectivity through what we choose to reveal, what our clothing conceals, what images it creates, for whom and where (Longhurst 2005a). Entwistle (2000) argues that our sense of dress is simultaneously socially situated and embodied. In this way, social structures are reproduced at the level of bodily practice. By actively engaging with the social through dress, we produce ourselves through routine practices directed towards the body (Entwistle, 2000). Our clothing allows us to occupy different gendered subject positions across space—by choosing different clothing, we can occupy different gendered subject positions in different locales (Longhurst, 2005a). For example, bralessness can be read as “sloppy” or “slutty” based on the space and the body.

Dress transforms flesh into something recognizable. It is a practice we all share to some degree as we all have and are bodies and all cultures dress. Clothing constitutes a personal experience of the body because it is “worn on our bodies” (Woodward, 2016a, p.46), and is a public marker of identity because it gives bodies meaning in culture (Entwistle, 2000). Longhurst (2005a) identifies the important role that clothing has as it constructs different images, at different times and in different spatial contexts.

Longhurst (2000) identifies the act of getting dressed to be one of the most complicated acts of daily existence as our clothing is used to negotiate between the personal and the social, requiring a keen attunement to space and time. Commenting on the crucial aspect space has on our experience of the dressed body, Entwistle (2000) identifies that getting dressed requires an implicit understanding of the rules and norms of social spaces. Entwistle (2000) argues that dress is fundamental to our microsocial order as the exposure of naked flesh is disruptive to that order. Bodies that do not conform or flout the conventions of their culture by evading the appropriate dress codes are subversive of the most basic social codes, risking exclusion, scorn, or ridicule, all of which form significant embodied experiences (Entwistle 2000).

Longhurst (2005) notes that geographers have begun to acknowledge how shaping and being shaped by social space should also consider fashion and the ways people clothe themselves. Geography on fashion previously focused on the production and consumption processes (e.g. Crewe & Davenport, 1992; Crewe & Forster, 1993), but more recently the focus has shifted

to observe the relations between fashion, clothing, subjectivity and space. Entwistle (2000) identifies a gap that exists between theories of the body, which often overlooks dress, and literature on clothing that too frequently leaves out the body. Longhurst (2005a) argues that geographic inquiry into fashion and clothing offers immense potential to craft a greater understanding of the complex relations between the self, the social, and the spatial—a task I take up in this thesis. Morrison (2007) argues that for geography to become more inclusive and diverse as a critical discipline, it is necessary to recognize fashion/underwear as an important aspect of bodily subjectivity. Entwistle (2000) calls for an account of dress as an embodied and situated practice to acknowledge the ways in which both the experience of the body and the various practices of dress are socially structured. I echo Morrison's (2007) statement that there is no fashion literature that considers the notion of abjection despite fashion requiring an abject Other. This thesis seeks to address the gaps identified by these scholars by considering the ways a bra is a complicated and embodied act that is informed by women's social location.

Dress is intersectionally based on the lived experience of the woman based on her class, race and ethnicity, age, occupation, location, ability, etc. (Entwistle, 2000). Longhurst (2005a) notes that “lifestyle, social class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity become expressed through the production, consumption, wearing, storage and circulation of clothes in particular spaces.” Entwistle (2000) highlights the intersectional nature that also must be considered when questioning the embodied experience of dress as within our neoliberal framework, there is an emphasis on promoting dress that is free and creative. However, within a culture of “choices”, the intersections of gender, class, location, and income set material boundaries and constraints around dress choice and expression in a variety of situations. Based on the intersectionality that shapes women's clothing choices, I consider the ways in which our bodies shape women's bra wearing habits and experiences while braless.

Colls (2004) identifies that women have spatial strategies to manage their emotions around clothing consumption. Colls (2004) identifies a need to understand “the emotional relationships formed between women, clothing and their bodies” (p. 586) to consider how feelings are manifested through clothing and dress to uncover relationships between emotions and clothing ‘the body’. Attending to how emotions are negotiated and what social subjectivities contribute to the shaping of these emotions is useful to consider the

intersubjective nature of emotions. In engaging in self-reflection with women, Colls (2004) reveals that there is an active participation, identification, and management of emotions on the part of individuals when it comes to clothing ‘the body’. In identifying links between emotions and the practices of consumption, Colls’ (2004) work is extremely useful as such endeavors have not been made explicit within geography; as work on women’s emotional connections with clothing has often commented simply on positive or negative feelings relating to sensation rather than how emotions are produced, managed, and experienced. The work of Colls (2004) is useful to consider the complex feelings and experiences that are contained in bra wearing, specifically the ways the bra shapes women’s subjectivity

2.4.2 Semiotics of Breasts and Bras

The breasts may be the most sexualized zone of the body (Entwistle, 2000). Masculinist culture constructs breasts as objects and within phallogentric culture, sexuality is oriented to the man and modeled on male desire where active sexuality is the erect penis as it functions to penetrate the passive feminine receptacle (Young, 1990). Under heteronormativity, non-phallic pleasures are considered either deviant or preparatory (Young, 1990). Young (1990) locates capitalist and patriarchal dominated culture as responsible for objectifying breasts through media. Young (1990) notes that “the way women respond to the evaluating gaze on their chests is surely as variable as the size and character of the breasts themselves, but few women in our society escape having to take some attitude toward the potentially objectifying regard of the Other on her breasts.” (78). A phallogentric construction of breasts privileges the look, their shape and size. Phallogentric norms do not value a multitude of breast forms but rather elevate a normative standard (Young, 1990) of breasts that are solid, firm, and contained, leaving women to regard their given breasts as inferior, floppy, deflated, or “other.” From a woman’s point of view, the feeling, sensitivity, and erogenous possibilities of breasts are far more important, however discursively, culturally, and imaginatively the visual remains to be privileged (Young, 1990).

Young (1990) imagines an epistemology spoken from a feminine subjectivity that privileges touch, enabling a woman to identify her breasts as her own, with some distance from the hard norms of the masculine gaze, allowing a space for female centered desire. Portrayed as a fetishized object, women’s breasts are a cultural object that is ideologically gazed upon as no

longer belonging to herself but as an object for male pleasure (Young, 1990). Often, women's breasts are portrayed as being high, hard, and pointy—visually sharing qualities that are phallogentric (Young, 1990). In trying to challenge heteropatriarchal norms of breasts, Young (1990) speculates what might be said about breasts if we asked women about their embodied experiences such as their sensitivity, health and feeling rather than appearance.

Since women's corporeal form is inscribed and viewed as existing as a mode of seepage (Longhurst, 2004), bras are used to constrain, firm, and solidify the softness and indeterminate fleshiness of breasts. A bra works to solidify the breasts by disciplining them (Bordo, 1993). Firm, contained breasts are privileged over soft, fluid breasts; meaning without a bra, women's breasts become abject (Longhurst, 2005a). Women's breasts are often covered and contained by the bra, contributing to an ideological understanding that privileges feminine bodies that have firm bodily margins. Without a bra, the fluid nature of breasts becomes more apparent. Young (1990) hypothesizes that surely a woman's mode of being must differ whether or not her chest is confined or open to touch while moving through the world. Without a bra, Young (1990) notes that women's breasts are deobjectified and desubstantiated as they no longer resemble the high, hard, pointy look that phallogentric heteronormativity demands. When the bra is removed, breasts are no longer objects with a definite shape but instead can now radically change shape with body movement (Young, 1990). Uncontained breasts reveal the diversity of breast shape and sizes and how breasts are more fluid than solid.

Bras reaffirm gender identity which in return becomes normative and appropriate in public space. Colls (2006) describes how the normative nature of the bra works to smooth over the contours of the flesh. A bra contains breasts, acting as a temporary means of disciplining the body. Bras with padding and push-up are used to normalize the shape of women's breasts as full, round and contained in public. Bordo (1990, p. 90) argues that the appearance of round, full breasts made while wearing a bra contains and solidifies the fluidity of breasts by bolting down and firming bodies. Without a bra, women's nipples may be visible. Visible hard nipples signify a woman's out of control sexuality or her general lack of being able to control her body (Longhurst, 2004). Nipples represent the fragile boundary between objectified sexuality and motherhood. Within this binary, women's nipples continue to only belong to

anyone besides herself. Because uncontained breasts are situated as being abject, women's braless walks represent a subversive activity as the potential for visible nipples is more possible and it situates women's feelings as central to the experience as opposed to focusing on the appearance of breasts. Without a bra, women's breasts are fluid and disrupt the normative image of breasts.

2.4.3 A Brief History of Contained Breasts

It would be naive to consider bras ahistorically and to assume that women have passively adopted the bra throughout time. At its conception, the bra was considered a liberatory garment in comparison to the corset. In the 19th century, bras slowly began to replace the corset but the commercial production of the bra did not occur until the 1930s. One of the reasons behind this shift is noted as a shortage of metal during the time to support war efforts that encouraged the end of the corset (Smith, 2014; Williams, 2012). During this time, the transition of women into the workforce, particularly vocational positions filling in for men serving in war efforts (Smith, 2014; Williams, 2012). The evolution of the bra from the corset was driven by the clothing reform movement of feminists who saw that greater participation of women in society would require emancipation from corsetry (Smith, 2014; Williams, 2012).

In 1968, the iconic feminist trope of "bra-burning" was made popular during a protest for the Miss America pageant. Protestors had a freedom trash can that included bras and other instruments such as girdles, curlers, and pantyhose that enforced femininity (Young, 1990). Misconstrued and depoliticized, the bra burning myth was born to trivialize feminism (Young, 1990). In separating the actions of discarding patriarchal items from the intent, feminism and bras have since had a complicated relationship where bralessness represents women's freedom from sexism and ability to assert themselves as sexual and autonomous beings (Young, 1990). Young (1990, p.83) argues that burning the bra represents the ultimate image of the radical subversion of the male dominated order, making a mockery of "normalized" breasts. Uncontained breasts show their fluid and changing shape; they do not remain the firm and stable objects that phallogentric fetishism desires (Young, 1990).

Over the past decade, the “Free the Nipple” movement has been popularized in media. Initiated by Lisa Esco in the form of a political comedy under the same name, Free the Nipple addresses the tension of the exposed nipple within digital spaces, specifically on social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook and Twitter) that determine women’s nipples to be crude content and subject to censorship through policy guidelines (Matich, Ashman, and Parsons, 2019). Ziesler (2007, p. 60) argues that nipples have become a fashion accessory. However, only certain bodies and breasts are considered acceptable without a bra in public. Since styles of flesh change, it is possible to consider a time when women’s bralessness is celebrated and encouraged. The history of contained breasts provides a context to consider how attitudes on bralessness are shaped. Being tied up with feminist resistance, bralessness can be seen as a radical act that surely has produces a corporeal response for women.

Women’s naked bodies have been used for protest to draw attention to the dangers of heteronormativity and double standards. By using the naked body, social norms of what is acceptable in particular spaces is challenged as well as heteronormative constructs. For example, Sutton (2007) looks at how the naked body was used for political resistance during the 2003 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil to resist social norms and order and to propose a new world is possible. When we think of protest more broadly, the body serves as the vehicle in which protesting is enacted, clothed or unclothed (Sutton, 2007). The effectiveness of naked protest is that the naked body is considered morally offensive in certain contexts (Sutton, 2007). Women enacting protest by displaying their bodies disrupt dominant notions of how women's bodies ought to appear in public: as passive and powerless sexual objects (Sutton, 2007). Sutton (2007) identifies that the use of the naked body for protest may be the only means of expression available to women.

Breasts have political power and exposed nipples can be a form of political speech. Breasts are not genitalia however they are treated as sexual organs as female breasts are viewed in a sexual context under heteropatriarchy. In a Canadian and American context, breasts are socially viewed as needing to be concealed like other reproductive organs. However, social norms that define what clothing makes women’s bodies “acceptable” vary depending on the context. In parts of Europe, for example, the prevalence of nude beaches suggests that breasts are not considered as titillating and the presence of topless women is tolerated, even encouraged.

While this thesis focuses on the Western feminist perspective that social pressure to contain women's breasts is oppressive while opportunities to release or reveal one's breasts are liberatory, this position is not universal. For example, the 'breast tax' in Travancore, India from 1829-1859 required Dalit women to leave their breasts uncovered as a way of reinforcing caste hierarchy, charging them a fine if their breasts were covered in public (Sebastian, 2016). In these circumstances, restricting women's rights to conceal their breasts was as oppressive as the social pressure that restricts women's right to reveal their breasts in other contexts. . Despite no laws dictating the necessity of bras within Canada, we are taught that women's uncontained breasts are distinctively perverse in contrast to men's assumed flat or chiseled chests. A fleshy chest is normatively constructed to be perverse and therefore should be covered in public. In Ontario, a pair of women exercised their right to topless equality and were arrested, attracting significant media attention and public discourse (van Rooy, 2021). Over the past decade, an increasing number of instances regarding women's breasts have attracted attention and ongoing discursive constructs continue to circulate such stories such as an Ottawa employer asking women to go braless at work, and women breastfeeding in public (CBC Radio Canada, 2019). Stories that are seen in Canadian public media draw attention to how pervasive women's breasts are in public as such actions are viewed as an act of public resistance.

2.4.4 Breasted Experience(s)

Some research on breastedness has included narratives of breast cancer (Langellier & Sullivan, 1998), breast-feeding (Carter, 1995) or cosmetic surgery (Morgan, 1991). Looking specifically at the experiences of large breasted women, Millsted & Frith (2003) attend to how women's own experiences of their breastedness has often been overlooked. They observe that many women find themselves observing their own breasts as lacking and inadequate. In addition to an internalized dissatisfaction with their breasts, Millsted and Frith (2003) report that for large breasted women they felt as though they possess no control over whether to make their breasts a salient aspect of their embodiment and identity as the visibility of large breasts in a culture that objectifies breasts was experienced as disempowering and distressing. Within the study, women negotiated strategies to control how their bodies are read by others, even though this control is not always possible to

maintain. Millsted and Frith (2003) note that women attempted to manage and constrain their breasts to make them less visible, to avoid being marked as sexual objects to mitigate disrespect. However, despite efforts to remain invisible, women's bodies are culturally rendered as being publicly available; their presence in public spaces sets a target for censure and harassment (Millsted and Frith, 2003). For women, being braless renders them vulnerable and potential a target for sexual violence. Wearing a bra is a way to contain their bodies and protect themselves from how others read their bodies as bralessness can suggest promiscuity.

2.4.5 Underwear and Space

Underwear plays a useful role in containing fluid and the fluidity of bodies. Underwear serves as the primary material that absorbs bodily fluids, soaking up menstrual blood, urine, feces, and sexual fluids in an immediate albeit temporary relationship with the body (Morrison, 2007). Morrison (2007) observes that undergarments add sexual meaning to the body, not by drawing attention to the body, but by emphasizing bodily difference, affecting and shaping the materiality of the body. Further, Morrison (2007) identifies that "there is little academic literature concerning the relationship between women's bodies, underwear and space" despite the unique role that women's underwear plays in molding and shaping flesh to fit the contemporary feminine norm through form. Wilson (1985, 5) suggests that the social implications of seeing women's underwear is more than simply witnessing the breaking of social and dress etiquette, it is witnessing "the exposure of something much more profoundly ambiguous and disturbing... the naked body underneath the clothes." I am interested in using the object of underwear to understand further the relationship between identity and place or more broadly, bodies and space. Examining the relationship between the body, the bra and space provides a means to consider geographically how *clothed* bodies are constituted in and through space. The specific role of the bra is interesting to consider as it belongs under the clothing and its removal shows a change in shape and fluidity that is not normally seen in public. The desire to avoid being cast as abject conditions the body that is publicly displayed.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I explored literature on bodies, gender(ed) social discourse, and clothing, breasts, and bras. Navigating geographic and feminist research on topics of the body and othering, I shape a framework to understand why women wear a bra and how it shapes their feelings as a result of cultural norms. I focus on literature on bodies, exploring the importance of exploring flesh and emotions. By doing so, I provide a background on the significance of studying women's bodily and emotional experiences. I explore gender(ed) social discourse by exploring abjection and the objectification of women's bodies, providing a context as to why women's breasts without a bra are seen perversely in public and why it is assumed normative for women's breasts to be contained and clothed in public. Finally, I explore literature on clothing, breasts and bras to provide information on previous breasted research that shaped this research project.

Chapter 3 : Methods

3 Introduction

This thesis employs a qualitative methodological framework. Qualitative methods are used extensively within geography to provide insights on human experiences and environments (Moss, 93). Geographers embrace both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and such mixed methods have contributed to an understanding of the richness of everyday life while illustrating the complexity of social issues (Crasnow, 2015). The use of qualitative methods can work to deliberately amplify voices of those previously silenced or ignored. In addition to qualitative approaches, I adopt feminist methodological approaches (based on my positionality). However, a variety of limitations shaped the boundaries of this research project including the restrictions of time, funding, and my own capabilities.

3.1 Methodological Framework and Research Design

While there is no single definable queer perspective, queer approaches to research are generally poststructuralist and postmodernist, challenging traditional notions of research and universal truth (Browne & Nash, 2010; Di Feliciano, Gadelha & DasGupta, 2017; Nash, 2010). Similarly, feminist methodological approaches are not universal in nature. To take up the affective relations between women's breasted experiences and space, I rely upon the feminist epistemological assumption that knowledge is produced through embodied research. This project's focus on emotions and its intent of subverting normativity align with a feminist approach to research that seeks to attend to power in order to learn about, disrupt, and improve social relations (Ackerly & True, 2008, p. 699). Creating space for women to talk about their (un)bound breasted experiences offers a small yet radical subversion to cultural hegemony, as it confronts the evaluating gaze that privileges the appearance of women's breasts. This subversion extends to the disciplinary boundaries of geography as focusing on emotions and fleshy bodies challenges historic notions of objective and disembodied knowledge production (Bordo, 1993, p. 20; Longhurst, 2004, p. 152; Longhurst & Johnston, 2014; Young, 1990, p. 161; Sibley, 1995, p. 184). As such, I offer an account of women's embodied breasted experiences, welcoming subjectivity, emotions, and the embodied

researcher, to focus on women's centred experiences that intentionally rejects the notion that research requires absolute objectivity and rationality, and should be performed by a disembodied researcher (Longhurst, 1997).

3.2 Methods and Techniques

In adopting a feminist methodological framework, I have carefully selected research methods that align with my research objective to generate an embodied account of women's (un)bound breasted experiences. Following is a brief overview of the embodied research methods that I have considered, including walking interviews, data visualization, and autoethnographic journaling. I detail each research method and acknowledge its strengths and weaknesses.

3.2.1 Recruitment of Participants

To recruit participants, I utilized snowball sampling, reaching out to an initial group of informants with the intent they would connect with others who would be interested in participating in the study (Noy, 2008). The method of snowball sampling is non-representative. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic that requires trust, it was more important to recruit participants through known contacts than to achieve a representative sample. Given time constraints, a small sample size of 12—there was originally 13 participants however due to conflicting schedules, we were unable to complete a walking interview, I have included our first interview however—was used which is common for qualitative research employing feminist methodologies. My decision to conduct research in Edmonton is two-fold. First, based on existing community connections, I am well supported in my ability to conduct effective snowball sampling. Second, my familiarity with the location aided in my confidence in navigating the city and the spaces visited, removing additional labour that would be required to familiarize myself with a new location and be comfortable being braless in those spaces.

3.2.2 Mobile Interviews

Interviewing participants while moving through space is an emerging methodological technique utilized by geographers (Evan & Jones, 2011; Jones et al., 2008; Springgay & Truman, 2017, p.33). Jones et al. (2008) note the interesting possibilities walking interviews offer as the format disrupts the controlled interview environment that is typically fixed. By physically exploring the participants' everyday spaces and walking alongside them while talking about their feelings in the spaces we visit, mobile interviews offer an affective dimension that is sensory focused. Walking interviews offer participants more control in the interview process, allowing them the opportunity to take the researcher to particular places and direct the flow and environment of the interview (Evans & Jones, 2011) By introducing movement, interviews can produce an organic response to stimuli.

Walking interviews also help overcome the typical power arrangements present in research interviews (Springgay & Truman, 2017). Walking with participants through space creates knowledge as it happens, oftentimes prompting reactionary responses as opposed to recall from memory (Evans & Jones, 2011). I will refer to the technique of walking interviews as *mobile interviews* to ensure an inclusive study can be performed that welcomes multiple modes of mobility. Aiming to retain the essence of the 'walking interviews', however, I offered participants the option to move between spaces utilizing public transit as dialogue can continue within this setting. Accommodating mobility concerns by utilizing public transit retained the movement aspect of the interviews and the engagement with public space. Prior to conducting interviews, I asked interested participants to complete a short questionnaire to understand any mobility concerns or accommodations that may be needed prior to engaging in mobile interviews (See Appendix A 1). With this information, mobile interviews were performed to best suit the needs of participants.

Once participants were selected, the first round of interviews occurred where routes for mobile interviews were determined (See Appendix A 2 for a list of interview questions). I asked each woman to choose spaces they typically frequent and offered to remove my bra with them if that would potentially make them more comfortable on the day of the interview. After the women selected the spaces they wanted to visit, I spent some time before each mobile interview researching potential changing locations. Following this, each woman was

individually interviewed for approximately 90 minutes while moving through various public spaces of their choosing, such as coffee shops, parks, or grocery stores frequented in their everyday geographies. Interviews began at a designated meet up location and the first 45 minutes the interview were spent moving with participants between the predetermined sites while wearing a bra. Once at our final location, participants were asked to remove their bra in a predetermined private location, e.g. bathroom. When I offered to remove my bra alongside them, seven participants took up my offer. The remaining 45 minutes of the interview were spent travelling back to our initial meet up location, visiting the same sites again. This time, however, participants were braless. While in each space participants were asked a series of questions based on how they are feeling and why that might be. Interviewing women about their feelings of their (un)bound breasts while moving through space actively produced emotions as participants had the ability to physically move through and respond to changes in space as well as their own bodily state, generating an embodied account that can be spatially situated and then analyzed to consider the ways in that physical and social spaces shape embodiment (Evans & Jones, 2011; Jones et al. 2008; Springgay & Truman, 2017).

3.2.3 Interviewing as a relational practice

Feminist (Alcoff, 1991) and geographic (Longhurst, 2003) researchers have demonstrated the practice of *speaking with* participants instead of speaking for participants to avoid misrepresentation. In practice, this means designing interviews to produce... I conducted partially structured interviews in the manner of Longhurst (2003), who suggests talking with and listening to participants in this way. Sharing, interpreting and representing others' experiences needs to be taken seriously and should be treated as a privilege and responsibility (Hay, 2016). However, Longhurst (1996) reminds us that research can be fun; often pleasure is removed from academia as the hegemony of the disciplines enforce rigid ideas about what is an appropriate research topic and how researchers are supposed to perform. In this way, research has been represented as a serious business and its binary opposite, fun, has been devalued, feminized and forgotten (Longhurst, 1996). Engaging in efforts to ensure participants enjoy themselves during the research process is gaining popularity within geography. Throughout all the interviews for this project there was a significant amount of laughter. My decision to conduct individual interviews was motivated by the prevalence of

heteropatriarchy shaping women's experiences, as breasts continue to be sexually objectified, discussing breasts can seem too intimate a topic to discuss appropriately in a focus group. While conducting interviews, I assumed the role of facilitator, directing the discussions to unfold in a conversational manner (see Appendix A 2 for a list of interview questions).

3.2.4 Participatory Mapping

Using audio recording via a personal phone to collect interview data, photos to capture site information, and GPS technology to track our route, I identified emotions that are produced in each space based on states of bodily (un)dress (Colls, 2004). The use of qualitative GIS mapping—combining qualitative techniques with GIS visualization—to represent women's embodied experiences offers a visualization of the data collected through the mobile interview process. Maps are powerful and shape how we understand and interact with the world (Cook, 2019, 36). Maps have a long history as a tool of oppression and act as a form of structural violence (Cook, 2019). Participatory mapping, offers a (re)clamation by coming together to share spatial knowledge and experience through the building of maps by making visible physical and socio-cultural phenomena, relations that would not be represented otherwise (Cook, 2019, 37). I include maps of bra-less geographies within my discussion chapter and photos from the mobile interviews in Appendix B1 as a way to leverage the power of mapping to stimulate and support story telling of embodied meanings of place (Cook, 2019). To my knowledge, there are limited studies that have used participatory mapping to consider the fleshy dimensions of the body and the related approaches to explore the spatial dimensions of (un)clothed experiences.

3.2.5 The Embodied Researcher

Attending to embodied research provides an enriched discussion on the relations between bodies and space. Focusing on “embodied methodologies”, I treat emotions as a source of data, an approach that Sibley (1995) considers ‘radical and emancipatory.’ My approach to interviewing, transcribing, coding and analysis involves an attentiveness to affect (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010). I aim to be an active participant in my writing and do not want to propagate a disembodied researcher. In order to do this, I allow myself to insert my emotions and experiences into the research. The researcher, the researched, and the research are

inextricably linked and influence each other. It is therefore crucial that the researcher is aware of how she influences and informs the research (Morrison, 2007). When we attend to power dynamics using feminist research, power is the researcher's subject and not the researcher power's agent (Ackerly and True, 2008, p.699). I aim to destabilize the notion that the researcher is a rational and detached observer. I too am part of the research, my participation is my own crafting, and I acknowledge that my engagement in any way impacts me as well. Smith (2005) offers a strategy to address the power relations within the research process by noting the complex positionality of the researcher, subject the research process to scrutiny and recognize the researcher as an embodied presence in the research process. Kearns (2000) notes that the appearance of the researcher can influence participants' reactions during interviews. As such, attending to how I present myself as a researcher is a necessary exercise to engage in.

In this thesis I draw on feminist poststructuralist theories in an attempt to acknowledge my position as partial and as a product of specific social settings. Embracing a feminist methodological framework, I am committed to remaining critically self-reflexive throughout my research process. The main tool I have used to achieve this is goal is autoethnography—a research method taken up by feminist scholars to bridge and emphasize the ways the personal is also political (Morrison, 2007; Moss, 2001). Autoethnography as a form of knowledge creation has been a long used feminist tool (Moss, 2001). Cosslett (2000) argues women's experiences are vital sources in the creation of geographic knowledge.

I recorded my experiences, thoughts and observations in an ongoing journal, including my experiences as a member of the research population shaped by the normative means of heterosexuality I am subjected to. In keeping an ongoing journal, I created a space to be reflexive and critical about the research process serving as a (co)creator of storied knowledge(s) (Morrison, 2007). Challenging the traditional role of the disembodied researcher, I embraced how I too am part of my research and can occupy the position of both the researcher and the researched (Morrison, 2007). Contributing my embodied experiences, I recognize how I am constituted by the power relations and social reality I am examining, specifically how I, as a cis-woman, am produced and gazed upon through discursive constructs of normative femininity (Morrison, 2007). Further, wearing a bra has been part of my embodied experience since I was a preteen, therefore, I am studying a familiar relation

that I directly engage in. Removing myself from the discursive context I am examining would imply that I am somehow unaffected by hegemony and the evaluating gaze, an unrealistic fallacy Reinharz (1992) argues, propagated by the myth of the disembodied researcher (Morrison, 2007). Positioning myself as a subject of my research, I offer a potential insider position. Through the journal I kept, I reflected on my assumptions and unpacked the ways heteronormativity and rape culture showed up in my life. I reflected on my bra wearing habits and how it felt to be bra/less. I noticed how my relationship with my bra changed over the course of the research project and I started attending to fluidity and feelings of abjection as they came up in my life.

3.2.5.1 Dirty participation

Di Feliciano and Gadelha (2016) explains dirty participation as a process where the researcher did not “clean” their research tools to erase any elements like emotions and affect that would “compromise” it within a positivistic framework (280). Utilizing dirty participation, by allowing my subjectivity to enter the discursive context of my research, my methodological approach challenges conventional binaries present within the research process as my role as participant/researcher and insider/outsider is complicated, fluid, and purposefully disruptive to traditional research methods in a meaningful way that is methodologically unique for geographic research (Browne & Nash, 2010). By embracing the concept of “dirty participation”, I deny the notion that emotions threaten the integrity of my research. Acknowledging that I cannot remove myself from the research I perform, I have relied upon my embodiment, subjectivity, and (un)bound breasted experiences as a site of knowledge production. In attending to critical reflexivity in the context of this research, I noted how I changed once I started researching breasts, specifically my relationship with my own body, breasts and bra. By offering to go braless with women, I felt it was important to try alongside them in order to also feel vulnerable and empathize with participants.

3.2.6 Analysis

Following data collection, I transcribed each interview verbatim from the audio recordings. This process was incredibly rewarding; being able to return and listen to the experiences of participants while in lockdown was a privilege. I am grateful to have had the experience to

have women share with me their experiences of their breasts. By interweaving individuals' lived experiences and truth with social analysis, I aimed to retain an analytical perspective while remaining empathically attuned to the ways participants' emotions construct their lived bodily experiences and sense of place (Hoskins and Stoltz, 2005: 99). To do this, I went beyond a cotheorization method to embrace crystallization—the process of integrating a reflection on the analysis experience to identify and articulate patterns and themes. I coded my interviews using a combination of themes drawn from literature and emergent themes that arose through the interview process. I took time and reflected on these themes, spent time building visual aids to represent the themes and felt my way through the data and through conversations with my supervisors. By reflecting on the act of doing or engaging in research, it helps integrating a framework that creates methods into an integrated whole (Browne & Nash, 2010; Hay, 2016). To do this, I took note of resonances in the form of words, emotions and experiences that came up for participants and myself. I also noticed inconsistencies and silences as discourse to be able to consider discourse that silences (Hay, 2016).

Coding, like detective work, is an iterative process of “making sense” of data (Hay, 2016). The purpose of coding is to refine and reduce data to allow for the organization and analysis of complexity and chaos (Hay, 2016). Assisted by NVivo software, I coded the data three times: once for organization and two more times to refine my interpretation. My initial codes included labels such as who, what, where, when, and how along with interactions, attitudes, emotions, and personal reflections based on my interview experiences. These broad categories were broken into multiple categories where I then completed concept mapping to visualize and relate the data (see Figure 1). Upon reviewing my codes, I performed additional coding including meanings, processes, definitions and grouped codes together based on similarities, relationships and conceptual links (Hay, 2016). From this process of quantifying clusters, key themes started to emerge from the descriptive qualitative codes.

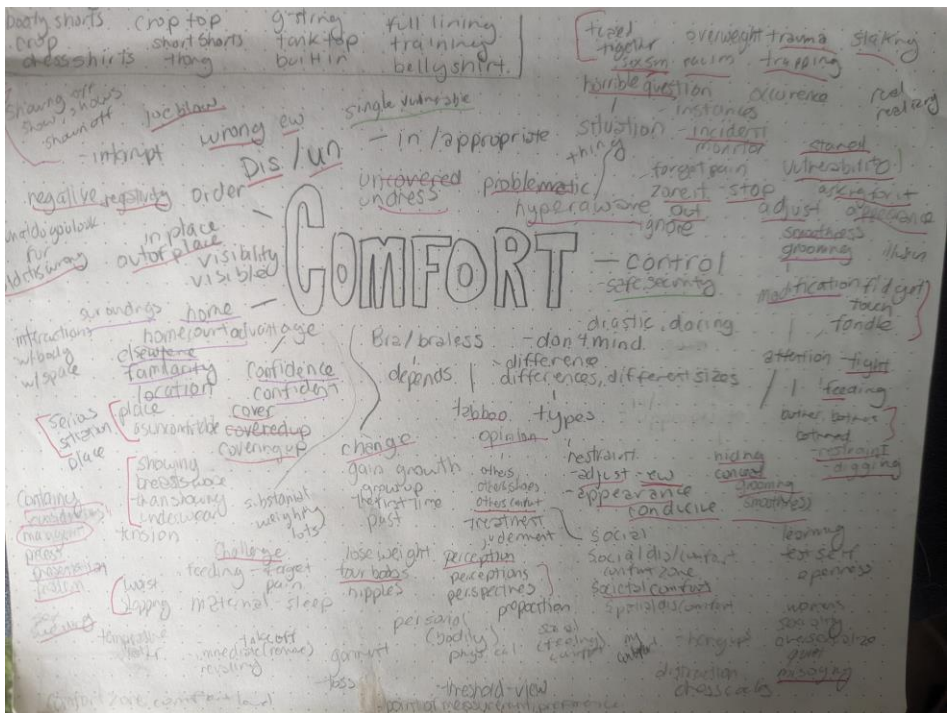


Figure 1) Thematic Mapping

Through the writing process, I aim to re-present the research by bringing the reader into what happened during the interviews. I consider the act of writing; a means of the research being continued and rich with observations and findings meaning there is no separation of writing and field work (Hay, 2016). In my attempt to re-present the research, I utilize thick description (Hay, 2016), focusing on minor theory (Katz, 1996; 2017), and acknowledge my knowledge is partial and situated.

3.3 Conclusion

In this section, I provide details on the methodological framework and methods used to shape this research project. Focusing on embodiment and the rich information that can be provided by emotions and bodily experiences, I explore methods that aim to extract embodied data. Embracing dirty participation and the embodied researcher, I designed my research study to reflect current and past feminist research practices.

Chapter 4: Participant Biographies

4 Biographies of Participants

The following biographies introduce the “breasted experiences” of participants interviewed during the summer of 2019, in Edmonton, Alberta, when it was normal to walk through public space with strangers unmasked. The thirteen women who participated were between the ages of 25 and 50-something; only twelve participated in the mobile interviews.

Pseudonyms have been used. During interviews, questions were open ended to allow what participants felt was pertinent to come forward (see Appendix A2). One thing of importance to note is that in addition to each woman having a different experience with their bra, each woman perceived what a bra was differently based on structure, material and form. For example, some women thought of a bra as something that needed to have wires while others would wear a bralette or something with less support as their regular day bra. Throughout this thesis, when I refer to the bra, I include all of these types of bras. I define bras as some form of extra fabric used to conceal nipples. The implications of including a wide range of garments in the category of “the bra” allows for multiple women’s interpretation of the bra that is related to their comfort with showing off the shape of their breasts and desires for a variety of levels of containment. An overview of all sites visited with participants is provided in Figure 8 and Appendix B1 includes photographs from the mobile interviews.

4.1 Monique

Previously living in rural Alberta, Monique, 51, moved to Edmonton seven years ago. A married mother of two adult children working in the service industry, Monique always wears a bra in public, “Like you put underpants on. Autopilot.” Monique described having bigger breasts as “sore” and needing to “keep them up because of gravity” and that “some people need to wear bras for physical support.” For her, fit is important, “it has to fit underneath the armpits.” If not, “day ruined”. She described her shopping habits, Monique finds that “it is hard being a larger woman, you have to find something that is comfortable, and you won’t feel self-conscious in.”

4.2 Jaida

As a self-proclaimed “Edmonton girl”, Jaida, 41, was born and raised in Edmonton, minus four years in Red Deer. Wanting to force herself to try something new, Jaida wanted to participate in the research and found it “interesting to intentionally go somewhere with that purpose and no other”. Jaida explained that she has never not worn a proper bra, and this will be her “first time as an adult woman going braless.” She shared the mixed journey she has had with “the girls”. Having had a breast reduction a decade ago, Jaida feels more confident about her breasts as they “feel like they are a part of me more than they were before”, that now they are “more like breasts than a rock in a sock,” as they are “constructed completely differently.” Being her first time intentionally braless in public, Jaida explained that “there was no way I ever would have done this before”.

Growing up, Jaida shared that she was the first of her friends to start developing at the age of 10, and by 12 she was wearing a full bra. She explained that she started feeling “better” about it when other girls started wearing bras because they could all be teased together. Teasing, she explained took on the form of bra snapping, as “visible straps were open season for snapping” —which looking back now, she describes the act to be sexual harassment. Around the same time, Jaida shared with me that a boy spread rumors about having copped a feel of her chest and telling others that she had “hairy boobs,” a story which became a “thing” for four months.

4.3 Morgan

A “50-something” year old, Morgan has two adult daughters and is currently living in her new apartment, with her kitty. Morgan explained previously living in the country, near Edmonton and having to commute; she much prefers living in the city now. As for her breasts, she “kind of likes them” but they are “just there”. She shared that when she was younger, she was “never the biggest, but now they don’t sag, and they are fabulous!”

While she can’t recall her first bra (when asked, she responds “no, nuh uh, that was 38 years ago”), she did remember wearing Dici Bras, she did remember wearing Dici bras, which were marketed to young women as lighter and more freeing than other bras available at the

time. As a teenager, Morgan had small boobs and “hated it.” While she loves to wear a push up bra, she explained finding bralessness to be “not a big deal” but that she doesn’t do it all the time. In our first interview, Morgan made a note to not wear white on the day of the walking interview, a mistake she accidentally did make. As a result, she decided to wear her jacket over her white t-shirt while we were walking braless together.

4.4 Bianca

A 35-year-old mother of two children under the age of 6, Bianca just recently returned to HR and Marketing after taking time off for child rearing. Previously living in Fort McMurray with her husband before moving to Edmonton, Bianca explained that she always wears a bra and tank under her shirt. She explained that it has probably been, “at most five times”, in her entire life that she has been braless in public.

As a relatively new mother of two, Bianca explained that it has been “a rollercoaster of an experience” with her breasts and that she “couldn’t possibly imagine being any bigger.” She recalled a defining moment, “surrounded by half a dozen medical professionals...after showing everything there is to show, you are in your pretty glory and then the nurse shows you everything about breastfeeding.” She goes on to explain how the lactation consultant came in and along with several nurses who all had their hands all over her chest, stating that “you kind of just go with it” and joking that while breastfeeding, “more people played with my chest than my husband.” Bianca described having experienced “feeling up and down” about her breasts, explaining how after having her first child, she had a low milk production which resulted in an array of medical and emotional obstacles to confront such as the discourse, “breast is best” and instead accepting “fed is best”. Reflecting on the time as feeling **stressful**, Bianca described breastfeeding as “one of the most wonderful and intense bonding experiences that makes you forget all the pain.”

Having explained this rollercoaster, Bianca “loves [her breasts] now”, detailing that after having children, “I gained a full shoe size and a cup size.” Before having children, Bianca described feeling “more reserved about them because like every typical female you want to show them off at the bar, you want to find a mate, that whole biological thing.” Now, she is

interested in the topic of bralessness because she notices how her younger daughter is highly influenced by popular culture and clothing trends.

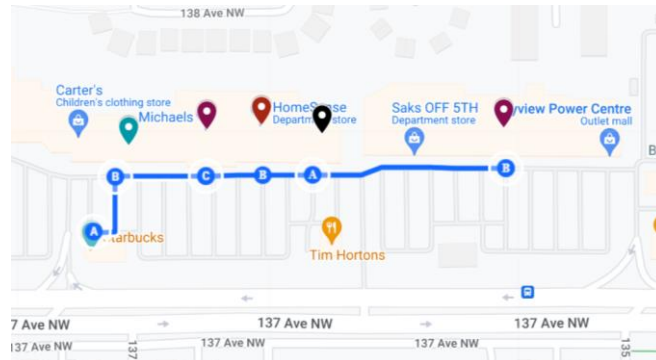


Figure 2) Mobile Interviews #1 - This map is representative of walks completed with Monique, Jaida, Morgan and Bianca. There was a lot of overlap in the sites visited here. The sites visited included a Starbucks, Chatters (a hair salon), Winners, Home Sense, Michael’s (changing location for three women), and The Shoe Company. These sites were located along a popular strip mall.

4.5 Alyssa

A 28-year-old born and raised in Edmonton, to her Filipino mother and Persian father, Alyssa has a mixed relationship with her breasts. Alyssa discussed her father throughout the interviews and notes the importance this context brings because she often doesn’t talk about him, “but this served a purpose”, before going on to discuss her father’s traditional gender views and sexist stereotypes—such as opinions on her body that were unnecessary. Alyssa sees breasts as just sexual, “women are sexual, and we are sexual, and boobs are sexual.”

With a background in environmental sciences, Alyssa was in the final week of her job before moving for graduate school. While she likes her nipples, Alyssa explains having fluctuating feelings towards her breasts, which she predicts will continue to evolve with time. Already planning her “titty renovation”, Alyssa explained that she, “won’t be happy when gravity starts to set in” and that she has “always wanted larger breasts so why the fuck not”. She predicted that after she is done having kids, she will get breast implants as a part of her “mid-life crisis.”

When she was younger, Alyssa would secretly try on her mum's bras. She explained that there was a sudden urgency to getting her first bra because her younger brother had pointed out the lack to her, commenting on being able to see the shape of her breasts through her shirt. She said that she was expecting to get some form of training bra, but her mom took her to get an underwire bra which was surprising because her mom never wore that type of bra. Alyssa describes feeling "grown up" and "like a woman" when she reflects on wearing a bra for the first time. She recalled "loving it," was "into it," and found it "dope." She recognized now that, "if I could not wear a bra for certain things, I would live my life very differently."

4.6 Ivy

A 30-year-old who would never be braless at work, anywhere near work, or a space where she might encounter people that she works with, Ivy explains having a tendency to cover up at work. Having immigrated to Canada from Poland in her youth, Ivy now works in the public sector after obtaining a graduate degree in biology. While Ivy feels "okay" about her breasts, she describes a general disdain for bras, and most items of normativity that are "required for getting ready and going out into the world" such as "having to wear pants." But as she ages, Ivy explains that she has been "accepting these conditions" because she "can't have an existential crisis daily." With Ivy, we changed out of our bras at the washrooms in the mall to prepare for the second half of the mobile interview. The following excerpt was from our conversation in the bathroom after removing our bras.

IVY: Ahhhhh that feels soooooo good. I guess that is a weird thing to say coming out of a bathroom stall *[laughs]*

ME: Yes but I enjoyed it quite a bit. Do you want to talk about it more?

IVY: Yeah. That felt really good. That is my favourite part of the day, but it was in a public washroom. Hmm.

ME: So, you have never had that cathartic release in public before then?

IVY: I don't think I have, no.

ME: So how are you feeling besides the initial relief?

IVY: Comfortable. It feels nice. I am curious as to whether this will get noticed. I suspect probably not

During our initial interview, Ivy discussed feeling *nervous* about participating in the braless walking interview because she has had little to no experience being without a bra in public. During the walking interview, Ivy covered her chest with her black cardigan because she was cold. After she put her bra back on, Ivy discussed how she felt no one had noticed her braless state, which she explained was “part of her plan all along”, laughing afterwards. Although Ivy explained feeling nervous about being braless, she described enjoying herself, that it was a “good time to share with someone else” and while talking about breasts, she started rubbing hers, jokingly sharing, “apparently, I am comfortable. I can’t seem to stop.”

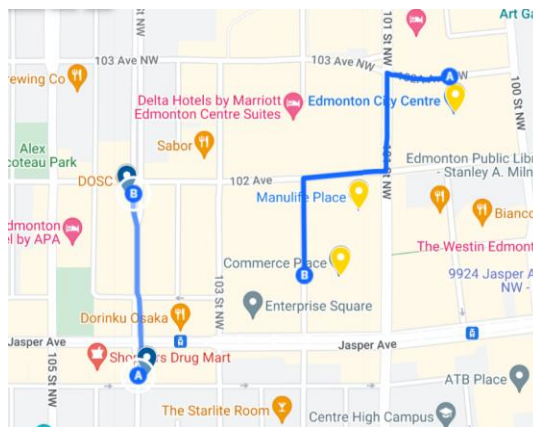


Figure 3) Mobile Interviews #2 - This map is representative of Alyssa’s (left) and Ivy’s (right) walks. With Alyssa we visited two bars and with Ivy we walked through the pedways connecting three buildings encompassing City Centre Mall.

4.7 Nina

Nina, 31, has always lived in Edmonton. She is currently working for an environmental nonprofit and is in the process of completing a graduate degree. Nina recognized and “appreciates the curves” that her breasts provide her body. Nina explained always wearing a bra, having a desire to feel cinched, she describes her process as, “you just find one, put it on and look natural and you get over it”. An activity that she described as something “I just do”, she explained that wearing a bra “becomes automatic and something that you are not conscious of.” Nina explained that she has always felt the need to “cover up and hide her chest.”

4.8 Violet

Violet, a 29-year-old who grew up in small town Alberta, uses her educational background in business to work at a nonprofit. Violet described herself as not a “really big girly girl. I don't wear makeup I don't do my hair. But I still conform. I look presentable that kind of thing.” When it comes to her breasts, Violet explained that she “never really accentuates them too much” Identifying a barrier to why she doesn’t try being braless more often, Violet shared that “being a woman who takes transit and stuff like that. I don't want to draw any extra attention I guess.”

With the exception of one time when she was working at a movie theater in high school that she “just totally forgot to put it on” and the few times going for a massage or taking out the garbage, Violet wears a bra. She finds that she “doesn’t think about them unless something brings them up.” She does express gratitude for her breasts, reflecting on the devastation and pain that she can only imagine would be associated with losing one’s breasts to cancer. After spending time braless, Violet felt like it was “not a big deal” and expressed a desire to try again in other situations.

4.9 Shea

In her early 30s, Shea grew up in a small town in Alberta and has a “slight hate on for clothing.” Working in web development and communications, Shea finds her chest size to be disproportionate which makes it hard to find clothing that fits well. While she can’t remember her first bra, she remembered her friend’s Mickey Mouse bra in the grade three bathroom and feeling ambivalent, a weird thing to remember she notes. She found the interview process “enlightening”. Shea attributed her rejection for femininity, and her bra wearing, to her mother pushing womanhood onto her by “forcing her to wear a bra” when she was younger. Asked why she wanted to participate in the research project, Shea said:

SHEA: “I was raised a feminist. It was not something that came to be for me it was just something that always was. My grandmother is Haudenosaunee, or in white people tongue, Iroquois. We are a matriarchal society. We are feminist. I was raised with this idea that women should be able to fully be liberated and have all rights in

society and legally. We mostly have legally. Mostly. But we don't have equality societally. This idea that women experience geography differently because of clothing is so completely true.”

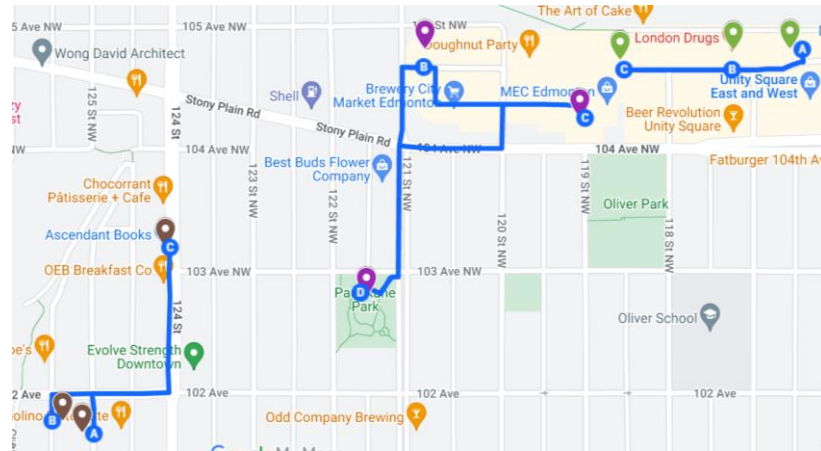


Figure 4) Mobile Interviews #3 - This map represents Nina, Violet, and Shea's walking routes, from left to right respectively. With Nina, we visited a Starbucks, a home goods store and an alternative bookstore. With Violet, we started at a park and walked to a nearby grocery store and changed at a nearby Starbucks. With Shea, we started at a Second Cup, moved to a London Drugs and finished at a pet store.

4.10 Sharon

Sharon, a 39-year-old graduate student, training to be a registered psychologist, was keen to explore the topic and participate in the research experiment. Used to always wearing a bra, Sharon described wearing a sports bra sometimes but that she would “never use it to run.” She shared that she used to wear shelf bras until one time while teaching, she bent over to tie her shoe and was “totally exposed in front of the student's parents.” Sharon explained feeling “mortified” and never wore a shelf bra again.

When she was younger, Sharon lived in rural Alberta and recalled her first bra quite vividly as it was shortly after her family moved and she had just started at a new middle school. She recalled being a new student and being called out for being one of the few girls not wearing a bra. She explained that she didn't really want a bra but felt like she didn't fit in so when she did go bra shopping, she was relieved. However, she found the bra to be uncomfortable and

was caught adjusting the straps at school once and got called out, contributing to her ongoing feelings of being an outsider at her new school.

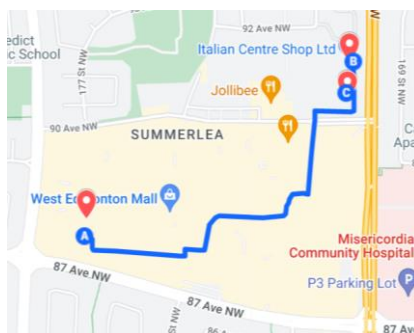


Figure 5) Mobile Interviews #4 - This map is representative of my walk with Sharon. We met at the bookstore inside West Edmonton Mall, walked through the mall to a nearby grocery store, and changed at a nearby Starbucks.

4.11 Blair

A 29-year-old graduate student who moved to Canada five years ago from the Pacific Northwest of the USA to be with her new husband, Blair described having a *journey* with her breasts. A few years prior she had a stroke which impacted her mobility. Experiencing a new disability, Blair described feeling “really traumatized” by her body. In no longer being able to move and exercise in the same way, she noticed her body changing, feeling like she had “no control over the changes”, one of which happened to include her breasts becoming larger. Growing from an A to a C cup, she felt like she had finally “done it”— ‘it’ being having “feminine like breasts.” Blair described that growing up she had always been “flat chested and desired larger breasts” but as her breasts got bigger, she began to feel “self-conscious”. Ivy explained her breasts as being something she has been loving and fearing because of the ways popular culture sexualizes women’s bodies in a disempowering manner. She explained how this fear resonates in her life as a feeling of a lack of control regarding the gaze inscribed on the body. She shared that in the past she has experimented with being braless in public plenty of times but is more uncomfortable doing it now that her chest is more “feminine.”

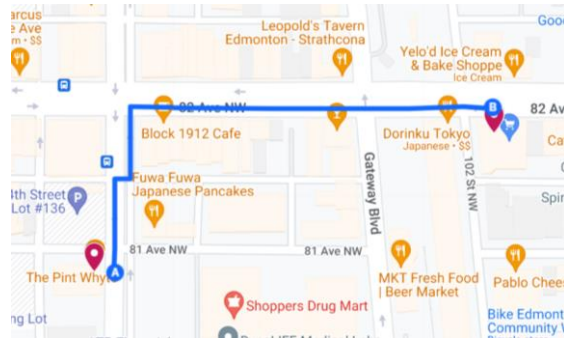


Figure 6) Mobile Interview #5 - This map is representative of my walk with Blair. We met near her house and walked to a nearby coffee shop.

4.12 Latrice

A 29-year-old year old early childhood educator, Latrice has always lived in Edmonton and always wears a bra. Latrice shared that when she first learnt about the research that it “jogged her” because she wears a bra every day and doesn’t exactly “like it” which inspired her to “reflect on the reasons why I wear a bra.” Latrice explained feeling *excited* the first time she wore a bra, even though she was an A cup, she thought it was “cool.” Her cousins, who were 5-6 years older than her, wore bras and she wanted to be like them. She can vividly remember her breasts growing, “going from having nothing there to having something show up.” She explained feeling like wearing a bra was a “rite of passage” which at the time made her feel “good.” After the first bra, she remembered having to continuously change sizes because they kept growing into her now C cups.

Being comfortable with her breasts now, Latrice thinks that “breasts are nice” and bring her comfort, serving as “hand warmers”. While braless, Latrice noted feeling a “noticeable difference” which she described “not as anxious but not as peaceful.” She described it as a difference where she is “more aware” because she feels like she is “not behaving and doing something wrong.” When she removed her bra, Latrice explained that she “instantly felt a difference, like I was forgetting something” explaining that her bra feels “so much a part of me. It feels weird even though it shouldn’t.” When describing why she feels like she is doing something wrong, Latrice explained that she has always been told to be “aware and pay attention” to her surroundings. For Latrice, not wearing a bra feels like “not following a

rule”. She described this hypervigilance in her life as “being conscious of eyes” on her and that she is “sensitive to that”.

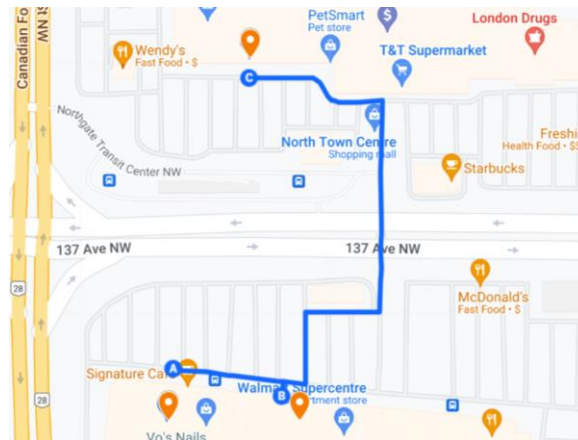
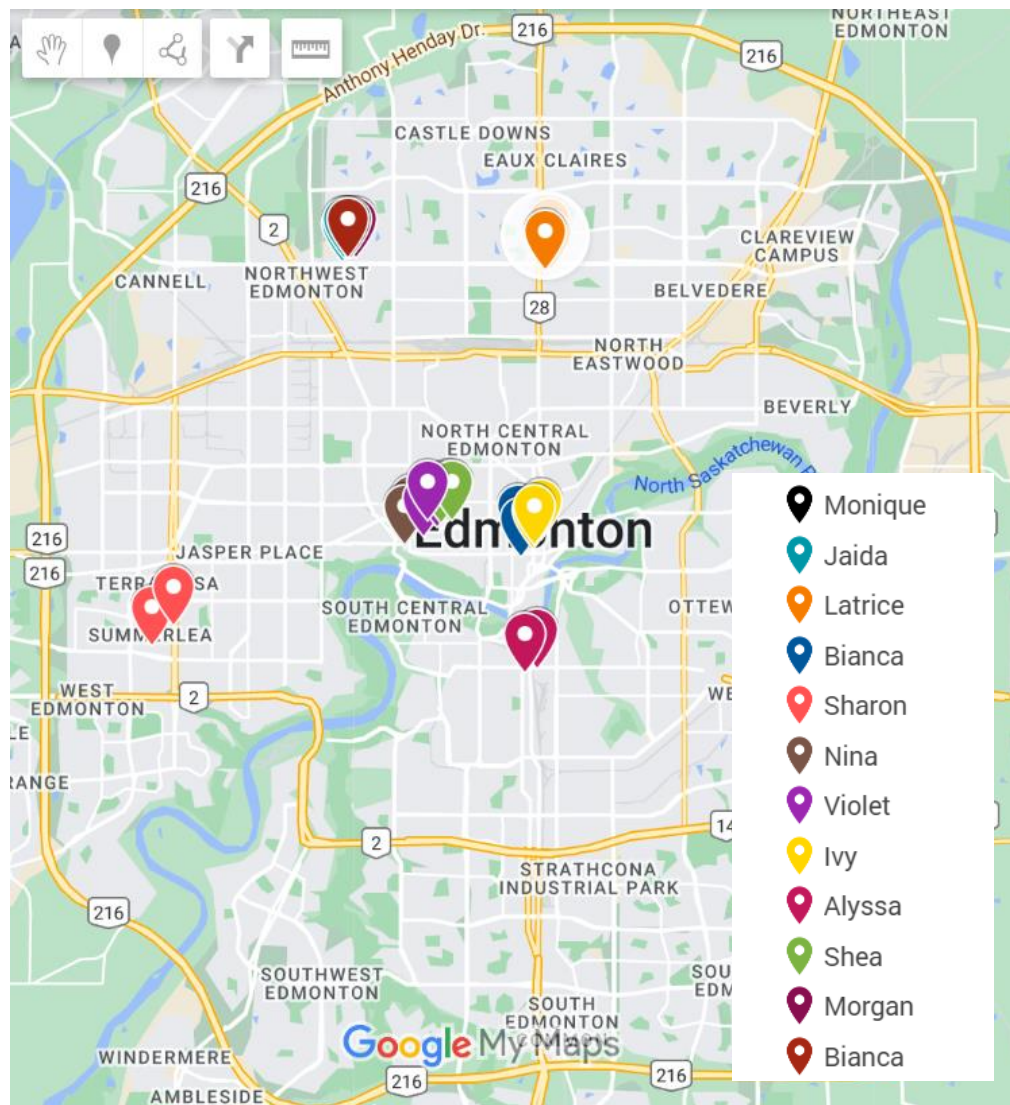


Figure 7) Mobile Interviews #6 - This map is representative of my walk with Latrice. We started at a grocery store, went to a clothing store and then crossed a busy intersection, passing a transit centre on the way to a bookstore.

4.13 Farrah

Farrah, a 26-year-old from Edmonton, explains her busy schedule as 30 hours a week at her office job, 16 hours at school, and 15 hours in the clinic—plus wedding planning. Farrah is the only participant who shared that she regularly does not wear a bra in public. She described herself as “super easy going” and “laid back.” Farrah, illuminating that she “likes” and is “happy with her breasts,” explained that is exactly why she doesn’t wear a bra, so she is glad that she is “not big.”

In describing her braless habits, she explained that in certain situations she feels “super uncomfortable because of other people” —not because she is uncomfortable with her body. She finds wearing a bra to be uncomfortable—explaining that her chest is non-existent, so wearing a bra just gives her back pain. Working two jobs, Farrah explained that at the clinic where she works as a massage therapist, she typically wears scrubs and has never had an issue; however, her office job has been less accepting of bralessness, causing her frustration. Farrah was the only participant who was unable to participate in a mobile interview due to scheduling issues, but did participate in an initial interview.



Chapter 5 : Findings

5 Introduction

In this chapter I explore a variety of themes that emerged through the data analysis. The themes are organized to flow through topics on the body to space in general including how emotional and social experiences shaped women's braless experiences in the interviews. These themes relate to the main concepts introduced in the literature review, including abjection and feelings of othering and help in answering my research question: do women experience public space differently whether they are wearing a bra or not, and if so, where, when, and why?

5.1 “The worst thing is having an uncomfortable bra” – Finding the right fit

Being uncomfortable physically can mean that the boundaries, such as a garment, are felt. Finding the right fit requires navigating boundaries and spaces between boundaries. The surface of the body, together with the clothing that shapes it, defines a boundary between two spaces: the body and its surroundings, allowing an inquiry into how women navigate feelings of comfort in terms of what it means to find the right fit of clothing against the body. Here I explore how the boundary-setting role of bras shapes feelings of fitting in and feeling (un)comfortable.

Finding a comfortable fit requires navigation between the space of the garment (an object that shapes and defines space, internally and externally) and our bodies. Not all breasts fit into standard bras, which are not designed to accommodate the diversity of breast presentation that exists. Not finding the right fit can make the body feel outsized—a deviation from normative sizing. Nina said she considered herself “lucky” that her breasts are the way they are because she feels they fit into bras “pretty normally and are not wide set.” Fitting with ease into a garment isn't something all women or bodies are afforded. Alyssa described a customizable bra that bases the fit off the breast shape instead of cup or band size, fitting breast shapes such as “athletic”, “conic”, and the “classic teardrop shape.” She

explained her difficulty finding bras that fit properly as she felt her breasts are conic shape. She also had trouble finding sports bras that fit well as “the sizing typically doesn’t take into account the middle part of your chest.” By middle part, Latrice refers to the area between boobs. Latrice explained feeling like she has a different breast shape than what most companies build for because when she bends over, “it is easy to see all the way down.” She explained feeling like it must be common, but that she feels like it isn’t normal because people don’t really talk about it. Feeling like your body is wrong or outsized is a result of the poor representations of a diversity of bodies. Heteronormativity depicts firm and contained breasts as more desirable; an image women are expected to measure up to. Instagram ads and body positive content creators push back against this, recognizing problems with standard fit. Size becomes pertinent to ensure the right fit. Sizing to evaluate fit is a process of judging and quantifying how comfortable the fit might be, which depends on what sizes are available and accessible.



Figure 9) Victoria’s Secret Advertisement for Push-up Bras (Push-up bras, 2022)

Jaida mentioned how the dominant style isn’t conducive to a natural breast look; “it is more augmented and lifted.” These norms become pertinent in women’s experiences of finding the right bra as not everyone fits into these norms (Figure 9 is an example of these norms being portrayed in popular bra advertising). Many women reported having challenges finding a bra that fits right. Figure 9 shows the different types of bras with various types of lift to “support your entire wardrobe.” The varieties of lifts available to fit into clothing are designed for women to decide how they want to present their breasts. Women described specific problems

related to parts of bras, such as not being able to find the right band, having cups that don't fit properly, or the issue of straps being uncomfortable, digging in or falling down. These parts are important for sorting out fit and comfort, which requires the "whole package" as Alyssa described. Trying to appreciate their current form, Alyssa admitted to not always possessing confidence in the appearance of her chest. When she was younger, she felt self-conscious because her breasts were two different sizes. One was so much smaller than the other that she wore a pad to even them out. She was worried at the time but realizes how normal it is. Being young and having asymmetrical breasts made Alyssa feel like an outsider, like her body was wrong—but the problem was not with her body, it was with the normative image of breasts and with standard sizing perpetuated through advertising.

The privileging of firm and hard breasts over saggy breasts is reflected in Alyssa's explanation of her planned "titty renovation." Hegemonic images of breasts shape our ideas of what breasts fit in. Based on her past experiences and predicting her future relationship with her breasts, Alyssa shared her plans for getting implants after she has kids as part of her mid-life crisis: "they are going to change more, and I am not going to be happy about those changes. Especially who knows what happens with breastfeeding." Concerned with her bodily changes, Alyssa wants to secure her breast shape to prevent sagging by getting implants. Breast augmentation is a way for women to maintain the "correct" breast shape/size by turning back the effects of time or childbearing. Advertising and mainstream images of women shape constructs that women's bodies are inadequate and require sculpting and management to be desirable and fit heteronormative norms.

Monique explained that having a bra that fits properly is similar to being braless but "if it is uncomfortable under the armpits then something is too tight." She discussed the value of comfort in shaping her experience, because "if you are uncomfortable then the day is ruined." Having a comfortable fit was important to decision making when we browsed through Winners: "you want to get something you'll wear. If you aren't going to be comfortable, don't bother."

Women's ideas of comfort were not only shaped by physical aspects but also their social comfort with their breasts physical appearance. One aspect of being comfortable and fitting in requires decision making on how much cleavage one wants to show. Being uncomfortable

with cleavage, Violet described, “I’ve never really accentuated them too much or anything.” There were differences in how women viewed cleavage and if they liked to accentuate their breasts. The majority of women did not like showing off cleavage, however some women mentioned that certain spaces, like a nightclub, would be an appropriate venue for showing off their breasts. For women, clothing was a way to decide how much attention they wanted to attract. For example, some felt more comfortable with tight clothing and low-cut shirts and others felt more comfortable with their chests covered up or extra layers to smooth their chests out.

Trying to better understand how women make decisions on fit and comfort, I asked Monique how she feels about wearing a swimsuit in public. She answered: “I’ll wear one but being, I don’t know, I just find it hard, being a larger woman you have to find something that is comfortable, and you won’t feel self-conscious in.” Finding something that she feels comfortable in both physically and psychically is important for Monique. In addition to being uncomfortable, ill-fitting garments do not effectively contain the flesh. Such garments instead (re)affirm the fluid and indeterminate nature of women’s bodies. Size is materialized by clothing (Colls, 2004); bodies that are out-of-size may signify a mis-fitting. Needing to feel comfortable in both her body and outfit, Monique also desired to feel comfortable psychically—to not feel self-conscious. Physical comfort was an essential part of finding a comfortable fit for Monique but it was tied to psychic comfort as well.

Having to navigate finding the right fit can bring on agony for some women. Shea described finding a comfortable fit to be problem:

I kind of have a slight hate on for clothing. Particularly anything that has to do with my chest. I am a slight bit disproportionately sized. Not drastically but enough that sometimes finding clothing to fit is not necessarily the easiest thing. I have most definitely gotten stuck in some clothing while trying it on before while at stores.

Getting stuck and realizing your body doesn’t fit requires a grappling of bodily boundaries and social norms of sizing. Shea sees clothing as not fitting as a direct result of her chest, describing a particularly frustrating time when a garment hit her chest and became stuck. Shea described wearing wire-free bras for comfort. She notes, however, that eventually a bra changes shape and you outgrow it. Shea described her wire-free bra that “has a bit of stretch

to it so eventually, like any bra, you are going to wear it out, but I just like it.” Noting the inevitable breakdown and misfit that is to come, she takes comfort in the garment's current fit and shape.

Women described a comfortably fitting bra as a garment that falls into the background.

Alyssa described her experience with her breasts:

The worst thing is having an uncomfortable bra. That is the worst thing about having boobs is a bra that doesn't fit you. You are just so uncomfortable all the time. And I am saying this because I feel like that is me now because I don't have a proper bra right now. And the other thing too about not having the proper size bra is that sometimes I am just always uncomfortable. The straps just annoy you so you kind of have to just zone it out. Which I think that is really problematic. But I am pretty fortunate.

For Alyssa, having a bra that doesn't fit is the worst aspect of having breasts because it is often hard to ignore, something she attempts anyway. She mentioned zoning out the discomfort but recognizing that she is “pretty fortunate” compared to women with larger breasts. Comparing her discomfort to the perceived discomfort of others was also brought up by other participants in negotiating their discomfort with wearing a bra, by having comparing their own embodied state to someone who has it “worse”. Being uncomfortable was unbearable for Alyssa because she always wanted to conceal having to adjust a misfitting garment. Wearing the wrong size brings knowledge and awareness to the boundaries of the body and the garment.

What I found while walking around with women and discussing their bra wearing habits is that most women experienced troubles with fit. From finding a bra that fits right or clothing that fits over their chests, women noted having various physical experiences like having a bra with a band that does not fit. Along with these physical instances of fit, women also discussed social and emotional aspects of fit that shaped their bra wearing habits, like being more uncomfortable without a bra out of fear they might run into someone they might know. While walking with participants, the women commented on feeling differently in public while braless, like they were no longer fitting in as easily. In their daily lives, women

explained that deciding whether or not to wear a bra was a compromise between their physical and social/emotional comfort.

Longhurst (2000) identifies the act of getting dressed to be one of the most complicated acts of daily existence as our clothing is used to negotiate between the personal and the social, requiring a keen attunement to space and time in order to manage abjection. Entwistle (2000) identifies that getting dressed requires an implicit understanding of the rules and norms of social spaces becoming an object of our consciousness, as space and the social shape our awareness and experiences. Since heteronormativity determines what is the ‘right’ shape or fit of breasts in public, it is no wonder that women explained instances where they felt like they weren’t fitting in because of their breasts, like their visible breasts were disruptive in space. Women also commented on ways they felt their bodies didn’t fit heteronormative standards such as having asymmetrical breasts or smaller breasts. One woman mentioned a desire for breast implants to better fit normative appearing breasts. What I found through the interviews was a difference between the fit on the body and the fit of the body. For women, comfort was found when there was a compromise between the physical feelings of comfort on the body and the social experiences of fitting in by adorning the body in appropriate clothing.

5.2 “Not so uncomfortable” – Physical experiences while braless

In this section, I focus on the physical experiences of the body that women articulated during the interviews. By focusing on physical aspects of the body’s experience in space, I explore the similarities and differences between participants’ braless experiences. What I found is that women varied in their experiences of bralessness, but shared a feeling of discomfort in certain spaces and around certain people depending on the context such as the workplace or being around their parents. Women associated bralessness with discomfort both physical and social/psychic as being without a bra questions experiences of general comfort in her body—does this hurt, pinch, bind, support, etc.?—and based on fears of the gaze of others or because of previous experiences while braless in public. Because of their fears or triggers,

women took steps to manage any feelings of discomfort they may have had while participating in the research.

Using an analytical framework that looks at (dis)comfort, I document the ways that women commented feeling differently while moving through space on bra/less walks. Based on how they described their comfort, I explore the connections between wearing a bra and feelings in public space. In this section I focus on the physical descriptions of how women felt while bra-less and their perceptions of comfort. What is revealed is how women manage their bodies in space to hide their bra-less states through contorting or covering their bodies. In addition to women's comments on how their physical comfort changed, I note the physical spaces that we visited and how participants described the places as shaping their bra-less experiences. Considering the physical spaces of bodies in relation to place allows an embodied account of navigating bralessness and containment in an urban setting.

To explore feelings of discomfort, I first focus on the physical aspects of comfort that women mentioned while going from having contained to uncontained breasts and discuss the mitigation strategies that they used to manage their comfort while braless, like using clothing to contain their body or changing their body's position to conceal their braless state. I discuss how women reported having a greater awareness and attention to their breasts while braless. Showcasing some of the ways women embodied the social impulse to contain their breasts, I offer insights into what comprises physical comfort that helps us understand how women navigate their bodies through society and space.

While bra-less, some women said they felt more vulnerable and had a keener sense of their surroundings than while wearing a bra. For example, when asked if there was anything that she noticed while braless, Blair explained, "men". Once she was braless, Blair explained that she suddenly felt like there were a lot of men in the space. She described feeling a "nervousness" that she didn't expect and while feeling "more comfortable physically, I'm not feeling comfortable emotionally". In feeling more bodily comfort in some aspects without her bra (less restraint), she felt more physically comfortable however. She mentioned feeling more anxious which produced a different array of bodily experiences including sweating and hypervigilance, making her more emotionally/psychically uncomfortable. Blair described that she felt "self-conscious" while braless because she felt like her boobs look differently.

Without a bra, breasts lose their firm and contained state, becoming fluid. Breasts in their fluid state look abject (Longhurst, 2004). Blair described a growing awareness of others and her peripheral vision being on “fire.” Blair explained that she noticed that her posture changed as she started hunching over more, crossing her arms over her chest and feeling a “difference and some anxiousness”. In trying to hide her braless state, Blair described noticing her heart beating faster, and feeling “not necessarily as at ease as when we first came in.” Even though she noticed these physical changes in her body and her perception, Blair remained “interested” in learning about her reactions.

Being braless required a (re)negotiation with the spaces the participants and I were in. For example, Alyssa noticed the fit of her dress, being more aware of how “low and loose” her dress felt while braless. Before, she didn’t worry about her outfit, but without a bra she began to be “hyperaware” of her nipples showing. Because of this, Alyssa described feeling more fidgety. Even though she wanted to adjust her clothing, she resisted indulging the urge to adjust her physical comfort to avoid bringing more attention to herself. Alyssa recognized adjusting a garment in public as an action that would be “inappropriate” and potentially draw more attention to her low-cut dress; it was best to try “endure” the discomfort instead of making a scene and becoming visible. For some women, accepting some level of discomfort is necessary to avoid social discomfort and attracting unwanted attention.

In addition to noticing the fit of her clothing differently, Alyssa described that in feeling more exposed, it affected the way she perceived the gaze of others in the space:

I guess there was a dude looking at us after we left the bathroom. So, we walked by and he was looking at us but the thing I question was, is he looking at us or is he looking at the fact that I am a little bit more exposed right now? Or could you see my nipple? Or whatever it is, I questioned...not his integrity or his intentions but if dude was looking at me otherwise, I would be like, oh dude’s looking at us. But this time I guess I was more.... anxious.

Feeling more visible in space while not wearing a bra shifted Alyssa’s perception of how she was being perceived. The increase in anxiety she described reflects changes to her physical comfort. These physical changes in how she interacted with space was something all women experienced, as there were suddenly certain subtleties of the background environment that

became visible while bra-less. For example, when I was with Bianca, she described feeling “itchy” after changing out of her bra. For her, bralessness felt unfamiliar and uncomfortable as she explained feeling, “a little deflated because I am not used to not having the straps and everything right there. So, like a little naked almost.” Feeling exposed while bra-less, Bianca described that without a bra her interaction with her clothing and her body changed. Despite these feelings of discomfort, she highlighted feeling “surprisingly okay”. Unlike Alyssa whose braless discomfort came from her vulnerability, Bianca’s discomfort was related to bralessness being an unfamiliar feeling. Able to tolerate the slight discomfort and change in bodily feelings, Bianca described feeling comfortable navigating space while braless.

Jaida similarly noticed the fit of her clothing on her body as she explained being able to notice the fabric touching her skin, which was “unexpected.” Her purse also felt closer to her body as she no longer had additional fabric against her chest, causing it to feel heavier. Similarly, Shea reported noticing a difference in her physical comfort immediately after taking off her bra, “definitely feeling less secure” and “I definitely feel different physically and socially” as she noted her body hunching over to prevent falling out of her top. Based on the clothing that the women selected to wear for the day of the interview, i.e. a tight or loose top played a role in how they experienced the braless component of our walks. In noticing a difference in comfort both physically and socially, Shea experienced feeling “less secure” of her boobs and of her social position without her bra. Adjusting her body to accommodate for her bra-less state, Shea viscerally negotiated and acknowledged the difference in her physical and social comfort when removing her bra. When I asked if she felt any differently, she explained that “it does feel a little weird and unnatural, but I am glad that it is not hotter out. That is a problem for me—undertit sweat.” Feeling unnatural without a bra is an interesting phenomenon as the bra is what is “unnatural”. Feeling weird, more exposed and vulnerable to visible leaking, from “undertit” sweat, Shea explained that she felt uncomfortable but was grateful because it could be much worse; her bra-less attire could be more visible had she started sweating and that showed on her top. Luckily the chances of sweating were greatly minimized after an epic rainstorm that came in and kept us braless in London Drugs for 25 minutes.

For Nina, being braless in public created a familiar feeling in an unfamiliar place: “you know when your under-boob kind of touches your chest? It is just not a feeling I am used to outside

of my home.” Associating a feeling that she might experience as comforting at home being experienced while in public was an unfamiliar feeling for Nina. The home is often the only place women feel comfortable being braless in and depending on her domicile make-up, may have geographies of comfort being braless within her own home. She noticed feeling “more distracted by them, like, how they look and the actual feeling of them being free and touching your sweater.” Nina explained feeling “different physically and socially” while braless in public. She perceived others in space as potentially looking at her and explained thinking, “oh my god, someone must be looking” but then her “logic mind” coming in and easing her, “no, no, no.” Nina recognized that no one stared and that it was just in her head that people were staring at her chest. Her perception of others potentially noticing and looking at her left Nina feeling differently in space. She relied on challenging her emotional response with logic which changed her perspective that others were staring at her chest and automatically noticed that she was braless. This practice of challenging her feelings of discomfort was a coping strategy for Nina to feel more comfortable about being braless.

Morgan was concerned with how her bralessness appeared, saying: “I need to keep my jacket on. I feel the need to conceal. I am always cold”. Morgan’s response was really interesting as she gives her real reaction, a desire to conceal her braless state, but follows up with a justification, that she is always being cold. Using her jacket to physically contain herself and provide protection over her chest in the absence of a bra was a mitigation strategy that Morgan used. Morgan also kept her sweater on during the interview and covered herself up because she was wearing a white t-shirt, something that is more revealing and something she admitted that she made a conscious effort to avoid but accidentally did anyway. Lacking a shield protecting her chest from the outside world made Morgan feel exposed and vulnerable, something she tried to avoid by covering herself up. Morgan was not comfortable walking around being potentially visibly braless.

Ivy was also more comfortable hiding, feeling the comfort of using her cardigan to cover and conceal her braless state. Later, she contradicted herself when she explained her comfort when fondling her own breasts and laughing at how much fun she was having. She explained that holding onto her chest is something that she likes doing, a comforting activity. When I asked Ivy if she was feeling comfortable, she described her comfort level expanding as she started fondling herself, something she only typically would do within private space.

Touching her breasts was a self-soothing behavior for Ivy. Ivy explained that having me with her made her feel comfortable enough to embrace herself in public. Developing social comfort made the space and background less relevant. Because we were enjoying ourselves, Ivy felt physically comfortable enough to do something in public that she didn't anticipate. Space and context were major factors in shaping her braless experience. Feeling like the place—the mall—was “low stakes”, Ivy felt comfortable enough with me that she found herself having fun. A place that is informal, like the mall, fell within her comfort zone allowing her to try being bra-less in public without much concern.

Similarly, Shea and Latrice described feeling a little weird, some anxiety and less secure but still “alright” and “good” while bra-less. Shea discussed feeling like “no one noticed us at all” which helped her feel more comfortable. However, had someone noticed her bra-less attire, she may have felt differently. Despite noticing some anxiety, Latrice felt “good” which she described as feeling “not so uncomfortable”. At the same time what Latrice noticed about the space while braless was the air conditioning. She described feeling like her “nipples seem like they don't know what to do, like they are experiencing some confusion, so they are at attention.” She explained feeling “more aware” because she felt like she was not following the rules and doing something wrong. Feeling subversive being in the bookstore without a bra, Latrice noticed her body and emotions differently in the space. When she removed her bra, Latrice explained that she “instantly felt a difference, like, I was forgetting something” explaining that her bra feels “so much a part of me. It feels weird even though it shouldn't.” Latrice explained that wearing a bra was so normal and natural for her that when she wasn't wearing one it felt perverse and there was a noticeable difference.

Although women described initially feeling out of place while braless, the majority of women felt more comfortable near the end of the interview compared to when they first took off their bras. Physically they noticed differences in comfort and how space felt while braless. However, navigating space together, undetected while braless, helped women feel more comfortable being without a bra. Being undetected was important for women because had they been seen visibly braless, they would have felt out of place and like they were “breaking the rules”. Women noted changes in their body management as well as their emotional reactions to physical sensations. In Figure 10, I provide a visualization of the

overlapping feelings of physical, social, and psychological comfort and the mitigation techniques participants used to manage their comfort.

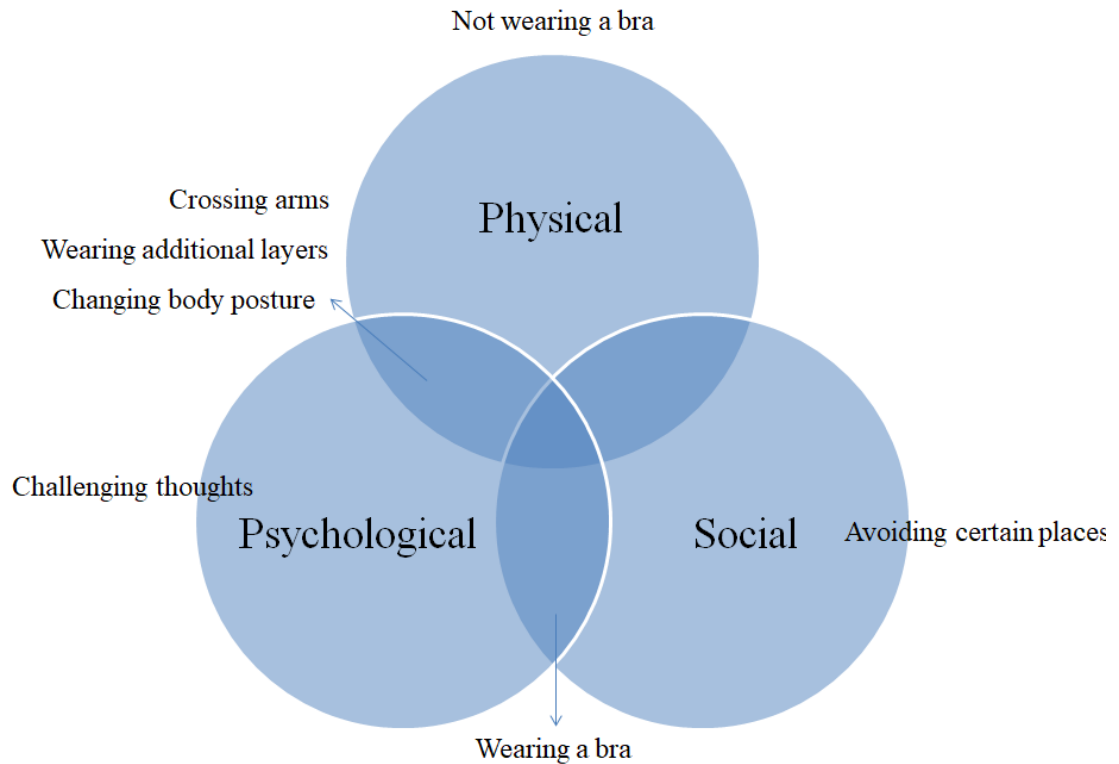


Figure 10) Comfort Relationships - This diagram shows the overlapping aspects of social, psychological, and physical comfort along with the mitigation strategies women used to experience different types of comfort.

As women discussed their feelings towards their breasts and their bras, they oscillated between comfortable and uncomfortable depending on the context. The difference between feeling comfortable with their breasts or uncomfortable in a bra does not exist as a binary; women's relationship to comfort is complex and depends upon a variety of physical, social, and psychic factors. Some women were concerned about making others—co-workers, family members, friends—uncomfortable with their braless appearance in the spaces they frequented, and a few women expressed that visible bralessness, both their own and that of others, made them feel uncomfortable. Ahmed (2014) argues that managing others' comfort demands extra labour, an observation that came through clearly in the interviews. Women in this study performed extra labour by maintaining a keen awareness of the people they might

encounter in each space and what those people expect of their bodies. Women responded differently to the assumption that they should manage their bodies to make others comfortable.

5.3 “Uncomfortable and unprofessional” – Breasts at work

Visible breasts and out of control femininity are seen as “slutty” and “unprofessional”. Cleavage, bra straps or visible nipples often go against dress code (formal or informal) depending on the space, something participants and I have all felt the boundaries of. One space where women commonly mentioned they would never feel comfortable being braless was at work. With the exception of one woman, all other participants mentioned their workplace as a space where they felt wearing a bra was always a must, citing the need to maintain a “professional” appearance. Shea shared that she would “never go to work braless,” and told a story about one instance when she was sick and went out to run a few errands and happened to be braless feeling like she looked like a “schlump” and a “total mess”. During this instance, she accidentally ran into her boss and felt “mortified,” not necessarily because she was braless but because of her entire appearance. She described feeling like “unprofessionalism and bralessness seem to be associated” because even in that scenario, she was “not afraid of being sexualized,” but “even at a distance” she still felt “uncomfortable and unprofessional.” Shea described only seeing her boss from afar but even though he likely would not have been able to notice that she was braless, she still felt uncomfortable in the interaction.

Participants described being braless at work as being “unprofessional”. Breasts are seen as inappropriate in the office because of their association with sex. Formal and informal dress codes are used to control women’s sexuality as a visible nipple or side boob could be “uncomfortable” for others. Even a visible bra strap or the outline of a bra can be disruptive in the workplace. For some women, the fear of being sexualized, and the potential consequences, which I explore further in this section, compelled them to wear a bra at work. Alyssa was annoyed by the limitations she felt require her to wear a bra even though it might not be visible:

I think because it is supposed to be a professional place, and which is also ridiculous because I can be wearing something and be all covered up but if it is a form fitting dress it is still seen as being too sexy. I don't have lots of cleavage like some people but I feel like I should be able to get away with more low-cut stuff, but I can't, and I think it kind of ties into that too. Can't show shoulders. And all that shit.

Complaining about workplace dress codes and being able “to get away with” different things based on body type, Alyssa described a desire to have the freedom to be braless more, but explained that her work environment often resembled that of “an old boys club.” Because of the age and conservatism of her bosses, Alyssa described feeling like certain looks would not be “accepted as professional”—such as showing off her clavicle, “even that part of women’s chests are sexualized.” Alyssa feels that even shoulder bones are sexualized at the office and would be inappropriate. Because of women’s bodies are sexually objectified, in an office setting, a women’s “sexy” or sexual body is abject. If their sexuality is to seep out, it risks contaminating and distracting the workplace or disrupting dress codes in schools. Because of the expectation that the office or school should be free of sex, there is an implication that women cannot be at all sexual and professional and yet we have sexy professions at Halloween including the “sexy nurse”, “sexy secretary”, “sexy student”, and “sexy teacher.”

In order to comply with standards of dress, Alyssa explained that when getting ready for work, she has several considerations including how visible her bra is through her top:

I think about colour and the other shitty thing about it, and these aren't even boobs, but if your bra is showing through your shirt that is still, like, unprofessional. I think it is dope. But it's still kind of sexual even though it is just a bra.

What became apparent is the number of feminine considerations that are factored into daily routines to avoid bringing women’s sexualized bodies into work. In trying to appear less abject by wearing a bra and containing breasts, the boundaries of the workplace can be upheld by avoiding out of control sexuality such as the presence of a nipple or a visible undergarment. For example, Blair commented on how she felt work required her to look professional and visible nipples or uncontained breasts are not a part of that presentation:

I guess it doesn't feel appropriate. Like to not have [a bra]. Like what if I nip while I am at work with my male colleagues and they get aroused and something terrible happens? Like, I don't know, anything can happen.

There are two things of significance that stand out in Blair's excerpt, 1) assuming "something bad" could happen—rape, assault, being fired—because of being braless and 2) that if something bad were to happen that it would be her fault because she had not done everything she could have to prevent "something bad" from happening. Feeling inappropriate about her body being uncontained is a spatially and socially constructed feeling of embodiment that requires Blair, and other women, to contain their breasts in public. Taught to fear the repercussions of out of control feminine sexuality puts the onus on women to contain their bodies to not expose themselves to men who might take visible nipples the "wrong way". Being sexualized and perceived in a way one does not intend induces feelings of fear and discomfort. Feeling like "anything could happen" and helpless in the event of a visible nipple, Blair contains her breasts at work and surveils her body to ensure this. The heteronormative narratives present in workplaces are damaging for all bodies as they allow little room for self-expression outside of what is deemed socially comfortable. An example of how women's breasts are sexualized and require constant securing is the infamous Janet Jackson nip slip from a costume malfunction at the 2004 Superbowl. The consequences of the breast reveal led to delays in live television events to ensure unfettered female sexuality was not widely broadcasted and the event impacted Janet's reputation as accusations that she was to blame ran rampant.

Latrice explained that at her work she always tries to "approach it professionally because early childhood education is often not taken seriously." She explained feeling like there is a "thing in my head, like a boundary, where I feel like being braless would be unprofessional." The boundary that Latrice described prevents her from being braless at work out of fear she would be seen as unprofessional, which could tarnish her reputation. Similarly, during the walk Ivy said she thought she would feel the same everywhere, not caring if someone noticed her right now. However, she would care if she was in "a serious situation"—then, regardless of location, she would feel "uncomfortable," as "any space can be made formal and important under the right context." Being in a formal space braless was a boundary most women agreed they would not feel comfortable crossing. A usually informal space can be

transformed into a formal or “serious” one depending on the social context, for example if there was someone they knew like a boss, parent or student was present in the space they would want to avoid having seeing them braless. The context and social materiality matters in making meaning of where bralessness is or is not deemed appropriate or disruptive. For example, “others” who are occupying space changes the nature of the space. For women, an informal place, like the mall, but occupied with men would feel potentially dangerous being braless in where as a formal place with employers, like the workplace, would make bralessness feel unprofessional.

For Bianca, nipples are perverse in an office setting; they disrupt the space, regardless of whose body they belong to:

I think I am not a big fan of seeing the nipple because I think it is...how do I say it...in certain professions, it doesn't bother me, but it can be distracting whether you want it to be or not. Men's or females, I don't want to see. If it is a man, or a larger man's nipple, I don't want to see it if it is an office environment. I think that is how I am and how I was raised. In an office, you need to be a little bit more professional. But if you're out and you are grocery shopping, in a hoody, I don't care.

For Bianca, the space and clothing both matter in deciding where it felt acceptable to be braless. She suggested that being braless while grocery shopping would be appropriate but covering up with clothing, a hoody, was still necessary. Feeling like an office environment appearance should be more “streamlined”, Bianca explains feeling uncomfortable seeing nipples because they can be distracting. For Bianca, nipples draw attention to the naked body underneath clothing, something that should not be visible in the workplace. The sentiment being communicated is that work is a space that is supposed to be professional and breasts that are uncontained are distracting to the point of destabilizing a place. However, casual or more informal places also require a covering of bralessness as Bianca sees nipples as being inappropriate and distracting in public places. Bianca explained how she was raised to possess these opinions:

I don't want to say it bothers me but if it is in a place of business, and you need a little bit more polished professionalism, well you look a little sloppy. Especially if it is

business causal or business environment. Like an extreme example, would you get the same reaction from a lawyer whether or not they were wearing a bra?

While Bianca says that bralessness doesn't "bother her", her previous statement suggested that seeing other women who are visibly braless *does* bother her and makes her feel uncomfortable. Bianca explained that certain professions matter more than others. For example, she did not consider workers that she would encounter while shopping as being in professional spaces. Breaking workplace standards presents feelings of misfitting where bralessness is associated with being "unprofessional". In addition, certain bodies matter more than others, as Bianca explained that "if it is like boobs down to your waist it is like, 'oh that looks like that hurts.'"

Not all women shared Bianca's perspective about nipples. Some saw nipples like any other body part and considered their visibility not a big deal; rather, that people should not look if they don't like something. Farrah "hates" bras and explained that at her office job, she was privately talked to because her bralessness was brought to her "male bosses' attention." She was told that she was going to have to wear a bra, "because it was making people uncomfortable" such as people like Bianca. Farrah explained her frustration at the situation, feeling like she was "getting in trouble" and "being picked on" because she happened to be the youngest one in the office:

I really don't understand why it matters if somebody else has an issue. Because like it is my body. Like don't look then. Don't. That is not my problem that you are looking, like, whatever. And then, actually right after that, I went and got my nipples pierced because screw you guys, I'm going to make it even worse. You want a distraction; I will really give you one.

Farrah explained that she doesn't really understand why she was being targeted when another woman in her workplace showed off considerable cleavage, and others wore skirts so short that "when they bend over you can see what you shouldn't." Farrah explores the complex relationship of abject feminine bodies and sexualized feminine bodies. In the workplace some bodies are seen abjectly where others are sexualized based on their bodies shape and the clothing that adorns it. She feels there is a contradiction in what is deemed "acceptable" as she gets called out for being visibly braless at work where other women show off their

bodies in different ways and they do not receive any scrutiny, she thinks this is because she is younger than her colleagues. Wanting to have control in the situation, Farrah explained her frustrations:

I understand dress code and I one hundred percent comply with dress code. But if you are going to tell me that I have to wear a bra because you can see my nipples and that makes people uncomfortable, that doesn't really sound like a me problem. Just because I'm not wearing a bra, or whatever, that should not make you uncomfortable...I can see your man nipples. You are cold and I'm not sitting there like, "that makes me really uncomfortable."

Highlighting the double standard in the workplace, Farrah explained that initially after the incident she went and got her nipples pierced to "because screw you guys." Since then she has not received any further complaints but shifted from resistance to compliance. Now she does not really bother with trying to be braless at work because it is not worth the fight: "it's frustrating but yeah, I comply with it because I don't feel like arguing with them." Feeling discouraged, Farrah now contains her breasts at work since she feels it is not worth the effort to face other people's discomfort, by wearing a bra she is making others more comfortable, compromising her own physical comfort.

Women expressed in their interviews that the workplace is not an appropriate place to be braless; it would be seen as being "slutty" or "unprofessional." Based on their descriptions, I learnt the importance of dress code in the workplace in shaping women's habits and relationships with their bras. Most women reported the need to feel contained in order to feel comfortable socially. Being contained is associated with maintaining a professional appearance and containing their sexuality. With the exception of one participant, all women reported the workplace as a no go for being braless.

5.4 "I'm comfortable here" – Navigating space

In this section, I consider how space and place contributed to producing feelings of comfort and discomfort across various scales. While a variety of sites were visited with participants, I focus on a few select places such as the hair salon that were examples of spaces with different gazes or where feelings of dis/comfort were mentioned. Differences in participants'

perceptions of urban and rural contexts are explored, as well as the cultures of different cities; both impacted women's experiences of public bralessness. In addition to reflecting on comfort at the scale of the city, I also explore participants' feelings about wearing a bra at home versus in public space. Since being comfortable in a space may be temporally specific, I consider the role played by variations in time of year and day, as well as norms about dress and conduct connected to specific places.

During the interviews, I asked the women to predict how they might feel if they were to conduct this experiment in a different place, such as their hometowns or on vacation. Blair explained that she felt more comfortable in Edmonton than where she grew up, "but that's because it is a little bit more conservative than the city." The women who felt comfortable in Edmonton perceived the space as being more liberal. Not all women shared this opinion, however, and viewed Edmonton as being less accepting towards bralessness compared to larger cities like New York that are seen as liberal hotspots. The size of the community was one factor influencing women's (dis)comfort with bralessness; culture was another. For example, Blair described the place that she grew up as "conservative" and the guys she went to high school with were "disgusting" and she wouldn't feel comfortable being braless in spaces where she might encounter them. Blair made a link between conservatism and "disgusting men", where spaces of conservatism moderates the type of people occupying the space. Blair associates conservative views with men that have disgusting views on women and their bodies, expecting less liberal sites to contain men that are more likely to sexualize them.

Not everyone equated a larger place with being safer as Morgan described feeling "safer in Edmonton than a place like Toronto." For Morgan, Toronto would feel less safe to wander without a bra because of her lack of familiarity with the place. Morgan explained, "I think this is a safe place...Somewhere like Toronto, yeah, probably not." Shea, who has spent time living in Toronto, expressed that in Toronto people "notice less because generally, they are more self-absorbed and less friendly where Edmonton is hypermasculine." For Shea, she sees Edmonton as being more conservative to other larger places, like Toronto, linking conservatism with hypermasculinity. Like Blair, Shea links conservative spaces with having more "disgusting men" that are more likely to sexualize their bodies. Shea felt that smaller rural communities in Alberta, like the town she grew up in, would be much worse to be

braless in. Also growing up in a small town in Alberta, I can relate to how uncomfortable it would feel to be braless in a rural community. I grew up in a town with a population of 5,000 people and it would be impossible to go out without seeing someone you knew, or that your family knew. When I first started this thesis, I never would have imagined visiting my small town while being visibly braless (now however I would feel relatively comfortable but there would be a few people I would not want to run into, i.e. ex-boyfriends or former teachers). Being visibly braless would feel “slutty” and suggest promiscuity or “looseness”, something that was present in the other women’s responses as well. In smaller communities in Alberta that are typically more conservative, doing anything that could be seen as promiscuous, like being visibly braless, would make you the talk of the town.

Wondering about how space shapes experiences, Jaida described wondering if having “home court advantage” helps her feel more comfortable being braless in Edmonton. Being familiar with the place can help women know where there can be braless safely and likely shaped the locations that were chosen for the mobile interviews. Part of the advantage of knowing the place means an ability to assess the level of risk that may be present. Jaida thinking about home court advantage said that “it has got me thinking though. Do I want to try this when I go through Toronto? Just to see. Just to test myself.” Imagining playing out the experiment on her own during an upcoming trip, Jaida recognized that the space likely has a role in shaping her feelings and experiences with bralessness.

Across the city, there were different experiences of comfort and different gazes present in the places we visited and discussed. Of the places we discussed and visited, there were a variety of gazes present, however, I suggest four different gazes: judgy conservatives, sexualizing men, imposed femininity, and professional. These gazes shaped how women expected to experience the space while braless. Three women selected Michael’s craft supply store and one selected a hair salon, which are spaces that are considered feminine. The decision to select these locations, I assume was because the women perceived they would feel most comfortable there, in part because the people present would likely also be women. With Jaida, we visited a hair salon that had a retail space in front and she reported feeling noticeably different while braless because of the gaze which imposes femininity in the space. Feeling more “exposed,” the traditionally feminine space made her feel out of place because “it is a place where people go to look nice and traditionally when people don’t wear a bra in

public it is viewed as less than or not taking care of themselves.” The feminine nature of the space made Jaida feel like she was breaking the rules and defying the original intent of the space, to beautify, but also to augment certain aspects of femininity that might be antiethical to bralessness. In the hair salon, Jaida perceived that our exposed breasts were contaminating the space as comfort and femininity seem to be polar opposites under an imposed femininity gaze.

In addition to the place, participants described time as important when considering braless attire. For Jaida, being braless in the winter months in Edmonton was something that she felt like she can “get away with.” Wearing extra layers to go outside allowed her to hide her chest more, making her braless attire less noticeable. Darkness provided another form of temporal cover: Alyssa explained that “I feel like it's usually more okay to go without a bra at night for whatever reason.” Time of day and year both played into when bralessness felt more acceptable.

There were distinct geographies of comfort across the city when women considered being braless. Latrice described that where we were, on the north side of Edmonton, that she was not too concerned being braless. She liked being separated and at a distance from her work, located in central Edmonton. She explained that if she was closer to her work, she would not feel as “comfortable or confident.” Running into someone from work was a concern that Shea mentioned while being close to downtown, which felt “like a risk”. She was not too concerned though, because those who she might run into had “worse behavior” than her bralessness. For Shea, “others” provided a buffer that made her feel her braless attire less visible. Defining an “other” who was more out of place than their visible bralessness provided some psychological comfort.

Public transit came up as a public space with specific features that shaped braless experiences. For Violet, wearing a bra added a layer of protection, “just being a woman who takes transit and stuff like that. I don't want to draw any extra attention, I guess.” Feeling like her bra brought her safety, Violet saw bralessness as making oneself vulnerable in public space. Taking public transit without a bra made Violet feel uncomfortable. Being a woman in these spaces requires a keen awareness of our surroundings, to evaluate any potential threats and through this process identifying potential others. Expecting to be “othered” in public

space, wearing a bra to protect oneself from public remarks was a safety technique some women used while navigating space.

In addition to feeling “othered,” women navigated concerns of being sexualized while braless in public space depending on the gaze present. Shea described context as mattering substantially as she would be uncomfortable being braless in a space filled with intoxicants—with the exception of marijuana—due to the “unpredictability” that often results, “certain spaces like that I would feel less comfortable.” Not wanting to be surrounded by unpredictable behavior is a way of managing comfort. By choosing to avoid spaces where people might be drinking, Shea avoids having to confront people that may have comments on her chest. Crowded bars and public spaces are prime spots for sexual harassment and comments on the body because of a sexualizing gaze from men present in these spaces. Being visibly braless in these spaces can attract attention and when unwanted, we cover our bodies to protect ourselves from comment.

Within public space, Alyssa felt that she had less control of her surroundings and who she encountered. The potential encounters bring about feelings of discomfort that are place based. Physically, she feels more comfortable at home than out in public. Feeling like people are more judgmental and attentive in Edmonton, Alyssa explained that when she is trying on clothing at home, she often has a desire to be out in public in the outfit but then when she is, she often feels “discomfort.” Feeling uncomfortable in an outfit makes Alyssa want to retreat.

Participants reflected on being braless in a variety of different spaces including specific neighbourhoods in the city of Edmonton (e.g. downtown versus the suburbs) as well as other communities they have visited or lived in, both rural and urban. Comparing these spaces, women identified various features of the city, such as the size, culture and social norms as well as the typical people circulating these spaces which shaped their perceptions of how socially acceptable it is to not wear a bra in public. Within Edmonton, proximity to their work and the potential of running into people they may know were two factors that made women feel less comfortable not wearing a bra. Variations in the time of year and time of day also impacted how women anticipated they would feel being braless. For example, women felt more comfortable being braless in the winter months when their braless attire would not

be visible under winter clothing. During the night also felt more acceptable to be braless, for example if going out to a nightclub.

This section has demonstrated the importance of place in shaping women's experiences with their bra and the variety of "gazes" and surveillers that women might encounter in different places. Women discussed how rural areas had a high percentage of judgy conservatives which they linked to expecting "disgusting men" in these spaces. The bar was also mentioned as place where women expected to encounter "disgusting men" and a sexualizing gaze. The hair salon was explored as a space where bralessness felt out of place because of the imposed feminine gaze and as discussed in more detail in the previous section (Section 5.3), the workplace had a unique professional gaze which women reported as feeling like they needed to contain their breasts at work. This gaze extended across the city, shaping women's braless geographies as there was a desire to avoid spaces where they could potentially run into their bosses or coworkers. The participants explained that while braless, they noticed everyday spaces differently. By becoming more aware of their bodies while navigating space and the "others" who were present in the space, their sense of belonging and being in place shifted. Women became increasingly aware of "others" while simultaneously fearing feeling "othered" while braless. Since it is through social actions that a place is created, the removal of the bra created a shift in how women experienced and perceived the places they visited.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored women's experiences of bralessness during the interviews conducted. Women reported changes to their physical and social comfort when they removed their bras and this shaped how they navigated and engaged with the spaces we visited. Women used a variety of mitigation techniques to avoid having their braless state be visible or noticeable. Women were okay with being braless in public as long as no one noticed their braless state.

For participants, there was a tension between the fit of clothing on the body and the fit of the body in space. Women described the ways normative sizing makes them feel other towards their body because of a lack of bra sizes and fits that represent the diversity of breasts that exist. For women, social comfort and maintaining a professional appearance at the workplace

was a priority as they felt an obligation to manage co-workers' comfort including their perceptions and judgement. Women described being braless in the workplace as unprofessional. In this section, I explored the ways space shapes women's perceptions and experiences of bralessness based on the variety of gazes present in different temporal and spatial settings. By exploring the differences in experiences of bralessness based on geographic features such as city size, neighbourhood attributes, and specific norms associated with salons, bars, and public transit, I offer an account of women's braless geographies in the next chapter. Based on the topics discussed in this findings chapter, I continue a discussion on the feelings of dis/comfort and explain how it shapes feelings of vulnerability and braless experiences in space.

Chapter 6 : Discussion

6 Introduction

Comfort and fit were a central theme shaping women's decision making and experiences with bralessness in urban places which shaped women's perceptions of vulnerability. Vulnerability was a primary emotion that all women expressed in a multiple of ways during the interview process and this struck me as being an important and common factor for the participants. Feeling vulnerable includes sensations of risk, discomfort, or uncertainty. In feeling vulnerable, one may feel exposed (physically, emotionally, and socially), judged, or at risk. A constellation of emotions, such as discomfort or fear creates a sense of vulnerability. Exploring vulnerability in a variety of urban locations leads to a discussion on how heteronormativity shapes bra(less) geographies and women's subjectivity. I discuss social norms, place, and subjectivity. Three main insights emerge: first, reflecting on the complex and contradictory reasons why women in this study contain their chests, I argue that feelings of vulnerability, interpreted using Kristeva's (1982) notion of abjection, help explain how and why participants take a range of actions to contain their bodies based on two sets of perceptions: 1) internalized abjection, where women experience their bodies as abject in relation to aspects of comfort and fit informed by normative femininity; and 2) externally imposed abjection, where women experience their bodies as abject as they move through spaces within a heteronormative culture. Next, I identify some key features of bra/less geographies, including the role of feelings of vulnerability and urban density in shaping women's experiences of bralessness. Finally, I argue that the bra serves as a tool of heteronormativity as it disciplines and contains both chests and femininity.

Comfort and fit were central themes that came up during the interviews and through the coding process. Comfort and fit provide an analytical starting point to consider the management of the abject body. Being comfortable falls to the background, we might not consciously be aware of our comfortable state (Ahmed, 2014). It is the fit between the body and object or an encounter between more than one body that creates feelings of dis/comfort (Ahmed, 2014). Comfort suggests wellbeing and satisfaction; it also suggests an ease and

easiness (Ahmed, 2014). Under heteropatriarchy, being comfortable means fitting in with social norms and expectations. Feelings of discomfort are triggered by the social norms present in space where feelings of comfort are relationally contingent on discomfort (McNally, Price & Crang, 2020). Comfort arises from an ongoing relationship with the world; it is contextual and relational as comfort is a process, not an attribute (McNally, Price & Crang, 2020). Discomfort involves the failure of fit (Ahmed, 2010). Feeling uncomfortable bra/less can be based on a women's comfort level with bras, bralessness, others, and their own body. For participants, being comfortable resonated with being at ease. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, women differentiated between physical and social comfort, which do not always align. Bralessness created a tension between physical comfort and social or emotional comfort, simultaneously increasing and decreasing the comfort of participants. Below, I discuss comfort in terms of feelings of fit of the body in space based on social norms as well as the fit of clothing on the body based on the spatial limitations of garments that are used to shape and define the body space. The fit on the body is tied to internalized abjection. Women's relationship with their bras is connected to the ways in which societal norms (femininity, heterosexuality, professionalism) are internalized. In this chapter, I explore how these feelings of social comfort and a desire to fit in are in relation to managing women's vulnerability across braless geographies. The fit of the body is the ways in which the body is perceived as it moves through different social and physical spaces and the feelings of fitting and misfitting that engenders in the women. For participants, because the bra was a way of fitting in with social norms, without a bra they were potentially subject to being rendered abject by others occupying the space.

For braless women, the difference between comfort and discomfort is fluid, negotiated and oscillating. When dressed uncomfortably, we become more aware of dress on our bodies, developing an epidermic self-awareness. By wearing clothing that is uncomfortable, our bodily boundaries and edges are highlighted; "garment/s impinge upon our experience of the body and make us aware of the "edges," the limits and boundaries of our body" (Eco, 1986). Dress shows us the edges of ourselves by bringing an awareness to our boundaries and the limits of our bodies. Without a bra, there is a palpable and visible fluidity of the body that is typically managed through dress. Kim et al (2007) argues that women conform to heterosexual scripts and contain their bodies to fit in with what is normative. By wearing a

bra, breasts are smoothed out to make the body appear less abjectly, something which is important

Comfort also becomes a form of emotional labour when work is put into minimizing signs of difference (Ahmed, 2010). Maintaining public comfort requires that certain bodies, like women's, go along with the norms of the space, and this includes wearing a bra. Refusing to follow what is normative could cause discomfort for others (Ahmed, 2010), which can in turn create a feeling of discomfort for the woman who is braless. Wearing a bra, like other aspects of containment, requires trade-offs and a negotiation of how much labour one is able or willing to expend on any given day.

The pervasiveness of bodily containment highlights the importance of this research. Bras contain women's chests and reinforce heteropatriarchal comfort. Without a bra, breasts in their fluid state have the potential to disrupt heteropatriarchal comfort. Ahmed (2014) explains how heteronormativity can be such a good "fit" that it falls to the background. For some women, wearing a bra feels comfortable and while they are contained, the fit falls to the background where they no longer notice they are wearing a garment at all. Whereas fitting implies a satisfaction and contentment, misfitting is a sensation of discomfort of being ill-fitting, not fitting in, or not having a garment fit (Garland-Thompson, 2011). Feeling like they were not fitting in with the normative expectation that their bodies be contained in particular spaces, women described feelings of misfitting or being out of place while braless. Their uncontained bodies did not fit into the heteropatriarchal space and were experienced as potentially disruptive to that space.

What I found through the interviews is that participants compromised their physical comfort in their everyday lives to fit in socially. It was common for women to wear a bra even though they found it uncomfortable, because the resulting fit of their body in space was considered appropriate. Women reported wearing misfitting or uncomfortable bras despite the discomfort to fit in to what was normative in the spaces they visited. In other words, fitting in socially mattered more than the fit of clothing on their body. By sacrificing the fit on the body, by wearing a bra and being contained, women fit in socially receiving some feelings of comfort. During the braless walks, women reported feeling more comfortable, physically, which challenged their notions of comfort and what it means to fit in. Based on the

interviews with women, there are costs associated with fitting into a space and sometimes that means compromising physical comfort by wearing something ill-fitting to avoid being cast as a misfit in the space. Women are required to be contained in certain spaces as per heteropatriarchal norms and sacrifice aspects of comfort and fit to experience social comfort and fitting in. In the next section I discuss vulnerability and its relation to the feeling of abjection.

6.1 Vulnerability

Being abject invokes a subjective horror: a fear that one feels when faced with one's corporeal reality (Kristeva, 1982). We have an aversion to fluidity, the other, and the monstrous feminine (Kristeva, 1982; Russo, 1995, Grosz, 1994). The point at which we become other is when our body no longer belongs to ourselves and represents what is horrific or abject. Under heteropatriarchy, women's bodies are objectified and do not belong entirely to them. Bralessness represents the monstrous, fluid and the feminine other. What I heard from women is that bralessness is judged, by themselves or others, as being "slutty" or "sloppy" depending on the body type, the fit of the clothing or the context. Such spatial and social factors are important in defining the spaces and instances when bralessness is read as being out of control. Bralessness is rendered unacceptable in a place like the office or a school, where the body would be read as inappropriate. Abjection is universal in that we all have and are bodies and we work to contain our bodies yet they remain leaky and aging, thereby vulnerable (Kristeva, 1982; Grosz, 1994). Uncontained breasts are fluid and potentially prone to leaking in their movement through space without a bra and so become sources of abject embodiment. Being felt to be abject unconsciously controls bodies including people's behavior, their sense of self and their subjectivity (Kristeva, 1982). Acknowledging our intersubjectivity and the ways in which the abject affects this, I argue that the first steps towards liberation becomes possible by acknowledging the universality of abjection and accepting our fleshy materiality (Creswell, 1994; Kitchin, 1998). By trying something that was out of the participants' comfort zone and allowing themselves to be vulnerable in the sense that they took a risk and did something they may have had feelings of fear or discomfort for, some women started to accept their abject materiality. Being braless allowed participants to start to think about their breasted embodiment in relation to space and

bras, and this led to some participants feeling comfortable being braless in public. Some women commented that they would like to try being braless again on their own accord and to challenge the boundaries of what is normative in public space—how women are supposed to behave and dress.

While women who participated in the study tried to avoid feelings of abjection generally, their navigation of spaces was also shaped by their feelings and perceptions of vulnerability in addition to feelings of abjection while bra(less). Vulnerability represents a constellation of emotions such as uncertainty, a sense of risk, shame, exposure, anxiety, or a fear of rejection or ridicule. Vulnerability also represents an emotional exposure and was present amongst all interviews, though it was expressed in many ways. Vulnerability came up repeatedly both directly and indirectly when participants talked about their breasts, wearing a bra, and navigating the city. I decided to focus on vulnerability as both a feeling that was universal amongst participants and as something we all inherently feel, and because of how spatial and social it is: feeling vulnerable occurs in real places and requires a reliance on an ‘other’. Additionally our own internalized feelings of abjection are in response to perceived social norms and standards. Vulnerability is created through social relations that are specific to place, both the interior or psychic space and the external places women’s bodies move through. Through the interviews, feelings of discomfort were related to sites of vulnerability based on women’s comments on risk, fear, safety, and feelings of anxiety while discussing braless geographies. Thus, focusing on how, where, when, and why women expressed vulnerability based on their feelings of discomfort and fear of “others” in the interviews helps uncover how they perceive difference in space and negotiate their bodies in that space. In this section I engage with work on docile bodies by Bartky (1997) to aid in my analysis of women’s vulnerability and their bodies. By positioning the bra within geography, I draw on Bartky’s work to help in understanding the abject body, and raise questions about the patriarchal construction of the female body (Bartky, 1997). Bartky (1997, p.144) identifies that an adequate understanding of women’s oppression requires an understanding of subjectivities and how they are structured—the practices that construct the body. Understanding gender subordination exposes systems of power under patriarchy and my work explores how the bra is imbricated within these systems of power.

Feelings of safety and belonging—or lack thereof—contribute to an array of vulnerable experiences including physical, social, psychological elements. A fear of being perceived as an outsider rendered participants vulnerable. Garland-Thomson (2011) emphasizes the role of dependence and vulnerability in shaping our embodiment. We rely on ‘others’ to shape our perceptions of ourselves and in this exchange, feelings of vulnerability, including doubt and questioning self-worth, arise. Our relationship with others shapes and informs our relationship with our body. When participants removed their bras, they became subject to an othering gaze, making themselves vulnerable. This gaze was both internalized as they were seeing themselves as they expected society to see them and externally imposed by the way in which people responded to their braless bodies in public space. Some women expressed this vulnerability by describing a “nervousness” to be without a bra in public. Removing their bras to participate in the walking interview was an example of “materializing vulnerability”—where the process registered feelings of othering, difference, and being out of place (Garland Thompson, 2011). Being braless prompted interviewees to bring up times when they felt vulnerable in the past. Women discussed how they would feel “sloppy”, “unprofessional”, and potentially “slutty” if their bralessness was visible. This concern with visibility was shaped by places, people and norms as well as women’s previous bra/less trauma, revealing how feelings of vulnerability and fear of the abject shape ones everyday braless geographies.

Containing their breasts by wearing a bra helped the women in this study to create zones of comfort that align with societal, primarily heteropatriarchal, expectations. Maintaining one’s comfort zone is a way of managing vulnerability as it permits women to move in places comfortably and with an acceptable level of risk. Breasts that are held in place in a bra have their movement restricted to what the container (and society) defines is permissible movement. For participants, wearing a bra supplied an extra layer, or boundary, between their breasts and the outer world. Without a bra, the fluid nature of women’s bodies becomes more present as breasts change shape while in motion (Young, 1990). Breasts are free to move around without a bra and in motion, move with the woman. Without a bra, women’s nipples are also visible, and because nipples are sometimes subject to leaking, become visible in ways which are associated with abjection. Bodily fluids—tears, sweat, blood, pee, milk, snot—are associated with abjection, and must be managed so that they are appropriately

contained in public, and uncontained breasts are sources for at least some of these bodily fluids. One of the issues a participant mentioned about being braless is boob sweat and the way this leaks and is visible through tops, especially if you are braless. Leakage in the breast area is associated with the leakage of breast milk, or the worry that the body is seeping out of the nipple somehow. Sweat is an abject fluid but not a function so much of gendered leakage like lactation. Women's fear of having visibly sweaty or leaky breasts was a fear of being abject, having the inside of the body come out. As Grosz (1994) discusses, bodies that are fluid and leak are absent of being "clean" or "proper" (p.194) as borderline states are located as sites of "danger and vulnerability" (p.196).

Feeling vulnerable is associated with feeling abject because vulnerability relies on the relationship of our bodies to others within space. Kristeva (1982) describes abjection as the **fear for the other** represents the **fear of becoming, or being perceived, as the other**, where the other represents a repulsive version of oneself, one that is unbearable to face. The repulsive version of oneself is an important aspect that drives the way abjection operates in relation to bralessness. Women internalize this repulsion and use bras to contain their abject bodies. Abjection refers to the reaction to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of distinction between subject and object, inside and outside. Abjection provokes the impetus for determining otherness and belonging as a means to alleviate feelings of breakdown (Kristeva, 1982). Abjection is a function of a blurring between the self and other. Women's bodies are constructed as abject in relation to men's hard bodies (Young, 1990). The braless body has a surfeit of meanings in our society whereby women's braless bodies becomes 'other,' losing integrity and meaning. Being braless materialized concerns of vulnerability and abjection by disrupting women's perceptions of how they imagined they would be received in public while braless. What this research highlights is the fragility of otherness—as our bodies are fluid and leaky in nature—and how abjection powerfully shapes our experiences by defining what it means to be fitting in socially.

Restricting the physical body to attend to social comfort represents a shift in embodiment. The expectation to wear a bra may ask us to ignore our physical comfort or tolerate some degree of discomfort in order to feel comfortable socially. The process of becoming abject occurs when we experience our embodiment as revolting and see our bodies as other to ourselves as we internalize how others (society) see us. Shifting from being with our body to

something that is apart and other from us, something that disgusts us, leaves us in a disembodied state. Women have historically come to experience themselves and their bodies as the object of someone else's desiring or judging gaze rather than as a subject of their own embodied desires. Young (1990, p.81) describes what it might be like to imagine women's breasted experiences absent from an objectifying gaze:

If we move from the male gaze in which woman is the Other, the object, solid and definite, to imagine the woman's point of view, the breasted body becomes blurry, mushy, indefinite, multiple, and without clear identity. The project of giving voice to a specifically female desire is an important one for feminism.

Because of objectification and social norms, women no longer see our bodies as our own when we apply judgement and layers of containment based on our social knowledge and our previous interactions with strangers or people we may know. The masculine gaze historically objectifies and contributes to feelings of abjection and objectification and contributes to how women's subjectivity is often formed less by focusing on how the body feels to attending to how it appears.

Women in this study described ways they habitually work to ensure that their bodies are not seen or experienced as abject, by themselves and by society and themselves. For women, objectification and abjection operate together shaping their subjectivity. Both being objectified and the fear of being rendered abject work together to shape women's habits and routines as they attempt to adhere to social norms and standards. Participants used bras and mitigated their braless appearance in public to adhere to social norms and as a behavior to reduce risk and feelings of vulnerability. Wearing a bra, crossing their arms while braless or covering up with clothing were all activities participants used to manage vulnerable feelings associated with being a body with potentially visible breasts in public. These behaviours can be interpreted as forms of self-policing, where the self becomes the enforcer of cultural norms (see Figure 10 for an illustrative example of these relationships).

Sandra Bartky (1997) provides an account of why women engage in self-disciplinary techniques to contain their bodies. Extending the Foucauldian theory of docile bodies, Bartky (1997) highlights that women's policing of femininity is uniquely positioned as women are both active and passive agents of their own subjectivity (Foucault, 1979). Femininity is a

performative construct; it is enacted and reenacted as the boundaries of femininity require constant securing, and as a result, so do the bodily boundaries (Bartky, 1997; Butler, 1990, p.33). Within patriarchal culture, Bartky (1997) highlights that women discipline their bodies to conform to a masculine gaze of heteronormative femininity. Femininity is a spectacle that virtually every woman is required to participate in, and although Bartky (1997) highlights that participation with heteronormativity does not have an active disciplinarian as “no one is marched off for electrolysis at the end of a rifle”, there are material consequences to opting out of what is defined as normative because women’s bodies cannot escape the criteria by which they continue to be judged (p.143). Along with femininity, women are expected to be contained and small; under the “tyranny of slenderness,” women “are forbidden to become large or massive; they must take up as little space as possible” (Bartky, 1997). Understanding women’s breasted embodied experiences is a way to understand women’s complex experiences of subjectivity in and across spaces. For example, the bra itself has no disciplinarian, however, women continue to engage in practices of containing their breasts and sacrificing physical comfort.

Bralessness registers as a spectacle of non-compliance. Without a bra, a woman challenges what is heteropatriarchal depending on the space. By having potentially visibly nipples and rejecting stereotypes of braless women (the slut, the slob, etc), the woman without a bra challenges norms that women should be contained. By looking into braless experiences, I offer an insight into understanding what it feels like to subvert something that is heteronormative by looking at the relationship between the bra and the docile body using space as a mediator. By walking with women through space while braless, we challenged what was expected of our bodies in the spaces we visited. Women generally reported feeling “okay” even though some felt like they were “breaking the rules”. The rules that women observed, including how being braless would render them as a slut or a slob, were the heteronormative expectations that women’s chests ought to be bound in public space. Women's experiences provide accounts of challenging boundaries.

6.2 Space

Women’s observations about places where they felt more and less comfortable being braless suggest some preliminary features of a bra/less geography. While none of the places visited

in the interviews have a disciplinarian enforcing rules that explicitly state bras must be worn, many represent locales which women recognized as creating the conditions where they were expected to contain their bodies and, in particular, their breasts. These perceptions were based on the actual and perceived judgement of others and an internalized heteropatriarchal gaze. For participants, wearing a bra was a way of managing heteronormative societal expectations and navigating the effects of heteropatriarchy in their lives.

Women's bralessness in public disrupts the apparently fixed positions of being either clothed or naked; without the bra, the illusion of a clothed (and contained) body is disrupted. The naked body is perverse or inappropriate in public space, creating a liminal space, generating our social proprioception. When the parts of the body (breasts) that are typically covered are visible, the body disrupts social order, and becomes out of place (Cover, 2003). The braless body draws on aspects of public nakedness that are meant to be concealed which explains some of the anxiety women expressed—the potential for a nip slip or side boob—and exemplifies the failure of clothing to adequately contain the fleshiness of the body. The anxieties present represent the fear of the naked body being potentially visible in public space. This section considers women's spatially differentiated experiences with bralessness across scales and in a variety of locales.

To offer a representation of braless geographies, Figures 11 through 13 represent feelings of comfort that Latrice shared during her mobile interview. I focused on one mobile interview to exemplify the possibility of mapping subjectivity and feeling related to bra-lessness, as completing a map for each participant was not within the scope of the project. Figure 11 highlights the feelings of comfort Latrice reported across the City. The red dots on the map represent areas where she suspected she would feel uncomfortable being braless: downtown or close to her work. The figure on the right shows a zoomed-in excerpt of the areas of comfort in the north part of the city-wide map. These sites were where we completed our mobile interview. Figure 11 is a zoomed in area of discomfort, shown in red was where Latrice mentioned feeling uncomfortable near the transit centre during the mobile interview. Figure 12 shows the areas where we walked during the mobile interviews, noting the area of discomfort. Figure 13 shows where we walked inside of the bookstore (Indigo) to highlight the variety of feelings within a specific locale. This map offers a look at a specific space with

excerpts on how she felt while bra/less across the bookstore representing the level of nuance and factors that shape how women experience braless geographies.

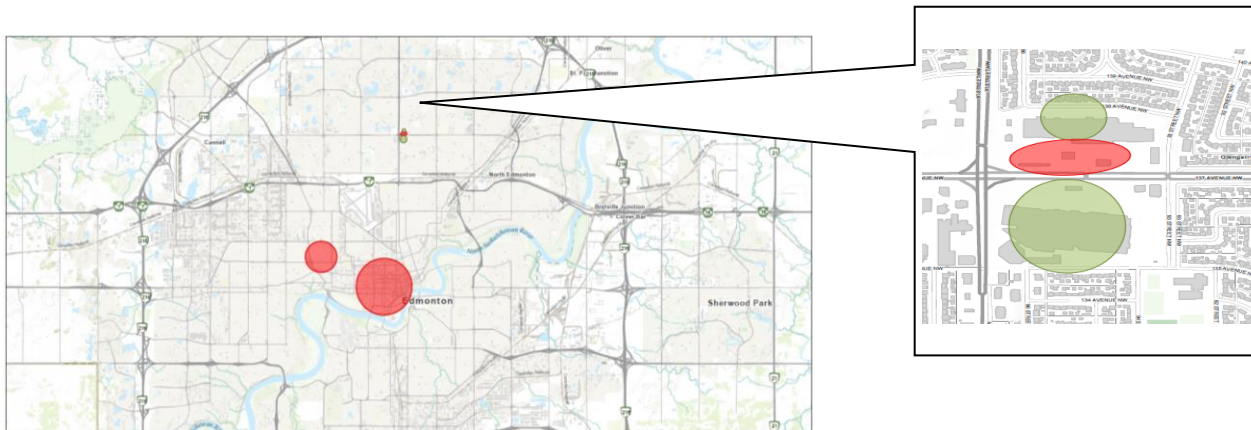


Figure 11) Feelings of Comfort in Edmonton, Alberta (Latrice)

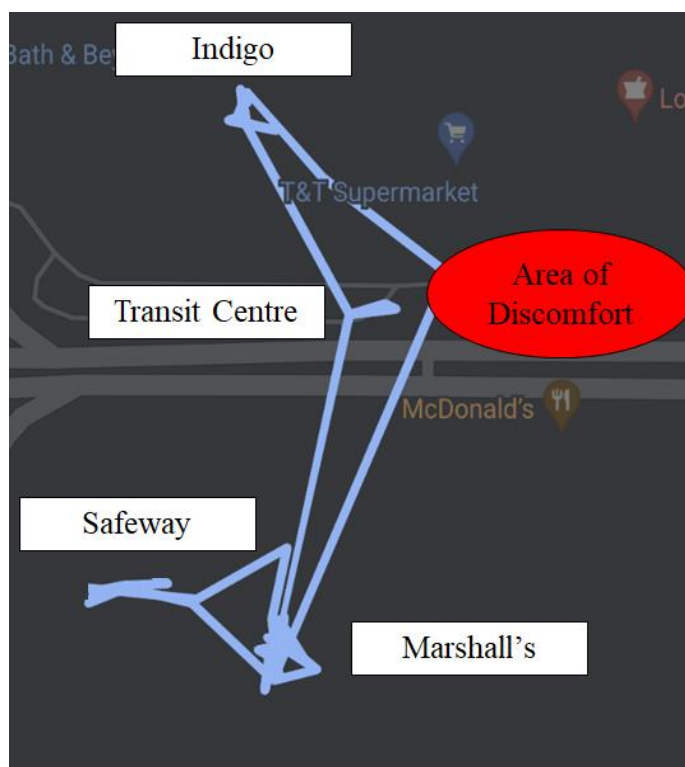


Figure 12) Mobile Interview with Latrice

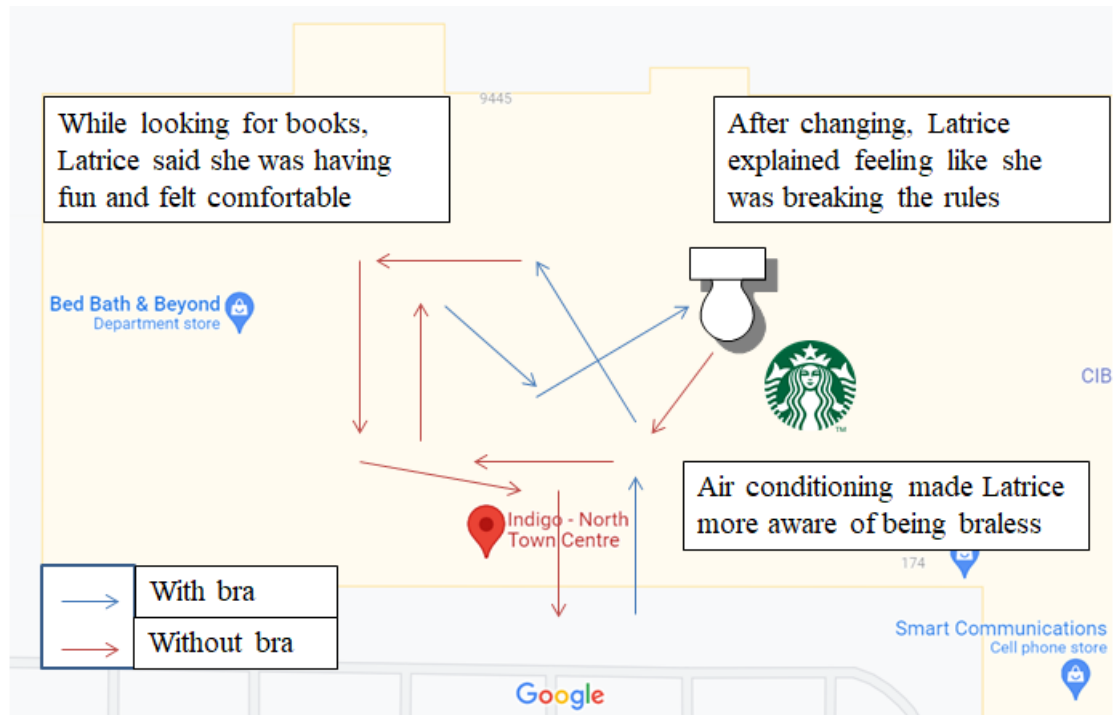


Figure 13) Mobile Interview with Latrice Mapping Sites of Dis/comfort

6.2.1 Heteronormativity and Bra(less) Geographies

Women's breasts are constructed as sexual objects; as such, they are often discussed objectively, disembodied from the women they belong to (Young, 1990). The notion that women's breasts belong to others was present throughout the interviews. Women discussed how their braless geographies were shaped by the perception of others they may encounter in these spaces. Women reported feeling concerned being braless near the workplace or had a fear of running into others like coworkers, their bosses, their parents, older men, or their boyfriends' friends. A concern with being visibly braless around their boyfriends' friends was one of the most surprising results that came out of the interviews. While women are clearly concerned with how they perform femininity in public, the specific concern that they expressed about their boyfriend's friends seeing them without a bra suggests that they are also concerned about being monitored for their sexual continence. They don't want to appear sexual or "slutty" in front of their partner's friends. Women described feeling like their braless bodies would be inappropriate in front of certain audiences and they were concerned about the comments their bralessness would elicit from others. These social relations shaped the spatial locations the women chose in which to go braless, in turn shaping their braless

geographies. While not representative my study offers a microcosm of the larger bra-less geographies women inhabit. In proposing the existence of bra(less) geographies, I identify spatial patterns in places where women felt more or less comfortable being braless and highlight places where bralessness was perceived as being more socially acceptable or something they could “get away with”. These braless geographies are both personal and temporally dependent.

Certain attributes of urban spaces contributed to these women’s perceived sense of place and how comfortable they would feel being braless. For some of them, a larger city would make them feel more comfortable being braless as there would be a sense of anonymity and blending in that would occur in a city with a higher density than Edmonton. Other participants explained feeling like they would never be braless in a city that had a greater density or population than Edmonton because of their perceptions of the lack of safety in larger cities and their own lack of comfort with someplace new. Perceptions of safety shaped women’s notions of comfort being braless across different kinds of locales as the example of bralessness in bars indicates. While one woman explained that she was uncomfortable being braless in a place where alcohol was consumed, another woman described a bar as the space where it is social acceptable to be braless. Both of these women perceive bars as a heteronormative space where it is possible to encounter an objectifying gaze; how this translated into their individual braless geographies varied, however.

The example of how these two women understood bars to be either an acceptable place to be braless or a place that increases their vulnerability while braless indicates how the perceptions of others across various social spaces have the power to shape women’s bra/less geographies. Similarly, most of the women in this study reported never wanting to be braless in rural Alberta based on the conservative nature of these spaces. They explained how being braless in their small hometowns would be uncomfortable because of the people they expect to encounter in a conservative space. Participants assume they would be judged negatively as they would be out of place in such geographies while braless.

In addition to feelings of discomfort and vulnerability that shape braless geographies, women’s perceptions of safety, including their threshold with risk and their previous braless traumas, shape their bra wearing activity. Violet explained that “being a woman who takes

transit...I don't want to draw any extra attention.” Women mentioned a fear of “something terrible happening” if they were to be braless in front of the wrong people. The fear of the unknown includes the risk of sexual assault, harassment, or being fired from their job if they are braless in public in front of the wrong people. The fears of being sexualized are different than needing to police the risk of being read as inappropriate, abject, and publicly sexual by someone who might judge you for it (an old high school friend, the hairdresser, or your boyfriend’s friend). Being publicly sexual puts women in a position of vulnerability where they feel at risk of sexual harassment and being without a bra, they would be “at fault” for anything bad that happened while braless. Feeling uncertain about encountering others or an objectifying gaze shapes women’s perceptions and experiences while braless as well as how they navigate the space itself. These women used crossing their arms, staying in secluded areas, etc. as a way of reducing their obvious braless state. While this is often associated with spaces where women might be subject to the gaze of male strangers, even feminized spaces could produce a similar response. For example, women reported that feminized spaces varied in their requirement to wear a bra. Jaida felt the hair salon was an inappropriate place to be braless in because it was a space where women go to engage in femininity, not reject something that protects (and projects) that image. However, Michael’s, a craft store that I visited with three different women was reported as being quite a comfortable space for being braless in. Whether a space is perceived as masculine or feminine, a heteropatriachal gaze remains dominant, policing and defining certain types of standards of women and feminine behavior that is appropriate. Women self-police their bodies by wearing a bra as a way to perform femininity and demonstrate a proper (clean and contained) feminine body. Within Table 1, I provide examples of the feelings women articulated across the various spaces we visited as well as other geographic spaces that informed their bra(less) geographies. I include features of the place that describe why they perceive the space this way based on the gaze present and include whether or not they would be bra/less in the specific place.

Table 1) Examples of Feelings Experienced Across Specific Places

Space	Feature	Bra/less
Office	Social setting with coworkers	Never, one participant did, one wish she could

School (as a workplace)	Institution with children	Never
Post-secondary institution	Can include a variety of social compositions	Depends, interacting with male professors - never
Coffee Shop	Social setting, location of interviews	Yes, depends on social space
Craft Store	Feminized setting, location of interviews	Yes, no concerns
Public Transit	Social setting, lots of strangers	No, identified as a site that felt dangerous or risky based on the others in the space
Hair Salon	Feminized space, location of interviews	Yes but felt out of place
Bar	Can expect objectifying gaze	Depends on the woman
Clothing Store	Location of interviews	Yes, no major concerns
City under 10,000	Rural population	Never, too small locality

City ~ 1,000,000	Mid size population	Depends on the woman
City over 2,000,000	Large urban centre	Depends on the woman

What came out through the interviews was that women navigating public spaces while braless tended to follow heterosexual scripts. They experienced themselves as subject to sexual double standards where women are expected to perform and manage their bodies for men (Kim et al., 2007). Femininity is to be managed to maintain the status of “good girl” and avoid slipping into the “slut, whore or ho” category (Kim et al., 2007). Wearing a bra is important for women in these spaces because without a bra there is a threat of drawing attention to themselves in an inappropriate way. Public space is generally assumed to be space where heterosexual interactions are both likely and unpredictable, and because of this, women face potential threats or increased risks navigating these spaces while braless.

Throughout the interviews, women suggested that having their nipples made visible could lead to men noticing and sexualizing them, and that this might lead to men potentially being unable to control themselves. These women wore a bra to protect themselves from the gazes of others, specifically men, and to avoid inadvertently sexualizing their body. The notion that men cannot control themselves and that women must take responsibility for the gaze (and actions) of others contributed to women’s feelings that they need to wear a bra. Fearing that being braless will lead to lewd stares, catcalling, or an invitation to inappropriate touch perpetuates rape culture (Fanghanel, 2019). Under rape culture, women are taught that it is their responsibility to do everything possible (including covering and containing their bodies) to prevent rape and to not provoke men. If they fall short of this ideal, they are no longer able to claim the protection of being an innocent victim of sexual violence. This logic is dependent on and reinforces a sexual double standard that is a disservice to both genders.

The uncontained women’s physical body is taken to be an uncontained sexual body and is seen abjectly. Women are treated as sexual objects that are subject to judgement and men are viewed as being unable to control themselves at the site of a woman’s provocative body (Kim et al, 2007). For women in this study, wearing a bra was a safety tactic and a

preventative measure because of the assumption and fear that without a bra, men would not be able to control themselves at the site of a visible nipple. Women internalize the objectifying gaze, anticipating being sexualized; they take responsibility for how others will view them by dressing in ways that feel socially comfortable and safe, minimizing vulnerability. Being braless challenges a women's reputation as a "good girl" and questions her credibility. A good girl wears a bra and adheres to feminine and heteronormative expectations. When one's credibility is questioned, one's worthiness as someone who deserves protection under patriarchy is questioned. This presents in my study as women's concerns and fear for their safety and shapes their braless geographies.

6.3 Conclusion

In the same way the bra physically contains women's chests, so too do perceived societal expectations of bralessness contain women's imaginations regarding what shapes are possible to show in public. This study explored how women's lived experience of being braless uncovered the extent to which wearing a bra equates to following heteronormative rules. The bra emphasizes secondary sexual characteristics, displaying an ideal form of female embodiment that is privileged within Western culture. Women reported feeling like they had to wear a bra, and all described having being told at a young age to cover the shape of their developing breasts to fit in. A bra is a female rite of passage, training bras, which participants mentioned wearing, are often about making breasts more not less apparent to the viewer by shaping breasts and smoothing out visible nipples. Wearing a bra is a heteronormative practice that girls learn through socialization and is the start of the connection between objectification and abjection many women experience. The heterosexuality of public spaces is naturalized by the repetition of different forms of heterosexual conduct, like wearing a bra (Valentine, 1996, 49). Conforming to heteronormativity can itself become a form of comfort (Ahmed, 2014). This chapter has shown that even though being braless was more comfortable physically, women sacrificed their physical comfort for social comfort and fitting in, managing feelings of vulnerability that grew out of abjection and objectification. Feelings of concern were present in the visual representation of braless geographies provided (Figures 11-13). For women, navigating space while braless required a negotiation between physical, social, and psychological comfort.

Challenging their comfort zones by being braless, however, enabled them to simultaneously challenge heteronormative expectations with their braless bodies. Our bodies disrupted and challenged what was normative—to wear a bra and be contained—by walking through various public spaces without our bras. Without our bras, our bodies could be viewed in a variety of ways that women described in their interviews: “slutty,” “sloppy,” or “inappropriate”. During our braless walks, however, we did not encounter any overt suggestions that our bodies were in fact abject or wrong, nor were we knowingly overtly sexualized by the others occupying the space which allowed some women to have fun.

Despite the lack of overt censure during our braless walks, it is clear that women’s bra wearing habits and experiences while braless is predicated on a relationship between space and heteronormativity. Women internalize what society suggests is and is not acceptable and what conforms to a sexually appropriate female body. Heteronormative expectations shape women’s braless geographies in defining where it is appropriate to be without a bra or where it would be acceptable to show off one’s body, and women, by and large, acquiesce to these expectations as they navigate public spaces.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7 Conclusion

In this thesis, I reviewed research on bodies, gendered social discourse, and clothing, breasts and bras to support my embodied research approach. Based on the mobile interviews, I presented an array of participants' experiences while braless and discussed how feelings of comfort shaped their corporeal and subjective experiences. Focusing on how being braless creates feelings of vulnerability as a result of rape culture, I discussed the impacts of heteronormativity in shaping women's braless geographies. Returning to my research question, **'do women experience public space differently whether their breasts are contained or uncontained, and if so, where, when, and why?'**, I offered a spatial analysis of feelings of dis/comfort based on bralessness, showcasing sites of negotiation between social, physical, and psychological comfort, and highlighting the specific contexts and places when bralessness felt unacceptable. I proposed that these geographies are shaped by heteronormative social norms present across space to help answer the question of why women experience public space differently whether their breasts are contained or uncontained.

There were three significant things to note that were not discussed by participants that is revealing. Women who were white did not bring up race (including myself), no one mentioned their sexuality, and there was no discussion about the erotic aspects of their breasts. This can be partly explained by the interview questions not prompting women to reflect on these aspects. Specifically, when I asked about demographic data, I left it open ended to allow the women to highlight what they felt was important. I identify each of these areas: race, sexuality, nipples and erogeny, in relation to bralessness as potential sites of future inquiry. Women who identified as racialized brought up instances of how wearing a bra was a way to protect themselves from further discrimination. Their experiences of discrimination based on their race or gender were not explored in detail here, but such intersectional factors would offer a fruitful direction for further work. When I asked women to tell me about themselves, no one mentioned their sexuality. By omitting sexuality, it is assumed that heterosexuality is dominant and presented as being natural and the presumed

norm. Researching how sexuality shapes bra wearing experiences would be beneficial. Longhurst (2004, 2005a) identifies that nipples are seemingly too taboo to discuss, especially the erogenous nature of breasts. Women discussed their nipples in relation to them being visible while braless. The majority of women wanted to avoid having or seeing visible nipples in public, seeing nipples as being inappropriate. Of the thirteen women I interviewed, three were mothers and no one mentioned experiences with leaking nipples. Only one woman mentioned the double standard that exists with seeing men's nipples, explaining they are not sexualized the same way. Finding a way to further explore women's experiences with their nipples would be interesting to consider the specific point at which sexuality and motherhood intersect and how nipples disrupt space.

Since I started this thesis, women's relationships with their bras and physical comfort have changed as many were forced to stay home for humanity's sake. The COVID-19 pandemic shifted bra wearing habits and created a new category of otherness across boundaries of sick/healthy. For many women, staying home meant the abandonment of bras as they were less subject to the gaze present in public spaces. Research into women's relationships with their bras and how their habits may have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic would be beneficial, specifically considering how boundaries of otherness have been redefined with risks of illness dominating public discourse. Wearing a bra was a technique women used to avoid appear abjectly in public. They however mentioned the ways bras fail to contain their breasts with a lack of inclusive sizing. Recently there have been a number of underwear companies, like Knix and Third Love that focus on normalizing women's leaky, non-standard shaped bodies in a way that does not pathologize them. Offering an alternative for women, inclusive sizing rejects women's bodies as abject.

Upon reflection of the research project, there are a few things I would do differently. In trying to answer my research question, I did not produce universal results that could be generalized to all women or across all spaces; instead, I offered embodied experiences of the participants of the research project. In trying to answer, where, when, and why women experience their breasts differently whether contained or uncontained in public space, I feel that a more comprehensive framework to identify the parameters of where and why bralessness produced feelings of dis/comfort would be beneficial, specifically ensuring a greater representation of space, i.e. covering the full extent of Edmonton, Alberta (or another

city). I would be interested in having women try going without a bra for a full day and documenting their experiences in a journal to produce a more in-depth analysis of their braless experiences. This approach would not have me participate alongside participants and would potentially lead to different results. Additionally, I would be interested in conducting a broader study with greater representation across space, age, race, sexuality, and maternal experience. Specifically, a research study dedicated to trans experiences of wearing and navigating bras would produce vitally important subjective results. While these results focus on the embodied aspects of women's experiences, it is important to note the limitations of the research in producing generalizability. The contents of the research are specific to the women and the places visited and mentioned in the interviews. Women that participated in the study were uniquely positioned in a Western, North American cultural context where bralessness is subject to abjection and objectification. The results and discussion presented are specific to the place and time in which interviews took place (Summer, 2019 in Edmonton, Alberta).

This study was methodologically innovative: the mobile interviews were not only *bodily* in the sense that they incorporated physical movement; they also directly engaged with *embodiment* by asking women to remove their bras and reflect on their bodily feelings. This approach enabled the researcher and participants to explore feelings of abjection and objectification as they occurred, a potentially useful strategy for future research on embodiment.

Through the interview and interpretation process, there were a variety of things that surprised me. I didn't expect to find the prevalence of rape culture and its distorting effect on how women move through the world, particularly, how they navigate bra/less experiences. When analyzing the data from the walking interviews, the commonalities that were present included participants feeling afraid and vulnerable that their bodies could be subject to violence if they went without a bra. Anticipating potential violence shapes how we engage with our environments and the pervasiveness of heterosexual violence was evident in women's testimonies on their discomfort with being braless, fearing that "anything could happen". What came out of the results is the significance the bra has in shaping women's experiences and feelings of comfort. I was taken aback by how something as trivial as undergarments can have such a significant role in shaping someone's subjective experience. Our culture's obsession with containment is phenomenologically significant and produces distorting effects

across bodies and spaces. Women's relationships with their clothing and breasts are complicated by societal expectations. Without a bra, women encounter feelings of social discomfort and changes to their physical comfort, challenging their psychological comfort.

Considering the body as a site of protest, women challenge what is heteronormative with their braless bodies. Challenging normative femininity and the need to manage other people's comfort by containing the body, the braless, fluid body challenges boundaries of abjection in public space. When women prioritize their physical comfort over social comfort, this is an act of embodied resistance against normative notions of women's bodies. Embracing feelings of discomfort can lead to transformative acts of resistance in public space. By removing their bras, women challenged a norm and embraced some level of discomfort through the process, leading them to learn more about their habits and confront the reasons why they wear a bra.

Further research into how we navigate feelings of abjection and discomfort and the universality of these experiences would be fruitful. Creswell (1997, 342) argues that the out of place body might be a "liberating dynamic entity that provides lines of escape from the confines of territorial power," where the out of place body might also be a site from which to transform politics. Ahmed (2017) suggests that living a feminist life requires resisting comfort. Attending to sites of discomfort, like bralessness, may help enable a transformative politics to take place through the body where the braless body challenges notions of abjection.

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Appendices

Appendix A 1: Screening Questionnaire



SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Email:

Phone Number:

What is your preferred method of contact?

What is your age?

Do you feel comfortable walking for approximately 90 minutes?

Are there any accommodations that you might request should you participate in the study?

Appendix A 2: Interview Guide

The following is the interview guide I used with participants. Interviews were semi-formal in nature and included a response to the environment we were engaging with.



INTERVIEW GUIDE

Preliminary Interview

1. Question: Tell me about yourself?
 Prompt: Have you always lived in Edmonton? How old are you?
2. Question: Why did you decide to participate in this research study?
 Prompt: What interested you the most about the research?
3. Question: Tell me about your breasts?
 Prompt: What do you think about them? Are you comfortable with them? What is the best thing about having breasts? What is the worst thing about having breasts?
4. Question: Have you ever been braless in public before?
 Prompt: If yes, how frequently would you say you are braless? Are there any barriers that you feel exist that prohibit you from being braless in public? Why do you think these barriers exist?

Participants site selection will occur here. Participants will be asked to select approximately three locations that they frequent in their everyday geographies, such as a coffee shop, a park, or a grocery store. Participants will be asked to select locations that are approximately a 15 minute walk, or 1.5 km, distance apart.

5. Question: Have you ever been braless in the sites you selected?
6. Question: How do you feel about the mobile interviews?
 Prompt: Are you feeling nervous/anxious/excited/ambivalent, etc.?
7. Question: Do you have any concerns about being braless in public?
 Prompt: Is there anything that I can do to help you feel more comfortable?

Mobile Interview:

Bound Portion of Interview

8. Question: Why did you select the locations you did?
 Prompt: Is there anything noteworthy about where we are going to visit?
9. Question: Do you have any stories you want to share about a time you were in braless in public before?
 Prompt: Can you remember how you felt?
10. Question: Can you recall a time that you felt uncomfortable not wearing a bra?
 Prompt: Is there anyone you would never want to see you braless?
11. Question: Do you ever think about wearing a bra or is it something you just do?
 Prompt: What do you consider if you are going to be braless?
12. Question: When and why did you start wearing a bra?
 Prompt: Can you remember your feelings from that time?
13. Question: How do you normally feel when you visit this place?
 Prompt: How much time do you normally spend here? Do you feel the same as you usually do here?

Unbound Portion of Interview

14. Question: Do you feel any differently than you did when you were wearing a bra?
 Prompt: What do you notice that is the different or the same? Are you aware of Anything that you might not have been aware of before?
15. Question: How do you feel compared to when we first visited this location?
 Prompt: Do you feel comfortable here? Why? Why not? What do you think would Make you more comfortable?
16. Question: Do you feel like people notice when you are not wearing a bra?
 Prompt: Do you feel any differently if you are able to “conceal” that you are braless?
17. Question: Do you think you would feel differently if you were in a different place?
 Prompt: For example, if we visited differently locations within the city or were in a different country, etc.?
18. Question: Did you think about what you were going to wear before the interview today?
 Prompt: What did you consider?

Appendix B 1: Site Photos



This is an image from the walks with Monique, Jaida, Morgan and Bianca. This is the strip mall that is very car orientated.



This is an image of skinny pig taking at the pet store with Shea. She felt comforted by the animals while braless.



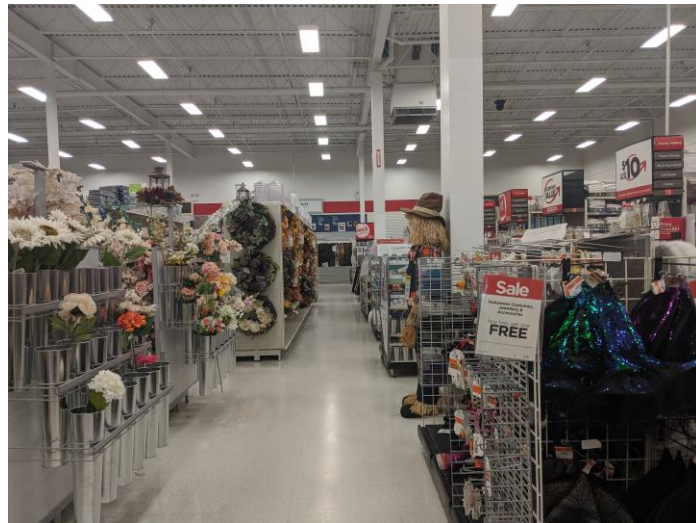
This is from The Shoe Warehouse I visited with Monique



This is an image from the walks with Monique, Jaida, Morgan and Bianca. This is the sidewalk connecting the stores.



This is the Home Sense I visted with Morgan and Bianca



This is the Michael's I visited with Jaida, Morgan and Bianca



This is the hallway to the bathroom at Michael's that I visited with Jaida, Morgan and Bianca



This is the bathroom at Michael's that I removed my bra alongside Jaida, Morgan and Bianca



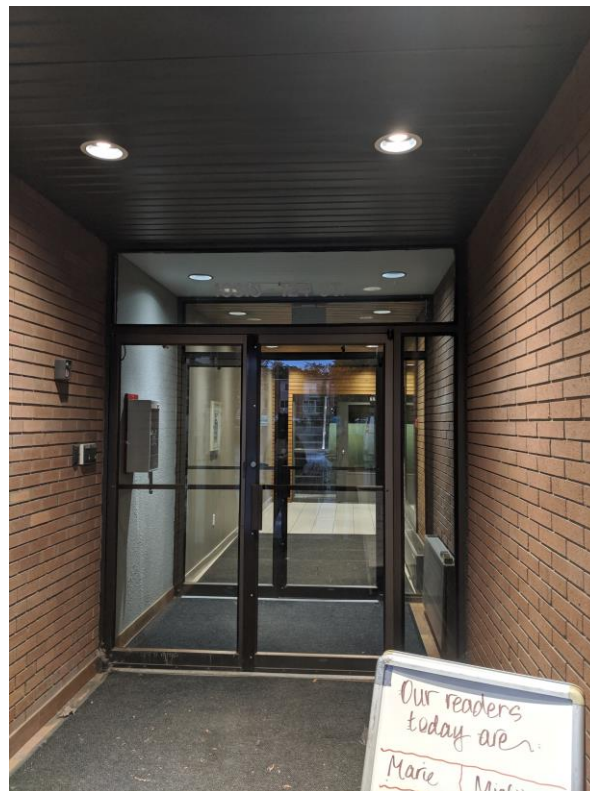
This is the hair salon, Chatter's that I visited with Jaida



This is the parking lot at the walks that I completed with Monique, Jaida, Morgan and Bianca



This is the book store that I visited with Latrice



With Nina, we couldn't find a bathroom to change in so she removed her bra in this little doorway that was adjacent to the bookstore we visited.

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