Which "Me" am I Going to be Today? Exploring Genetic Counselors' Attitudes on Expressing their "Authentic Self" in the Workplace

Brynna Nguyenton

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Which “Me” am I Going to be Today?
Exploring Genetic Counselors’ Attitudes on Expressing their “Authentic Self” in the Workplace

by

Brynna Nguyenton

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Science in Human Genetics and Genetic Counseling
School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences
Keck Graduate Institute

[2020]

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DEDICATION

To Wayan,

Whose mental support kept me going and financial support kept me fed,
Read every single draft of my manuscript,
And always supported, albeit at times questioned, my “Authentic Self.”

P.S. – What a long, strange trip it’s been.
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The 197 genetic counselors that took the time to respond to the survey and provide the data that made this study possible

My family for their unwavering support.
ABSTRACT

While professional organizations expect their employees to adhere to a cohesive image based on the social contract of professionalism, the modern workplace is growing increasingly diverse and freedom of self-expression is challenged by these traditionally defined norms. This study seeks to define these societal expectations and their implications in the context of a rapidly changing professional landscape. Individuals portray their true identities, or “authentic selves,” through their internal beliefs and external appearance, so naturally, these expressions may contradict the expectations for their professional appearance. Previous research has investigated professionalism, authentic selfhood, and the genetic counseling profession on separate levels, but a study encompassing the expression of genetic counselors’ “authentic selves” in the context of a professional setting has yet to be conducted. As genetic counselors are uniquely-trained healthcare providers at the intersection of a quickly growing profession, their perspectives on expressing their true identities may provide insight into the expectations and challenges to professional appearances of a rapidly growing profession. The study utilized an online, anonymous survey distributed to a genetic counselor listserv. Of the 197 total respondents, most felt supported by their employers in expressing their “authentic self” regardless of demography while multilingual respondents reported discrimination from clients. The strongest predictors of feeling supported by employers and job satisfaction was respondents’ comfort wearing culturally or religiously-identifying clothing, suggesting that the freedom to express cultural and religious identities are quite central to many respondents’ sense of true selfhood. These results may be useful to the genetic counseling profession, employers, and in the context of rapidly changing
professional environments, in understanding the implications of the “authentic self” and its challenges to traditional defined customs of professionalism.
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INTRODUCTION

Workforce diversity is defined as a heterogeneous environment and refers to both similarities and differences between individuals in an organization and encompasses race, ethnicity, culture, background, age, religion, gender identity, and more (Saxena, 2014). Diversity not only refers to an individual’s background and physical appearance, but also their internal identities, such as their personality, cognitive style, and personal prejudices (Patrick and Kumar, 2012). External identities are expressions of outer appearances, such as physical appearance, and internal identities, such as personal beliefs and biases, all contribute to form an individual’s sense of authentic selfhood. The intersection of an individual’s internal commitment to their own identity, or “authentic self”, alongside their external role identity performance directly relates to a sense of selfhood which is crucial to human development and growth (Ainsworth, 2013).

In the context of the workplace, external identity roles primarily manifest as an individual’s professional appearance. As defined by Brosky and others, professionalism can be characterized as a function of clinical acumen, engagement, and capability, or as an image that can encourage a successful relationship when engaging with clients (Brosky et al., 2003; Johnson et al., 2014). The main method of expressing both external identities and professionalism is through clothing, jewelry, and grooming habits. Clothes, and how they are styled, play a significant role in the self-identification and role definition for many individuals. Individual styles often have great psychosocial implications for both the wearer and those interacting with the wearer while communicating the wearer’s sense of personal identity (Bowman et al., 1991, p.330; Cerny, 1993).
While clothing and other physical forms of expression serve to represent an individual’s “authentic self,” professionals are also expected to adhere to a certain code of conduct and exhibit specific attributes related to their profession. Traditionally, professional appearances are typically aligned with a dominantly white, heteronormative narrative (Dellinger, 2002). With the implementation and enforcement of these standards, employees may feel pressure to conform to these guidelines to reassure others that they follow traditional social and gender norms. Especially in the context of an increasingly diverse workforce, those who do not agree with long-established professional norms may feel at odds with their inability to express their “authentic self.” As identified in previous research, an individual’s self-expression is inextricably linked to human growth and if their sense of identity is challenged, these standards may be met with resistance (Ainsworth, 2013; Johnson et al., 2014).

In considering the rapidly changing professional landscape of genetic counseling, this health care profession is at the unique intersection of advancing technology and providing psychosocial patient support. With the need for genetic counseling services rising, the profession is growing rapidly and genetic counselors, while primarily consisting of young Caucasian females, are growing increasingly diverse and mirroring the population that they serve. Through assessing genetic counselors’ perceptions on their “authentic self” expression, this study aims to identify factors that influence their representation in the workplace, challenges to traditionally defined norms of professional attire, and its implications in a quickly evolving professional context.
BACKGROUND

Historical Frameworks of Professionalism

Before diving into the implications of demographics and physical expression in regards to professional appearances, it is important to first define the context of professionalism and how it has socially manifested. Professionalism is a socially developed process where a business or field with employees are held to standards of expertise and principle set forth by their respective professional associations (Salloch, 2016). Professional members are expected to conform to the group’s code of conduct and abide by the established procedures as outlined by the organization.

Most societies and cultures place value in competent individuals who are proficient in a specific specialty. Historically, European medieval craft guilds systematized skilled workers and thus, supported the rise of professionalism (Sox, 2007). These medieval guilds regulated the quality of goods produced and established guidelines for the progression of apprentice to craftsman, all while creating suitable working environments and adequate income for professional members (Salloch, 2016; Sox, 2007). As codes of professional conduct are seen as expressions of professionalism, professional organizations sought to establish a more cohesive image among members through the enforcement of guidelines for workplace appearance. To maintain a more cohesive professional image while maintaining the respect and consumers and other professionals, employees must adhere to professional standards and guidelines.

As more individuals acknowledge the benefits of belonging to a profession and wanted to become professionals themselves, professional associations became more exclusive to protect the
integrity of what it meant to be a member of their organization. Individuals who wanted to become professionals needed to be approved by existing members and had to be evaluated on their level of competency, which eventually lead to the establishment of credentialing bodies and licensure requirements (Salloch, 2016). Professionals maintain extensive knowledge of their respective specialties and provide self-regulation of each organization at differing degrees across professions and the establishment of social infrastructure and professional philosophy (Greenwood, 1957). In allowing the privilege of self-governance for each professional organization, they must also recognize the limitations of their own expertise, especially in the context of ethical issues (Kennedy, 1981; Salloch, 2016).

To an increasingly diverse society, professionalism serves an essential function in providing context for societal differences and standardizing the process for both professionals and those seeking their services (Roiphe, 2012). For socially marginalized foreigners and outsiders, professionalism provided a means of going beyond their ostracized social status and entering society as a professional through their own hard work and perseverance (Cohen, 1916). In American society, professionalism was way to preserve various versions of the “American Dream” and allowed newcomers to progress to higher social ranks through a system of merit (Parker and Rostain, 2012; Roiphe, 2012). Unlike other social constructs, professionalism provided an opportunity for individuals of varied backgrounds, regardless of cultural or religious differences, to enter the community with a combination of determination and intellect.

While the construct of professionalism served to provide benefits to both the individual and society, its history was also colored with elitism and exclusion. During the establishment of professionalism, physicians and lawyers were considered among the social elite as a result of
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their university educations (Roiphe, 2012). As the social elite adopted professionalism within their own associations, these groups became entwined with political movements and capitalistic crusades in an effort to deviate from the traditional guild establishment of those in lower social ranks (Salloch, 2016). Professional ideology was further used for capitalistic greed in attempting to preserve power within the middle-class elite as an outcome of xenophobia and the onset of a more diverse workforce (Roiphe, 2012). As individuals migrated from various backgrounds and locations, entering society as a professional became increasingly difficult. Blatant discrimination and prejudice were used by Anglo-Saxon white males to further maintain the homogeneity of their profession and to exclude those that did not fit the mold (Friedman, 2002). Exploitation in the name of professionalism was utilized to establish ranks within the organization and to condone the exclusion of outsiders, particularly ethnic and racial minorities, and women (Mack, 2002). Although professional landscapes have increased in diversity, the traditional narrative of a dominant white professional continues to be rooted in professionalism.

**Heteronormative Standards of Professional Appearance.**

Heteronormativity is the perspective that standardized heterosexuality and gender norms further support the social expectation that men and women portray a strict binary construct in line with masculinity and femininity (Butler, 2011; Pascoe, 2005). As a social institution, the effects of heteronormativity are felt in various aspects of everyday life from behaviors to identity and expression. Stereotypical features of masculinity encompass power and indifference with threats to this norm aligning towards more feminine characteristics, like care-giving and expressiveness, or homosexual identities and sexualities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005;
Pascoe, 2005). In addition to heteronormative roles, individuals are expected to conform to their respective gender identities and are held accountable in aligning their expression to their assigned sex (Collingham, 2016). Regardless of their inclination to follow or disregard these social customs, the social pressure and expectations of each individual is ever present as individuals may be expected to socially connect in ways that align with their assumed gender role, which in turn, further support the heteronormative infrastructure of men and women and marginalize those outside of them (Collingham, 2016; Hollander, 2013; Jackson, 1995).

In the context of professional appearance guidelines, heteronormative expectations for men include a button-down collared shirt, slacks, and dress shoes while women often do not adhere to as strict definitive professional attire when compared to men (Smith et al., 2018). While previous research has determined that women are judged on their appearance in professional settings (Watkins and Johnston, 2002), they also have more options to modify their clothing and appearance and oftentimes, the professional boundaries for appropriate women’s dress may be difficult to distinguish. Women have considerable choices for business dress with options including blouses, dress slacks, formal skirts, formal dresses, and dress shoes. While men’s professional attire is typically static, women can alter the hemline of their skirts and dresses, the neckline cut, and how tight their clothes fit (Smith et al., 2018). Depending on their profession, women may also be expected to wear makeup, wear accessories, or make other additions to their appearance. While women have more options to choose from, and thus more options to modify their appearance, research suggests that women presenting perceived sexualized appearances are often negatively viewed as incompetent or inept as a leader (Smith et al., 2018). Both men and women were identified to correlate women with a sexualized
appearance with a lack of stereotypical masculine traits, such as competency and power, and
determined that these women would be poor candidates for conventionally masculine jobs, such
as those in leadership positions regardless of their qualifications (Deaux et al., 1985). Thus,
research continues to identify men and masculinity as being favored over females and femininity.
While men and particularly, women, should be able to dress in a manner that expresses
themselves while being professional, other individuals will continue to make judgement and
biases based on appearance (Smith et al., 2018). For individuals who remain outside of the
traditional heteronormative constructs, a lack of literature suggested that there are no
professional customs to guide their professional attire.

**Professional Standards of Appearance in the Workplace**

Psychologists, sociologists, and social scientists have long studied the influence of
physical appearance and its effects on how others perceive, judge, and communicate with each
other. From one’s physical characteristics to what clothes we are wearing, these components are
often the basis of others’ first impressions of the wearer, from personal characteristics, social
statuses, to attitudes to work simply from what the semiotic codes of appearance. Oftentimes,
clothes and how they are worn serve to express an individual’s identity and can have powerful
psychological implications to the wearer and those around them (Cerny, 1993).

Professional dress guidelines serve to provide guidance to employees regarding
appropriate work-wear, to provide a sense of commonality and to identify in-group identify that
separates them from other groups and professions (Entsuah et al., 2018; Furnham et al., 2013).
At the same time, professionals are expected to adhere to a certain code of conduct and exhibit
specific attributes related to their profession. There is a range of appropriate work attire between industries and can vary from uniforms, formal and business wear, and more casual apparel. Typically, the formality and tone of workplace dress guidelines are dictated by the level of interaction employees have with clients (Furnham et al., 2013).

Similar to most professions, medical attire is not static. In recent decades, professionalism in health care has had a variety of ambiguous definitions as each role has a different expectation regarding professional dress (Stevens, 2002). Most published literature is focused on medical attire towards the professional appearance of a physician with an overwhelming majority of respondents favoring a physician in more traditional items of dress aligned with a more business formal code along with physician-identifying items like a white coat (Barrett et al., 1994; Bond et al., 2010; Douse et al., 2004; Gherardi, et al., 2009; Gooden et al., 2001; Gjerdingen et al., 1987). In fact, several studies identified compelling evidence that patients strongly preferred physicians wearing white coats while providing patient care, and in some cases, lead to better rapport, communication, and confidence-building during the medical encounter (Bond et al., 2010; Cha et al., 2004; Furnham et al., 2014; Rehman et al., 2005;). Interestingly, the phenomenon where patients perceive a higher level of care from a physician wearing a white coat is also referred to as the “white coat syndrome” (Matsui et al., 1998) and has also been observed in countries outside of the U.S. (Barrett et al., 1994; Gherardi et al., 2009; Ikusaka et al., 1999; Keenum et al., 2003; Kazory et al., 2008; Petrilli et al., 2016). Regardless of patients’ preferences for the professional appearance of their health care providers, the fact stands that the providers’ attire has and will continue to be considered an influential instrument of establishing a good first impression in any patient interaction (Gherardi et al., 2009).
When not wearing white coats, physicians will typically wear business formal clothes. Similarly, health care professionals, particularly those who provide interact with patients, are also held to the expectations of a traditional business formal dress. Genetic counselors are employed in a range of settings ranging from clinics and hospitals to biotechnology companies, with 59% providing direct patient care, 25% providing non-direct patient care, and 16% providing both (NSGC PSS, 2019). As the majority of genetic counselors provide direct patient care, genetic counselors are also typically held to the same dress guidelines as other health care professionals. For genetic counselors that do not provide direct patient care, the dress code can vary depending on company policies and workplace culture.

The culmination of controversy surrounding workplace dress codes rests on the definition itself as there is a broad spectrum of interpretation for attire ranging from “business formal” to “business casual” (Shinn et al., 2011). Furthermore, while a traditional dress code is assumed to be straightforward and a black-and-white code of conduct in the workplace, there can be various interpretations on what a professional appearance entail. Culminating factors such as the diversification of the workforce, the companies that they work for, and the modern era of the 21st century have played significant roles in challenging the more antediluvian aspects of what is deemed appropriate professional attire (Dellinger, 2002; Middlemiss, 2018; Taylor et al., 201).

Racial and ethnic identities are one of the most fundamental social components in modern American culture where their representation and performance are realized through symbolic customs of dress and grooming habits (Ainsworth, 2013). As the workplace grows increasingly diversified culturally, ethnically, and religiously, it is inevitable for personal and individual values to be expressed in the workplace (Messarra, 2014). Considering the salwar kameez ensemble that numerous Indian women wear, the dreadlocks and braid hairstyles of Black individuals, as well as other cultural and religious dress, the expression of cultural and religious identities are increasingly represented at work. The U.S. Equal Employment of Opportunity Commission defines religious attire and grooming habits as wearing religious dress or articles, observing religious bans against wearing certain attire, or complying to shaving or hair length practices (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2019). According to Oliveira, groups that openly support their employees to express their spiritual identities have an increased likelihood of becoming more successful (Oliveira, 2004). However, individuals are more likely to experience discrimination as they increasingly make their religion known to others (Scheitle et al., 2017). Previous studies have been conducted of Muslim women and have suggested that their decisions to wear a hijab negatively impacted their ability to obtain employment, especially when interacting with the public (Ghumman et al, 2008 & 2013) to the point where many respondents intentionally covered or downplayed their “Muslimness” by avoiding religious distinctive clothing (Mythen et al., 2009).
In fact, religious discrimination claims have significantly increased compared to other protected groups under the Civil Rights Act, with effects stronger for Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Evangelical Protestants, and atheists (Ghumman et al., 2013; Scheitle et al., 2017). As a result, federal rules and regulations have been established to protect employees and employers against discrimination and prejudice. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, employers are legally required to make exceptions to permit employees to observe their respective religious and culturally-identifying dress and grooming habits (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2019). While workplace dress guidelines should be modified to respect all cultures and ethnicities, avoid any stereotypes, and should apply equally to all employees, the severity of these regulations can lead to discord and legal conflicts over employee appearance which, if not handled carefully by employers, can even result in decreased job satisfaction (Middlemiss, 2018).

In addition to physical expression, the social construct of cultural identity can be additionally expressed through language. As the contemporary workplace becomes increasingly international and multilingual, a varying amount of languages contribute to the professional setting (Angouri, 2014). However, the presence of multiple languages may present with unique challenges for the organization of the professional community as some languages suggest to be more beneficial than others (Barwell, 2003). Linguistic discrimination is defined as discrimination based on language when prejudicial advantages, beliefs, or treatment of individuals speaking minority languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995). Often, individuals in the minority language group must learn the majority group language in order to participate or be included. In this way, minority languages may be undervalued and members of the minority
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language group may be at a disadvantage (Barwell, 2003). As English is the most widely spoken language worldwide, individuals of a minority language group or those who are multilingual may feel pressured to repress their original identity and conform. Also referred to as the “English-only rule,” Rodriguez argues that this phenomenon illustrates how employer regulation of their employee’s behaviors can further hinder their identities and their connection to their respective communities (Rodriguez). Preservation and protection of the individual’s right to speak non-English languages has implications not only limited to personal identity and expressive interests, but also to their societal identity.

**Hairstyle and the Performance of Racial Identity.**

Cultural and religious identity is not limited to clothing or jewelry, but also expands to how an individual wears their hair. The communication of identity and image has long been hair and how it is styled. As observed by Brownmiller, this is because hair is able to be shaped and styled in a variety of designs and techniques (Brownmiller, 1984). Previous studies interviewed women who altered their hairstyles (an Asian woman curling her hair because her straight hair was “too Asian” and a Chicana women who grew out her hair to cover her “more ethnic” features) in attempts to downplay their racial or ethnic identities due to the social expectations set against them (Rosette et al., 2007). Regardless of intentionality, hair will continue to have social meaning for the wearer and convey a message to those around them, but expected social norms will contribute to how the wearer will express their identity through their hair.

For most professional women, hairstyle choice is limited to its length, color, cut, and style. Grooming options for Caucasian women are typically derived from personal preference
and is free of negative connotations and stereotypes, whereas the same issues for a Black woman [or a woman of minority] presents with a constrained choice as they must adapt to the norms and expectations of their Caucasian counterparts (Rosette et al., 2007).

For women of Black ancestry, hair has historically been closely intertwined with symbolism and social connotation. The distinctive hair texture that is characteristic of numerous Black individuals has long contributed to a racist belief as a symbol of “otherness” and the inferiority to further exclude Black women (Ainsworth, 2013). Individuals whose different hair texture from most Caucasian women were left to assimilate to the images of a set of beauty ideals or to embrace their natural hair and in doing so, celebrating their Black identity. Typically, the natural hair texture of Black individuals is wooly, kinky, or tightly curled and oftentimes, very expensive to style so that it adheres to traditional professional guidelines (Rosette et al., 2007). Oftentimes, these style options can lead to hair breakage or even skin diseases (Samalonis, 2005). Unfortunately for Black women, having hairstyles that work with their natural hair textures are not socially accepted and are typically considered inferior to styles that are more reflective of Caucasian standards of beauty. While there are myriad reasons as to why Black women choose to comply to these standards, the pressure for Black women to conform is very powerful and is often suggested to be the primary reason in addition to diminishing the negative misconception that they are outsiders, preserving their professional image, and avoiding negative career consequences (Ainsworth et al., 2013; Rosette et al., 2007).
Dress, Makeup, Jewelry, and the Expression of Gender Identity.

Since birth, social expectations of gender traditionally dictate an individual’s identity. By providing only two options of gender identity, these societal norms are enforced as the individual’s identity must align with their sex at birth, male and female (Dietert and Dentice, 2009). According to West and Zimmerman, gender is a societal construct established through social interactions rooted and reinforced in traditional norms and expectations set by social institutions (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Individuals are expected to adhere to societal expectations by acting accordingly, while those who deviate from the norm are made aware of their gender infractions. As social gender identity norms molded what would become traditional gender roles, everchanging societal customs and values further influenced the establishment of these beliefs.

Various social structures and interactions, such as restroom or clothing use, serve to maintain gender binary norms and individuals often must decide on how they identify or present themselves. Often, these binary constructs establish guidelines based on the assumed gender norms of the individual’s interactions, such as how their gender and sexual identity is recognized (Dietert and Dentice, 2009). While binary gender expectations are typically enduring, individuals identifying as transgender challenge these stringent constructs. The term transgender describes individuals whose gender identity and/or expression do not match the mainstream gender expectations affiliated with their sex at birth (Vidal-Ortiz, 2002). While multiple sexual identities can exist within transgender individuals, so too can individuals of the binary gender norm, resulting in individuals redefining their own gender identities (Vidal-Ortiz, 2002; Dietert and
Dentice, 2009). As evidenced through published literature, individuals may identify according to binary norms, on a fluid spectrum of gender roles and identities referred to as queer theory, or as variations that best describe their true self (Stein and Plummer, 1996). When veering from their assigned sex and gender, individuals are authentically expressing themselves and exhibiting control over their personal self-expression. With the struggle of stringent mainstream expectations and individuals’ desire to present their true identities, non-binary identifying individuals experience restraint and discrimination which touches all aspects of their lives, including the workplace. According to Irwin, his study surveying openly queer and non-binary identifying groups determined over 60% of participants had experienced some form of harassment or discrimination in the workplace (Irwin, 2008).

In addition to individual self-expression, gender, gender identity, and gender culture are often communicated through semiotic dress and appearance (Kaiser et al., 1993; Schilt et al., 2009). Particularly in Western culture, clothing and grooming habits are gendered and clearly linked to the fluid ideologies of gender, sexuality, and social hierarchy depending on social context (Workman et al., 1993). Clothing associated with masculinity denotes that the wearer is more powerful, whereas clothing deemed as more feminine is associated with a weaker and more powerless persona (Owyong et al., 2009). For example, males are expected to show very minimal interest in their dress and appearance, whereas females are expected to be the exact opposite and to be very attentive to their physical presentation. Furthermore, gender-associated dress and grooming practices also leads others to presume conventional gender-role conformity by the wearer, which leads to people interacting differently with the wearer based on these assumptions (Workman et al., 1993). Many societies, including American culture, follow a
binary gender expectation allowing individuals to identify as either male or female. Since there are only two choices of gender identity, gender identities that are nonbinary are restricted (Dietert and Dentice, 2009). Currently, gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles are increasingly diminishing in Western culture with an increasing number of individuals viewing gender as a non-binary or fluid construct. In fact, gender neutrality is redefining societies and local customs from language use, dress codes, to parenting methods, among others (Hamalainen, 2019).

One of the most strictly gender-differentiated aspects of appearance is facial makeup, which has been considered in Western society to be inextricably linked to females where they can be encouraged and, in some cases, expected to wear makeup. The more modern semiotic association between wearing makeup and the wearer’s assumed support for more traditional female gender roles makes the obligatory requirement to wear cosmetics problematic for women who personally renounce more conservative gender expectations (Ainsworth, 2013; Ogilvie, 2005). On the other hand, males are traditionally not permitted to wear makeup at any time, regardless of its subtlety. However, there has been a notable shift towards men wearing makeup at work in more recent years and showing increasing engagement with interests typically associated with femininity (Gill et al., 2005). Overall, attitudes towards the use of cosmetics, the reconstruction of gender identity, and other gender transgressing methods have become more accepting over time (Hjort and Komulainen, 2017).

While social and professional appearance are traditionally specified for female and male gender roles, individuals who are gender fluid or identify as transgender do not have established guidelines. The LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning and others)
community encompasses various spectrums of sexuality and gender. According to the 2016 Gallup poll, about 4.1% of American adults identify as LGBTQ+ (Gallup poll, 2016). Despite a rising number of individuals identifying as LGBTQ+ as a result of feeling more comfortable in an increasingly accepting society (Pew Research, 2013), there is little to no literature on the experiences of those in the LGBTQ+ community in the workplace aside from more specialized articles that are applicable to a small subset of the population like LGBTQ+ physicians and LGBTQ+ librarians (Eliason et al., 2011; Nectoux, 2011).

As professional guidelines for workplace appearance are well-established for females and males, conversely, individuals that do not prescribe to heteronormative roles do not have clear expectations. Unfortunately, there are limited publications on workplace dress codes specifically for LGBTQ+ individuals, but there are resources on how to create a more LGBTQ+ inclusive workplace, including a complete guide to being transgender in the workplace (Rosenstone, 2019; Sheridan, 2009). For transgender individuals that begin the transitioning process (often culminating in having sex reassignment surgery), the Benjamin standards are suggested to help with the physical and psychological aspects of transitioning and require the individual to publicly present themselves as their identified sex (Meyer III et al., 2002). While some workplaces continue to become more accepting of the LGBTQ+ community, it is crucial to continue to foster an inclusive workplace environment as more than one in four individuals identifying as transgender have lost their job as a result of bias, and discrimination in the workplace (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2019). To further combat employment bias, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission serves to enforce sex discrimination laws to help combat employment bias alongside the National Center for Transgender Equality.
In addition to dress, other aspects that consist of personal appearance including jewelry, body modifications, and grooming further convey the nonverbal message of the wearer’s identity and social position. For modern dress, jewelry and other decorative apparel are typically grouped into the feminine category, although certain types of jewelry, like functional jewelry, are deemed socially acceptable for males (Workman et al., 1993). In some cases, professional athletes wearing jewelry are not typically perceived as “feminizing,” but represent their wealth through their athletic abilities, which tend to be a more masculine characteristic (Ainsworth et al., 2013). Observers tend to respond based on what they assume about the wearer’s appearance and if there is a contradiction in between what is assumed and how the wearer wants to be perceived, this can potentially lead to interpersonal misconceptions and even feelings of estrangement for the wearer (Ainsworth, 2013).

**Body Modifications and Grooming Habits in the Workplace.**

There is no limit to the ways in which an individual can express themselves, and particularly in the context of an increasingly evolving professional environment, it is important for both employers and employees to be cognizant of the infinite manners of self-expression. While clothes and hairstyles contribute to an individual’s physical appearance, a more controversial form of expression in the workplace are tattoos and other methods of altering one’s body. Tattoos and body modifications, defined in this study as piercings anywhere in the body besides the earlobes, are also nonverbal attributes used to express the wearer’s character. Tattooing is not a novel phenomenon and has been gaining popularity as the amount of people getting tattoos exponentially growing and continuing to rise with the number of body piercings.
following closely behind (Harkins, 2006). According to the Pew Research Center, the rate of
tattoos has significantly increased with the passing of each generation with 38% of Americans
between the ages 18 to 29 having a tattoo of which 30% were described as visible (Pew Research
Study, 2006 & 2010). Another study estimated that 30% of the U.S. adult population has a tattoo,
body piercing, or a combination of the two (Laumann et al., 2006). As this population makes up
a large portion of the working force, workplace dress codes are forced to adapt to these aspects
that contribute to an employee’s physical appearance. Many workplaces, with the exception of
the more stringent standards of the service industry, are relatively tolerant of tattoos and
piercings, as long as they are not visible (Miller et al, 2007; Timming et al., 2017). There are a
handful of studies investigating the recruitment of visibly tattooed job applicants with most
providing little to no relevance to the larger service sector or examined body art with relation to
employment law (Elzweig et al., 2011; Swanger et al., 2006; Timming et al., 2017). However, a
common thread was identified among these studies that most employers viewed visible body art
negatively with less than 30% of employers in the service sector hiring an applicant with visible
tattoos (Bekhor et al., 1995). While tattoos are increasing in popularity, many people associate
tattoos with conventionally controversial activities such as a lack of religious belief,
incarceration, drinking, and drug use (Laumann et al., 2006). There are even fewer studies
conducted on body piercings in the workplace, but there is overall consensus that facial piercings
carry significantly negative stigma resulting in an applicant’s credibility ratings being drastically
lowered (McElroy et al., 2014; Swami et al., 2012). For individuals with tattoos and body
piercings, the effects of stigmatization across workplaces will vary with the situational context of
the subject of prejudice and the prejudiced (Miller et al., 2009; Timming et al., 2017). Since
much depends on the discretion and individual cases, it is recommended to have a clearly communicated policy pertaining to appropriate dress attire to clearly define expectations for employees (Jones, et al., 2015).

While there is a regimented expectation of workplace dress for both men and women, there is no doubt that women are subjected to more stringent requirements. From a glance through any women’s fashion magazine to casually observing women’s street style, it will reveal the universal and pervasive beauty ideals for women with all standards pointing towards youthfulness. Though these are impossible standards to achieve for most women, it has been accepted and internalized by many women worldwide and as a result, there is some level of body dissatisfaction that has become normal for women, especially in Western cultures (Mills et al., 2017; Rodin et al., 1985; Tiggeman et al., 2004). As a consequence, women are motivated to try to alter their bodies to match these beauty ideas through dieting, exercise, cosmetics, hairstyle, cosmetic surgery, and other grooming habits (Tiggeman et al., 2004). Although there has been a variety of articles published about the idealized female body, there is little research on the theory of smooth and hairless skin as shaving legs and underarms are typically seen as commonplace behavior for most women as incorporated in part of their normal grooming routine (Fahs, 2011). Employers often enforce policies to dictate employee appearance and regulate grooming but they are often ambiguous and often mandate for hair and facial hair to be tidily maintained to present a professional appearance (National Law Review; Safdar et al., 2019). Women learn to conform to these standards to escape workplace determination, negative judgments and even violence (Anderson & Holliday, 2004; Button, 2004; Rosenfeld, 2009). However, in frequently imposing stagnant dress and grooming restraints on employees, professional appearance guidelines serve
as a focal point for controversy over the visual representation and expression of personal identities (Ainsworth, 2013).

**Workplace Culture and the Construction of the “Employee” Identity**

In society, companies are treated as miniature societies and communities as they establish their own cultures and expectations (Mawere, 2011; Tran, 2017). The professional culture of the workplace is dependent on the performance of the business as well as the relationships between those involved in the organization (Bhagat et al., 2012). Naturally, organizations will inevitably encounter cooperation issues amongst individuals and groups. While business success is reliant on workplace culture, it also has important implications for those employed there (Ahmad et al., 2007). Workplace culture can be defined as an intricate combination of the norms established from an employee’s job role (occupational culture) and the norms emerging from where the employee performs that duty (organizational culture) (Dellinger, 2002). Occupational psychologists and sociologists have suggested that workplace culture continues to perpetuate gender inequality as various occupations establish different standards that enforce gender roles upon their employees (Dellinger, 2002; Stamasaki et al., 2015).

By imposing these dress and grooming standards, professional guidelines for appearance in the workplace represents both an opportunity and point of controversy over visual representation and the expression of personal identity. Additionally, employees’ preferences for workplace attire and its effects on their own self-perceptions were found to play a part in their selfhood (Peluchette et al., 2007). By complying to these established workplace dress codes, employees make choices to uphold their identities as employees, which may contradict their own
As racial identities and gender roles are attained partly through self-expression of dress and grooming practices, enforcement of dress codes dictated by employers may be met with resistance from employees whose individual sense of identity is challenged by these expectations (Ainsworth, 2013; Brower, 2013). Far from being focused on superficial matters of personal preference, conflicts over professional attire represent an opportunity to resist the employers’ dominance over the employees’ portrayal of their “authentic self” and to further evaluate and challenge the conventional establishments of racial and gender identities in today’s world (Ainsworth, 2013).

**Acculturation**

As the development of an individual’s identity can result from a combination of their backgrounds and personal beliefs, challenges to traditionally defined norms can be equally diversified. Particularly in the context of a diversifying workforce, the racial and ethnic makeup of America is ever-changing as waves of immigrants continually contribute to significant cultural and phenotypic diversity of the American melting pot (Perez et al., 2010). In a rapidly developing professional setting, previously defined boundaries between racial and ethnic populations are becoming increasingly blurred.

Throughout the course of history, the migration of individuals and the process of globalization has led to cultural changes altering various aspects of the modern world. Acculturation is the process of changes resulting from managing culturally diverse groups while simultaneously acclimating to norms determined by the predominant culture (Gibson, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2013). This mechanism is not to be confused with enculturation, the process in
which an individual learns about their surrounding culture and obtains their beliefs and standards while retaining their own cultural values (Kim and Abreu, 2001). The effects of acculturation are often observed across cultures, religion, social organizations, and can also have implications on psychosocial being and health (Schwartz et al., 2013). While acculturation can be experienced through physical enforcement of the dominant culture’s norms, it more typically occurs through social pressures or constant exposure to the prevailing culture. Acculturation can be felt at both group and individual levels. At the group level, consequences of this process are felt more broadly and apply to a large group of people which can include cultural and religious changes, or even changes to health care and social organizations (Sam and Berry, 2010). In the context of an individual, acculturation can lead to a cultural blend of values and customs of the host culture resulting in changes to the individual’s behavior and psychosocial well-being (Sam and Berry, 2010; Schwartz et al., 2013).

As professional landscapes, particularly in America, have become increasingly diversified, the effects of culture in the workplace have been additionally studied. Similar to the challenges of immigrants assimilating to their host country culture, employees who come from a cultural or demographic background that is not the majority culture in their workplace may feel pressured to with assimilate with the dominant culture or retain their indigenous identity (Erten et al., 2018). Many employees will often assimilate to the host culture to avoid experiencing discrimination or alienation (Lee et al., 2016). Resulting strategies for how to acculturate are thoroughly described in literature and outlined as follows including, assimilating with the new culture, separating oneself from the new culture to maintain the original culture, integrating the original culture with the dominant one, and marginalizing oneself when no effort is made to
maintain the original culture or adopt the new one (Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 2003). Individuals who face the challenges of abandoning elements of their indigenous culture, also known as “culture shedding,” or adopting aspects of the predominant culture, referred to as “culture learning,” may be uncomfortable and at odds with the clash of cultures (Tonder and Soontiens, 2014) and may experience culture shock or the resulting anxiety from experiencing a loss of familiar cultural norms and cues with an unfamiliar culture (Brown and Holloway, 2008, p.34).

In the context of a rapidly changing professional landscape, employees who are met with the issue of acculturation may feel resistance to either conform to the new culture or maintain their original one. Regardless of the outcomes of acculturation, individuals may feel a lack of authenticity as they are pressured to alter the expression of their own identities.

**The Construction and Definition of the “Authentic Self”**

In modern society, an individual’s authentic identity is experienced as the crossroads of multiple social identities with constantly shifting roles dependent on infinite situations and contexts (Wagner et al., 2013, pg. 242). As selfhood is created and experienced through this unique and complex intersection, it is then that an individual’s identity comes to be actualized as their authentic selfhood. According to Ainsworth, the “authentic self” is the unadulterated interpretation of which an individual is comprised (Ainsworth, 2013).

As the experience and development of personal selfhood plays a significant role in human growth, psychoanalytic scholars suggest that the complex process of an individuals’ “authentic self” is strongly rooted in the agreement between the external identity role performance and the internal private commitment to their own selfhood (Callero, 1985; Havens,
1986). In fact, psychology researchers have recognized that people can have collective identities that contribute to their overall “authentic self”, with some being more pivotal to their “authentic self” as others can be dependent on the social situation (Ainsworth, 2013; Callero, 1985). The more important and essential a facet of identity is to the individual’s impression of their unique selfhood, the greater the need to solidify and assert that self through social means of expression (Bell, 2008).

**Multiple “Authentic Selves.”**

Depending on their job roles and workplace environment, workers may encounter differing expectations about when to express their personal identities and their employee identities (Dellinger, 2002). These unwritten organizational standards contribute to a large role in gender and sexual expression of employees at work and as such, should be more closely monitored by those that dictate these group norms in an attempt to achieve equality for men and women in the workplace.

Many Americans associate with multiple identities that manifest from complex ancestral origins, associations with community, and heterogeneous ideologies reflected in their racial and cultural perspectives. While multiracial individuals do not change their ethnicities haphazardly, individuals can emphasize various aspects of their ethnicities and identities depending on the situation and their environment (Perez et al., 2009). While not all expressions of identity are for the purpose of representing the “authentic self”, individuals may find themselves consciously (or subconsciously) minimizing their identities, coined as “covering” by Yoshino, especially when those attributes are depreciated or stigmatized within society (Ainsworth, 2013; Yoshino, 2002).
Typically, these social pressures are often socially implied or implicitly demanded by others that individuals cover up an aspect of their identities. For example, racial minorities may feel strongly pressured to integrate white vernacular or clothing styles to cover their racial identities or women may feel burdened to appear more “feminine” to reinforce traditional gender roles. Reverse covering can also occur where the individual will strive to exhibit a difference generated by a unique attribute of their identity (Yoshino, 2002). Regardless of covering or reverse covering practices, they both share the manifestation of an individuals’ dysphoria due to the incongruencies between their external expression and their internal identity.

While there remain varying schools of thought on the disposition of individual identity and the development of an individuals’ unique perception of their “authentic self”, most scholars agree and prescribe to the idea that identities are both personal and social in nature as social meaning also contributes to the development of selfhood. According to Ainsworth, the expression of the interior self must match its outward manifestations via social semiotic messages to complete the realization of an “authentic self” (Ainsworth, 2013). The interior self is composed of an individual’s internal commitments and personal beliefs, whereas the exterior self is the expression of their actions, which may or may not reveal the former (Johnson et al., 2004). As all individuals have an inner and outer layer, the true “authentic self” consists of a combination of these identities. When an individual’s authentic feelings are realized and true selfhood is identified, the outer core or the expression of these identities will follow suit naturally. However, if there is discordance between the external identity and an individuals’ commitment to their internal identity, a loss of self-esteem ensues and can often result in an
Genetic Counselors on Expressing their “Authentic Self”

alienating and humiliating experience due to others drawing false conclusions about one’s true identity (Callero, 1985; Johnson, 2004).

**Job Satisfaction**

While there are many variations and combinations of an individual’s background, beliefs, and social constructs that make up their sense of self, the overarching theme is that an individual is unsatisfied when anything less than their “authentic self” is portrayed. Across personal lives and professional roles, authenticity is favored when self-expression is involved. In the workplace setting, individuals portray their employee identities, but also have professional identities which are defined by their professional values, motives, and experiences (Slay & Smith, 2010). Professional identities additionally encompass the complex interactions between job satisfaction, occupational obligations, self-efficacy, and motivation levels (Canrinus et al., 2012). Given that job satisfaction and an individual’s professional identity are strongly related and have further implications for authentic selfhood, it is an important factor to evaluate when considering the outcomes of a rapidly changing professional environment on the professional. All of these complex intersections of various identity attributes continually play a role in an individuals’ personal and professional identities and have an effect on the employees’ self-perception and their overall job satisfaction.

**Genetic Counselor Demographics**

When evaluating the factors that contribute to an individual’s “authentic self” and the traditional guidelines on professional appearance, the implications of self-expression in the
workplace are situationally dependent. For an ever-changing social construct like professionalism, the workforce is growing increasingly diverse and the organizations that employ them must accommodate their employees and adapt to these progressive changes. At the intersection of an expanding definition of professionalism and the unique development of their own profession are genetic counselors.

Genetic counselors are health care professionals in the unique position of having the scientific acumen to understand and interpret complex genetic information while possessing the interpersonal skills necessary for providing psychosocial support to patients, often during emotionally difficult situations. The field of genetic counseling is rapidly growing compared to both health care and non-health care professions (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has projected the field to grow 27% percent from 2018 to 2028, which is much faster than the 10% average growth for other health care practitioners and technical occupations and 5% for all occupations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). However, the growth of the field is not reflected in the demographic diversity of genetic counselor.

The National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC) administers a Professional Status Survey (PSS) to identify professional trends and provide insightful information to genetic counseling professionals derived from the data of current NSGC membership. According to data released by the most recent 2019 PSS, approximately 90% of genetic counselors are Caucasian (NSGC PSS, 2019) while only 72.4% of the United States population is Caucasian (U.S. Census, 2010). The skewed ethnic distribution seen in this data were not isolated to the genetic counseling profession. In fact, various reports in the literature have illustrated drastically fewer
health care professionals who are ethnic minorities relative to the population in the U.S. (Betancourt, 2006; Mittman et al., 2008; Nelson, 2002).

While most genetic counselors identify as Caucasian, the field is also predominantly composed of women compared to other similar health care occupations. According to the 2019 PSS, women make up approximately 95% of genetic counselors (NSGC PSS, 2019). In addition to the distortion in ethnicity and sex, there is also an uneven distribution of age amongst those in the profession. As the field continues to rapidly expand, the average age of genetic counselors has decreased with 70% under 40 years of age and 52% having less than 5 years of experience in their specialized area of practice (M. Smith et al., 2009; NSGC PSS, 2019).

Additionally, published reports have suggested that significant and persistent health disparities among ethnic and racial minorities exist as a result of discordant health care providers. According to a groundbreaking 2002 study published by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), there is compelling evidence portraying notable discrepancies when comparing the level of care patients received with the rate of patient morbidity and mortality between both ethnic majorities and minorities even when controlling for other dependent variables (Nelson, 2002). Increased diversity of health care providers, as suggested by the IOM, is correlated with enhanced patient satisfaction, increased access to health care, and improved patient-provider interactions (IOM 2004). While this study is primarily focused on the challenges to traditionally defined norms of professional attire in a rapidly evolving professional context, previous research also suggests that these findings may also have implications on the patient populations that genetic counselors serve.
Rational/Objectives of Current Study

Mainstream expectations of professional appearance are heavily influenced by society. Previous literature has determined that individuals may have differing interpretations of these guidelines, resulting in variable manners of expression in their physical appearance. As individuals are shaped by a multitude of backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences, the identity(s) that is portrayed through their expression may be dependent on the circumstances. The “authentic self” is a summation of an individual’s interior and outward identities and must be expressed congruently through a series of social customs communicating visual representation and statement of personal identity, including dress, appearance, and grooming habits. If the “authentic self” is repressed or altered, this can lead to implications for the individual including negatively affecting their psychological well-being. As genetic counselors are a uniquely-trained group on the cusp of a rapidly evolving professional landscape, studying their responses may provide additional insight into other highly-evolving professions and how they manage with conventional professional attire. A comprehensive review of published studies reveals that a standardized study of genetic counselors and their perspectives on the portrayal of their authentic self in the workplace has yet to be conducted.

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes of genetic counselors on their genuine self-expression in the workplace in regards to their external identity role performance. By assessing genetic counselors’ perceptions on their “authentic self” expression, this study aims to explore factors that influence their representation in the workplace, identify challenges to traditionally defined norms of professional appearance, and illustrate its implications in a quickly evolving professional context. Allowing genetic counselors and other professionals to express
their “authentic self” in the workplace would support the unique identities constituting their individuality and further support human development and growth. If differences are identified, they may partially account for some of the disparities in the issues previously discussed.
MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

The study utilized an online, unidentified survey asking respondents about their “authentic self”, perceived support by employers and clients, and overall job satisfaction (Appendix D). Survey invitations were distributed using a convenience sampling schema targeting subscribers of single listerv. Survey data were analyzed to examine the relationship between participants’ experiences expressing their “authentic selves” and perceived support from their employers and clients and job satisfaction.

Study Population

Eligible individuals were currently practicing genetic counselors over the age of 18. The survey was distributed to 4,500 current NSGC members and members in the grace renewal period via the NSGC listserv. The survey was also distributed via the MGPN listserv to 111 currently practicing genetic counselors. Additionally, the survey was also shared through the social media site, Twitter.

Recruitment

The principle investigator posted the recruitment advertisement (Appendix A) to the NSGC and Minority Genetic Professional Network (MGPN) email listserv in December 2019. The NSGC listserv sent reminders two weeks after the initial distribution and by the MGPN two months after initial mailings to promote higher response rates. The principal investigator also
posted a recruitment notice on social media (i.e. Twitter; Appendix B) in December 2019 to solicit additional survey responses.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected via one online unidentified 36-question Qualtrics survey (Appendix D). The survey was open from December 12, 2019 to March 3, 2020. The survey was closed on March 3, 2020 when the dataset was finalized and analysis began.

**Data Analysis**

Once the survey was closed, responses were downloaded into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26.0 (IBM Corp., 2019) format for data processing, cleaning, and analysis. As nearly all the survey questions were close-ended, data cleaning was performed via visual inspection of data for invariant respondents, histograms of the two open-ended numeric variables (age and years of experience in genetic counseling), and examination of survey start and completion times. Data analyses included the calculation of univariate statistics (e.g. means, standard deviations, frequencies, and valid percentages) and bivariate analysis including independent samples t-tests and chi-square tests of independence using a significance of 0.05, unless otherwise noted. Multivariate analyses included the calculation of two simple linear regression models. In addition, open-ended questions were evaluated for additional insight from survey respondents and pertinent themes.
Risks and Benefits

This study involved minimal risk to survey respondents. A consent form was provided in the survey introduction and explained that all participation was voluntary and that respondents were free to stop the survey at any point in time (Appendix C). The consent form also indicated that all responses would be anonymous and only reported in aggregate to protect respondents’ privacy. Additionally, the first author’s contact information was listed for survey participants if they had any questions or concerns about the study.

There were no anticipated direct benefits for participating in the study aside from supporting a student’s research and contributing to the comprehensive literature and knowledge within the genetic counseling profession.

Compensation to Subjects

There was no compensation given to survey respondents.
RESULTS

A total of 197 individuals participated in the survey. This data roughly corresponds to a response rate of about 3.9% of practicing genetic counselors, as there are an estimated 5,000 genetic counselors (National Society of Genetic Counselors, 2020).

Data Cleaning

Data cleaning was performed in order to detect invariant or careless respondent answers and to ensure that all participants qualified to participate in the study. All 197 initial respondents consented to participate in the study, with 176 (89.3%) indicating an age of 18 or greater. The decision was made to retain the 21 subjects with no age indicated, as the verbiage of the informed consent page included a clause that subjects were verifying that they were of at least 18 years of age. Of the 197 respondents, a total of 7 (3.55%) failed to provide any information after providing informed consent and were thus removed from the dataset.

The amount of time respondents spent completing the survey was examined to rule out responses from bots. The survey took participants, on average, 35.1 minutes to complete (SD = 217.4), with examination of shortest completion time (0.9 minutes) and longest completion time (47.4 hours) showing outliers. Visual inspection of subjects’ responses revealed that those who completed the survey extremely quickly simply left many questions blank. These subjects were left in the dataset, as their responses appeared to reflect good faith efforts from human respondents (i.e. not near-instantaneous responses to all questions by bots), and missing data are simply excluded from pertinent analyses. Extremely long response times (> 1 hour) were
observed for 12 respondents, but all 12 responses appeared to represent good faith efforts to respond to the survey, and could be explained by practices such as opening the survey in another tab and forgetting about it. As a result, no subjects were removed due to completion times.

Histograms were used to examine participants’ answers to the survey’s two open-ended questions: age and years of experience in genetic counseling. All responses were found to be reasonable, though the decision was made to recode 3 responses of “<1” year of experience in genetic counseling to zero to indicate that these subjects did not yet have a full year of experience.

**Modifications to Dataset**

Several modifications were made to the data set based on the survey responses. Some study variables were recoded, as there were not enough respondents in each category to draw valid conclusions or avoid violating assumptions of subsequent hypothesis tests. For example, respondents that selected more than one practice setting were recategorized as follows: those who reported providing counseling from very small cities were recoded as “Urban” and those reported working in a city and also providing telehealth services to patients in rural areas were recoded as “Urban” and “Remote.” Survey respondents who provided telehealth services to patients across all practice settings (including patient facing role by video), but not from home, were recoded as “Remote” and those who identified their work involving 50% remote work and 50% travel were recoded into existing categories depending on where they travelled.
Respondent Demographics

In order to examine the demography of respondents who chose to complete the survey, a demographics table was constructed (see Table 1). Overall, the majority of the survey respondents are young, Caucasian, and female, with the preponderance of respondents reporting working in urban settings.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (n = 189 - 190)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>N (valid %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>32.6 (8.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years Experience, Genetic Counseling</td>
<td>7.8 (8.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>11 (5.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>179 (94.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>11 (5.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>179 (94.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-binary/Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>23 (12.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>260 (87.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English only</td>
<td></td>
<td>44 (23.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>145 (76.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White(^a)</td>
<td></td>
<td>160 (84.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>30 (15.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Setting(^b)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 (5.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td></td>
<td>40 (21.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
<td>131 (71.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td></td>
<td>31 (16.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Specialty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical</td>
<td></td>
<td>142 (77.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td></td>
<td>28 (14.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td></td>
<td>11 (5.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other(^c)</td>
<td></td>
<td>35 (18.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Restricted to subjects who indicated that they were white and did not check any other race/ethnicities

\(^b\) Respondents could mark more than one practice specialty, so these categories need not add up to 100%

\(^c\) Included responses such as Education, Insurance, and Clinical Research
Genetic Counselors on Expressing their “Authentic Self”

Research Questions

In order to better understand genetic counselors’ experiences expressing their “authentic self” in the workplace, a series of eight research questions were developed and examined using bivariate and multivariate data analyses. Specifically, the author sought to answer the following research questions about respondents’ demography and physical appearance in the workplace:

Bivariate Analyses: Questions about respondent demographics

1. Is there a difference between the demographics of respondents who did or did not feel supported by their employers?

2. Is there a difference between the demographics of respondents who did or did not feel discriminated against clients at work?

3. Is there a difference between the demographics of respondents who did or did not report feeling satisfied at work?

Bivariate Analyses: Questions about respondent’s physical appearance

1. Is there a difference between the physical characteristics of respondents who did or did not feel supported at work?

2. Is there a difference between the physical characteristics of respondents who did or did not feel discriminated against by clients at work?

3. Is there a difference between physical characteristics of respondents who were satisfied versus not satisfied at work?
Multivariate Analyses:

1. Of the statistically significant factors identified in the Research Questions above, which are the strongest predictors of feeling supported by employers?

2. Of the statistically significant factors identified in the Research Questions above, which are the strongest predictors of job satisfaction?

**Research Question 1:**

**Research Question #1a:**

Is there a difference between the demographics of respondents who did or did not feel supported by their employers?

Table 2. Associations Between Respondents’ Demography & Employer Support for Expressing “Authentic Self” (n = 162 - 183)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Supported by Employer</th>
<th>Unsupported by Employer</th>
<th>p*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>N (valid %)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>32.4 (8.6)</td>
<td>33.2 (8.0)</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years Experience, Genetic Counseling</td>
<td>7.8 (8.6)</td>
<td>8.0 (7.5)</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8 (80.0)</td>
<td>2 (20.0)</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>144 (83.2)</td>
<td>29 (16.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8 (80.0)</td>
<td>2 (20.0)</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>144 (83.2)</td>
<td>29 (16.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>LGBTQ+</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19 (86.4)</td>
<td>3 (13.6)</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>133 (82.6)</td>
<td>28 (17.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English only</td>
<td>117 (83.0)</td>
<td>24 (17.0)</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>34 (82.9)</td>
<td>7 (17.1)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>131 (84.0)</td>
<td>25 (16.0)</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21 (77.8)</td>
<td>6 (22.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Settinga</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>7 (70.0)</td>
<td>3 (30.0)</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>31 (77.5)</td>
<td>9 (22.5)</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>111 (84.7)</td>
<td>20 (15.3)</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>26 (83.9)</td>
<td>5 (16.1)</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Specialty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical</td>
<td>118 (83.1)</td>
<td>24 (16.9)</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>23 (82.1)</td>
<td>5 (17.9)</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Genetic Counselors on Expressing their “Authentic Self”

Overall, 152 (83.1%) respondents reported feeling supported by their employers in expressing their “authentic selves”. As shown in Table 2, the demography of respondents did not differ between those who reported feeling supported by their employers to express their “authentic selves” compared to those who did not (all p’s > 0.05).

Research Question #1b: Is there a difference between the demographics of respondents who did or did not feel discriminated against by clients at work?

Table 3. Associations Between Respondents’ Demography & Client Discrimination in Response to Expressing “Authentic Self” (n = 162 - 183)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Discriminated Against by Clients?</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>N (valid %)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>N (valid %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>32.6 (8.6)</td>
<td>32.4 (7.9)</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years Experience, Genetic Counseling</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.8 (8.6)</td>
<td>7.7 (7.2)</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>9 (90.0)</td>
<td>1 (10.0)</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>151 (87.3)</td>
<td>22 (12.7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>9 (90.0)</td>
<td>1 (10.0)</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>151 (87.3)</td>
<td>22 (12.7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>20 (90.9)</td>
<td>2 (9.1)</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>140 (87.0)</td>
<td>21 (13.0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English only</td>
<td></td>
<td>128 (90.8)</td>
<td>13 (9.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>31 (75.6)</td>
<td>10 (24.4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>139 (89.1)</td>
<td>17 (10.9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>21 (77.8)</td>
<td>6 (22.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Setting*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td>7 (70.0)</td>
<td>3 (30.0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Comparisons were made using Independent Samples t-tests and Chi-Square Tests of Independence, where appropriate. Each possible setting was treated as a dichotomous variable (e.g. The first row compares geneticists working in Rural Settings to geneticists not working in Rural Settings). Only respondents selecting “yes” for each setting are displayed for the sake of brevity.
As shown in Table 3, the proportion of respondents reporting discrimination from clients stemming from expressing their “authentic self” showed statistically significant associations by languages spoken ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, respondents who reported speaking more than one language were more likely to have reported feeling discriminated against by their clients/patients. No other statistically significant findings were observed ($p$’s > 0.05).

**Research Question #1c:**
Is there a difference between the demographics of respondents who did or did not report feeling satisfied work?

Table 4. Associations Between Respondents’ Demography & Work Satisfaction (n = 182 - 183)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Satisfied M (SD)</th>
<th>Satisfied N (valid %)</th>
<th>Not Satisfied M (SD)</th>
<th>Not Satisfied N (valid %)</th>
<th>$p^*$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>32.7 (8.7)</td>
<td>29.9 (3.7)</td>
<td>.06$^a$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years Experience, Genetic Counseling</td>
<td>8.0 (8.6)</td>
<td>5.3 (4.5)</td>
<td>.09$^a$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>10 (100)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>161 (93.1)</td>
<td>12 (6.9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>10 (100)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>161 (93.1)</td>
<td>12 (6.9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+</td>
<td>21 (95.5)</td>
<td>1 (4.5)</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>150 (93.2)</td>
<td>11 (6.8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>130 (92.2)</td>
<td>11 (7.8)</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English only</td>
<td>40 (97.6)</td>
<td>1 (2.4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Comparisons were made using Independent Samples t-tests and Chi-Square Tests of Independence, where appropriate.

$^a$ Each possible setting was treated as a dichotomous variable. Only respondents selecting “yes” displayed for sake of brevity.
As shown in Table 4, no significant relationships were observed between the demographic characteristics of respondents and whether or not they reported feeling satisfied with their work (p’s > 0.05; see Table 4).

**Research Question 2:**

**Research Question #2a: Is there a difference between the physical characteristics of respondents who did or did not feel supported at work?**

Table 5. Associations Between Respondents’ Physical Appearance & Employer Support for Expressing “Authentic Self” (n = 26 - 183)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Characteristics</th>
<th>N (valid %)</th>
<th>Supported by Employer</th>
<th>Unsupported by Employer</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Cramer's V</th>
<th>p*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tattoos</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>26 (14.2)</td>
<td>23 (88.5)</td>
<td>3 (11.5)</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Visible</td>
<td>157 (85.8)</td>
<td>129 (82.2)</td>
<td>28 (17.8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tattoo Size</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>9 (34.6)</td>
<td>1 (88.9)</td>
<td>1 (11.1)</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>17 (65.4)</td>
<td>15 (88.2)</td>
<td>2 (11.8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Piercings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>162 (88.5)</td>
<td>136 (83.4)</td>
<td>27 (16.6)</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None / Non-Visible</td>
<td>21 (11.5)</td>
<td>16 (80.0)</td>
<td>4 (20.0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facial Piercings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 5, the proportion of respondents reporting feeling supported in expressing their “authentic selves” was statistically significantly associated with comfort wearing culturally-identifying or religious clothing at work ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, respondents who reported feeling uncomfortable wearing culturally-identifying or religious clothing at work were much less likely to have reported feeling supported by their employers. No other statistically significant findings were observed ($p$’s $> 0.05$).

**Research Question #2b: Is there a difference between the physical characteristics of respondents who did or did not feel discriminated against by clients at work?**

Table 6. Associations Between Respondents’ Physical Appearance & Client Discrimination in Response to Expressing “Authentic Self” (n = 26 - 183)
As shown in Table 6, no significant relationships were observed between the physical appearance of respondents and whether or not they reported feeling discriminated against by clients (p’s > 0.05; see Table 6).

**Research Question #2c: Is there a difference between the physical characteristics of respondents who were satisfied vs not satisfied at work?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Characteristics</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>X^2</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Cramer’s V</th>
<th>p*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tattoos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>25 (96.2)</td>
<td>1 (3.8)</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Visible</td>
<td>146 (93.0)</td>
<td>11 (7.0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tattoo Size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>9 (100)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>16 (94.1)</td>
<td>1 (5.9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piercings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>152 (93.3)</td>
<td>11 (6.7)</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None / Non-Visible</td>
<td>19 (95.0)</td>
<td>1 (5.0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial Piercings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face</td>
<td>10 (100)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear</td>
<td>151 (93.2)</td>
<td>11 (6.8)</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable wearing Cultural/Religious Clothing at Work</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>28 (100)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>27 (87.1)</td>
<td>4 (12.9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable Displaying Body Hair, Women Only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legs</td>
<td>14 (100)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armpits</td>
<td>7 (100)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 7, the proportion of respondents reporting feeling satisfied at work was statistically significantly associated with comfort wearing culturally-identifying or religious clothing at work (p = 0.05). Specifically, respondents who reported feeling uncomfortable
wearing culturally-identifying or religious clothing at work were less likely to have reported feeling satisfied with their work. No other statistically significant findings were observed ($p$’s > 0.05).

**Research Question 3:**

Of the statistically significant factors identified in the RQs above, which are the strongest predictors of feeling supported by employers?

| Table 8. Simple Linear Regression Model Predicting Perceived Employer Support ($n = 59$) |
|-------|-------|------|------|-------|
|       | $B$   | $SE$ | $\beta$ | $t$   | $p$   |
| Constant | 2.60  | 0.39 | 6.74 | < .001 |
| Comfortable Wearing Cultural/Religious Clothing at Work | 0.37  | 0.08 | 0.51 | 4.52  | < .001 |

$F_{(1, 57)} = 20.41, p < .001, R^2 = .26$

As only a single statistically significant variable was observed in Tables 2 and 5, a simple linear regression model was constructed to determine whether comfort wearing culturally or religiously-identifying clothing predicted perceived employer support for expressing respondents’ “authentic selves.” The overall mode was statistically significant ($F_{(1, 57)} = 20.41, p < .001, R^2 = 0.26$), with increasing comfort wearing culturally or religiously-identifying clothing predicting substantial increases in perceived employer support for expressing respondents’ “authentic selves” (see Table 8).

**Research Question 4:**

Of the statistically significant factors identified in the RQs above, which are the strongest predictors of job satisfaction?

| Table 9. Simple Linear Regression Model Predicting Job Satisfaction ($n = 59$) |
|-------|-------|------|------|-------|
|       | $B$   | $SE$ | $\beta$ | $t$   | $p$   |
| Constant | 4.15  | 0.34 | 11.94 | < .001 |
| Comfortable Wearing Cultural/Religious Clothing at Work | 0.17  | 0.08 | 0.30 | 2.34  | .02 |

$F_{(1, 57)} = 5.46, p = .02, R^2 = .09$
As only a single statistically significant variable was observed in Tables 3 and 7, a simple linear regression model was constructed to determine whether comfort wearing culturally or religiously-identifying clothing predicted job satisfaction. The overall mode was statistically significant \( F(1, 57) = 5.46, p = .02, R^2 = 0.09 \), with increasing comfort wearing culturally or religiously-identifying clothing predicting increases in job satisfaction (see Table 9).

**Responses to Open-Ended Questions**

The last question on the survey provided respondents with the opportunity to share comments about the study or their personal experiences. Free responses were reviewed and assessed for overarching themes. This feedback illustrated respondents’ experiences with self-expression and the various obstacles that they have faced in expressing (or not expressing) their “authentic selves” in the workplace. The most prominent theme identified was that genetic counselors were worried that their own self-expression could make patients who have different beliefs feel uncomfortable and not feel open to express themselves during the counseling session. As one respondent stated,

> I occasionally wear a cross necklace or other Christian jewelry when I am not working. But the reason I do not wear this at work is not related to feelings of discrimination, rather, I am aware that patients who do not identify with my same beliefs may feel uncomfortable which would hurt my rapport with them.

Other themes related to the inhibition of genetic counselors’ self-expression include worries about being perceived by patients both in a discriminatory manner and as being incapable in their professional roles. Additional factors influencing the self-expression of genetic counselors
include concerns with having contradictory religious or political beliefs than their patients and working in a region that has strong conservative and religious beliefs (i.e. the South).
DISCUSSION

With this study, the investigators attempted to examine the ideology of authentic selfhood within the context of a rapidly evolving profession, genetic counseling. The study focuses on genetic counselors’ perspectives on their self-expression in the workplace. Some significant associations were identified in each set of analyses, and the implications of these findings will be discussed for each research question, respectively.

Respondent Demographics

Overall, the demographics of respondents appeared to closely mirror those of the genetic counseling profession at large. As expected, most respondents identified as young Caucasian women. At 94.2%, the vast majority of survey respondents are female, which closely matches the previously reported percentage of 95% from the 2019 National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC) Professional Status Survey (PSS) and other studies on the genetic counseling population (2019 NSGC PSS; Smith et al., 2009). The majority of respondents (84.2%) also identified as Caucasian, with the mean age of respondents at 32.6 years old and mean years of genetic counseling experience under ten years. Although respondents’ demographic data from this study are not novel, it does serve to reinforce the significant skew in the genetic counseling field towards young Caucasian women. While the demographics of genetic counselors remain primarily Caucasian, the percentage of non-Caucasian genetic counselors was higher than the percentage identified in the 2019 NSGC PSS (2019 NSGC PSS). Additionally, 76.7% of
respondents reported speaking another language in addition to English. Hopefully, this optimistic trend is suggestive of an increase of diversity in the genetic counseling workforce.

The present study filled an important knowledge gap in the literature by assessing genetic counselors’ sexual orientations, something not reported in previous studies. Interestingly, the study found that 12.1% of respondents identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community, which is three times greater than the number of LBGTQ+ identifying American adults reported in 2016 by the Gallup poll (Gallup poll, 2016). One possible explanation could be that the genetic counseling profession simply attracts more individuals identifying as LGBTQ+. Another likelihood is that genetic counseling actually has the same proportion of LGBTQ+ individuals as the general population, but given the topic of the study, perhaps those in the LGBTQ+ community were more likely to respond to the survey. This is referred to as volunteer bias, where study participants may not represent the general population. While both of these possibly explain the number of LGBTQ+ individuals reported in the study, there is also a likelihood that a mix of both of these options have occurred. As the majority of respondents in this study reported feeling supported by their employers and this study sought to fill the knowledge gap by reporting on genetic counselors’ sexual orientations, LGBTQ+ individuals may have been attracted to the supportive nature of the profession and also more willing to participate in this study.

One implication of these findings is that there may be value in efforts to diversify the genetic counseling profession; there may be benefits in exploring alternative methods of professional outreach to recruit more males and minorities. In the larger context, previous studies have suggested that an increased diversity of health care providers can lead to increased patient satisfaction and improved patient and provider relationships (IOM 2004). Future research may be
warranted to explore the connotations of an increasingly diverse genetic counseling population and their effect on the patient population, focusing on the relationship between healthcare provider diversity between patent satisfaction and its outcomes.

Unsurprisingly, most respondents reported working in clinical specialties, which is defined as providing direct patient care. According to the 2019 NSGC PSS, 59% of genetic counselors provide direct patient care, 25% provide non-direct patient care, and 16% provide both (2019 NSGC PSS). In recent decades, there has been a notable shift of genetic counselors that do not provide direct patient care, as the profession has expanded its scope to include new roles (2019 NSGC PSS). Additionally, the majority of genetic counselor respondents reported working in urban settings. This result was also hypothesized as urban settings and cities often have a higher concentrated population of people. Some respondents that identified working in urban locations are also providing remote services to patients in rural areas. As the popularity of telehealth increases and more genetic counselors are expanding into telehealth roles, genetic health care services will be more accessible, particularly for patients in rural areas (Zierhut et al, 2018).

Conclusions from Research Question #1

As a data-driven methodology was taken to identify demographics factors that differ between respondents based on employer support, client discrimination, and job satisfaction, this research question was approached without specific hypotheses about which variables would emerge as significant. However, one or more statistically significant differences were anticipated.
No significant relationships were detected between respondent demographics and their perception of support from their employers to express their “authentic selves.” It should be noted that the majority of respondents reported feeling supported, which resulted in a relatively small comparison group of unsupported respondents. This, in turn, may have limited the statistical power of these analyses, obscuring potentially meaningful relationships. Future research that intentionally oversamples dissatisfied or unsupported genetic counselors may be warranted to examine employer support of expressing “authentic selves” in more depth. While the role of perceived employer support has not been previously studied as comprehensively, these data showed that over 8 in 10 rated their employers as supportive of them expressing their “authentic selves,” which suggests that genetic counselors experience a high degree of support regardless of their demographics. On the other hand, those who do not report feeling supported by their employers could feel uncomfortable with expressing themselves at work.

Another possible explanation is that there are other factors outside of one’s demography that influence how genetic counselors perceive employer support that were not captured by this survey. As discussed previously, an individual’s self-expression consists of multi-faceted identities influenced by infinite factors manifesting both internally and externally (Ainsworth, 2013), including many not accounted for in the study.

While no statistically significant associations were observed between participants’ demographics and reported employer support, investigating discrimination from clients bore an interesting result. Specifically, a statistically significant association was observed between discrimination from clients and the number of languages the counselor speaks. Respondents who spoke more than one language were more likely to report feeling discriminated against by their
clients. As previously discussed, an outcome in the presence of various languages may be unique challenges to professional organizations as some languages may suggest to be more valuable than others (Barwell, 2003). Individuals in the minority language group may feel pressured to conform to the majority languages for fear of being linguistically discriminated against. While multilingualism is supported by immigration and continually alters social and professional settings, a multilingual individual is typically able to choose to disclose this ability, unless they have a revealing accent. Given that physical appearance is a visible representation of an individual’s identity, it was expected that a significant relationship would be determined between client discrimination and more conspicuous aspects of respondents’ demographics. A possible explanation could be that respondents who are multilingual may have learned English as a second language and retained an accent from their native language, making their ability to speak multiple languages or being non-native English speakers known to their clients when they interact. It was also assumed that those who reported being multilingual were more likely to identify as a minority than Caucasian. Previous research suggests that minorities are more likely to experience discrimination (Ainsworth, 2013), and it was hypothesized that the workplace was no exception. Additional factors that could have potentially explained genetic counselors reporting discrimination from clients may not have been captured in this study. Some measured variables were close to statistical significance and in the direction hypothesized, but the limited sample size was unable to provide a comprehensive conclusion. Future studies utilizing a larger sample may be warranted to clarify the determinants of genetic counselors’ reports of discrimination by clients.
There were no significant relationships identified between respondents’ demographics and their satisfaction at work. This was surprising, as previous research has identified significant relationships between employee demographics (Choi, 2016). For instance, previous research has documented that employees identifying as a minority reported lower job satisfaction, a finding that spanned multiple racial/ethnic groups (Choi, 2016). As the genetic counseling profession predominantly consists of Caucasians, it was expected for respondents identifying as minorities or non-Caucasians to report lower job satisfaction in the present study too. Several explanations may account for the insignificant p values in the present study. For instance, it could be that the specific demographic variables examined simply are not related to job satisfaction as defined and reported by respondents. It also remains possible that this study simply failed to capture the responses of enough minority respondents to detect statistically significant findings. Similarly, with over 84% of respondents reporting that they were Caucasian, there were too few non-Caucasian respondents to explore potentially meaningful differences among subgroups; instead all non-Caucasian subjects were combined into a single category, potentially overlooking meaningful differences among those groups. Upon additional analysis of the literature, several studies were found that question whether job satisfaction varies by racial or ethnic background (Brush et al., 1987; Campbell, 2011; Hersch & Xiao, 2016). To resolve this matter, future studies should focus not only on maximizing sample size, but also on employing sampling strategies that ensure high representation of minority respondents. In fact, it may be worth intentionally oversampling minority ethnicities in some future research of genetic counselors given their low numbers in the profession.
While only a single factor emerged as statistically significant in this study, valuable information can be deduced from this data. The notion that clients and patients may discriminate against genetic counselors who are multilingual, or possibly only those with accents, opens up this topic for future research. Although the current study did not investigate accents, this is suggested as a possible premise for client discrimination. In regards to non-significant findings, these may also be enlightening. Given the absence of previous literature on the intersection of genetic counselors’ demographics, employer support, client discrimination, and job satisfaction, this study starts to fill in this essential gap in the literature. The lack of significant findings may not reflect the methodology drawbacks of this research, but the demography, at least as defined by this study, is not an important indicator of most genetic counselors’ employer support, client discrimination, or overall job satisfaction. Whether this is true or not, will hopefully be the focus of future research.

**Conclusions from Research Question #2**

An individual’s “authentic self” is comprised of multiple internal identities and external expressions, including, but not limited to, clothing, jewelry, hairstyle, grooming, and body modifications. Employers are responsible for establishing guidelines for professional appearance, and in doing so, dictate the tone of the workplace. If the professional expectations are stringent, this conveys a more rigid workplace manner and relays to the employee that variable expression of one’s wardrobe or other forms of expression outside of the norm is not allowed, and therefore, not supported. With the inability to align their internal commitment with external expression, individuals may feel unsupported to disclose their true identities. Given self-expression of dress
and grooming practices contribute to an individual’s “authentic self”, enforcement of traditional dress codes may be met with opposition from employees whose identities are not aligned with these standards (Ainsworth, 2013; Brower, 2013).

As with Research Question #1, a data-driven methodology was taken to identify physical characteristics that could be related to employer support, client discrimination, and job satisfaction. Because an individual’s “ authentic self” can be made up of infinite factors and manifested expressions, this research question was approached without specific hypotheses about which variables would emerge as significant. However, one or more statistically significant differences were anticipated. As in Research Question #1, only a single variable emerged as statistically significant, though the implications of this variable as well as those that were not statistically significant warrants consideration. Since any discordance between the expression of the external and internal identity may lead to a loss of self-esteem, alienation, and false conclusions about their “ authentic self” (Callero, 1985; Johnson, 2004), it was expected that respondents not comfortable with wearing cultural or religiously-identifying clothing would have most likely reported feeling unsupported at work. As expected, employees who must abide by more strict dress standards at work may feel pressured to repress or “cover” their identities, especially when these features are not aligned with social norms (Yoshino, 2002).

Cultural and religious identities play a large role in authentic selfhood, especially in particular cultures and ethnic/racial backgrounds. Wearing culturally and religiously-identifying clothing serves to reinforce an individual’s sense of cultural and religious identity, both of which ultimately contribute to their “authentic self”. Previous studies have suggested that employees with the freedom to express themselves through clothing typically feel supported in the
workplace (Brower, 2013). As anticipated, a statistically significant association was detected between employer support of expressing one’s “authentic self” and comfort wearing cultural or religious clothing at work. Being able to wear culturally and religiously-identifying clothing was associated with higher job satisfaction and more perceived employer support. The opposite was true when respondents reported feeling uncomfortable. One interpretation of these results is that comfort wearing cultural or religious clothing at work is a proxy variable that is actually identifying workplaces with a high tolerance of diversity overall. If workplaces foster a supportive environment for employees to express themselves through cultural or religious dress, employees will feel more comfortable at work with portraying other aspects of their “authentic self” because it will be supported within a professional context. As previous research suggested that individuals with visible tattoos and facial piercings are viewed negatively in the workplace (Bekhor et al., 1995; Swami et al., 2012; McElroy et al., 2014), it was expected that these factors would lead to reduced employer support and lower job satisfaction. Additionally, grooming practices play a large role in professional appearances and those with more unconventional ways of displaying body hair were expected to feel uncomfortable in the workplace. Regardless, the fact that culturally and religiously-identifying clothing emerged as statistically significant in two sets of analyses underscores the importance of this variable. Being able to represent their “authentic self” through clothing was related to both perceived employer support and job satisfaction, whereas other physical characteristics, like displaying body hair, were not.

When comparing the physical appearance of respondents and their perception of discrimination by clients, the study did not identify any significant relationships. As genetic counselors often interact and engage with the clients, it was hypothesized that clients would have
shown prejudice against genetic counselors who fail to adhere to traditional dress code standards, as similar patient perspectives have been studies for physicians (Cha et al., 2003; Rehman et al., 2005; Bond et al., 2010; Furnham et al., 2014). One plausible explanation for the findings in this study is that the genetic counselors surveyed simply tend to dress professionally by traditional workplace standards, so clients do not appear to discriminate against them based on their wardrobe. An alternative interpretation could suggest that clients are more accepting of genetic counselors expressing their identities through their clothing when compared to employers, as any employer with a stated dress code runs the risk of leaving an employee feeling unsupported in expressing their “authentic self.”

As expected, a statistically significant association was detected between reported satisfaction at work and comfort wearing cultural or religiously-identifying clothing at work. Those that felt uncomfortable with wearing cultural-identifying or religious clothing at work were less likely to report feeling satisfaction at work. This significant finding is intuitive and supports the logical reasoning that an individual cannot fully express themselves, then they are not comfortable. When employees do not feel comfortable being themselves at work, as expressed by what they wear, they feel that they are not being supported by their employer and enjoy their job less.

As the “authentic self” is composed of multiple selves, an individual’s true self can be strongly influenced by cultural and religious identities (Wagner et al., 2013, pg. 242). In feeling comfortable with expressing their cultural and religious identities at work through various attire, respondents felt supported by their workplace and were more likely to report work satisfaction. Individuals often feel satisfied when they are able to express their “authentic selves” as they do
Genetic Counselors on Expressing their “Authentic Self”

not have to expend energy in concealing their true identities (Bell, 2008). Along the same vein, respondents who did not feel comfortable with wearing cultural and religious clothing in the workplace most likely did not feel that this aspect of their identities was being supported and as a result, were less likely to report feeling satisfied at work as indicated by the study data.

Conclusions from Research Question #3

A simple linear regression model determined that comfort wearing culturally or religiously-identifying clothing does predict perceived employer support for expressing respondents’ “authentic self”. As expected, the more comfortable respondents were expressing themselves through their garments, the more support by their employer they felt. As this was the only significant variable to be included in this analysis, this implies that dress codes are a critical (if not the most critical) way that employers can show their support of employee’ self-expression. This was further supported by the regression model’s $R^2$ value. As a measure of effect size, the model’s $R^2$ value of .26 suggests that respondents’ comfort wearing culturally and religiously-identifying clothing at work explains or can account for approximately 26% of variability observed in respondents’ perceived employer support for expressing their “authentic self.” As this is a considerable amount of variability to be explained, this data strongly suggests that an individuals’ ability to wear culturally or religiously-identifying clothing is quite central to many respondents’ sense of authenticity.

That only a single variable emerged as significant was surprising, as the concept of “authentic self” consists of multiple identities and selves (Dellinger, 2002). It was anticipated that additional statistically significant variables, particularly demographic factors, would strongly
predict respondents feeling supported by employers, in addition to respondents’ comfort level wearing culturally or religious clothing. Nevertheless, the simplicity of this model has an upside; it identifies dress codes, and less codified guidelines about self-expression through garments, as a critical issue for employers to reflect upon. Future research may be to see whether an intervention focused on changing genetic counseling dress code standards works to improve job satisfaction.

**Conclusions from Research Question #4**

A simple linear was constructed and identified comfort wearing culturally or religiously-identifying clothing predicted job satisfaction. The overall mode was statistically significant with increasing comfort wearing culturally or religiously-identifying clothing predicting an increase in job satisfaction.

These findings are nearly identical to the results from the previous regression model run for Research Question #3 and align with hypothesized relationships. While comfort wearing cultural/religiously-identifying clothing was a strong predictor of feeling supported in expressing one’s “authentic self”, this variable is a slightly weaker predictor of overall job satisfaction, as denoted by its lower $R^2$ of .09. This is understandable, as job satisfaction is complex construct and may be influenced by more factors than the dependent variable examined in the previous research question. Stated simply, a dress code may strongly influence how supported one feels in expressing themselves, but a dress code alone is unlikely to radically change one’s satisfaction with a job that feels stressful, challenging, or unfulfilling. As job satisfaction was not the primary scope of this study, additional research is encouraged to gather more information on factors that
influence job satisfaction in the scope of the genetic counseling profession. Future studies should explore additional predictors of job satisfaction that are more focused on the workplace, such as salary and work hours, to provide more context to the importance of job satisfaction in the workplace (Kruger et al., 2002; Shoman, 2009; Wright and Cropanzano, 2000).

**Future Research**

According to Ainsworth, authentic selfhood is realized during the intersection of ever-changing social identities and norms contingent on infinite contexts and continuously evolving roles (Ainsworth, 2014). In other words, an individual’s authentic identity is experienced by the complex interaction between an individual’s internal beliefs and experiences in addition to their external expression. One respondent commented:

> Self-expression is so much more than tattoos and hairstyle. What about subtlety of modifying my conversation topics and speech to meet mainstream norms?

While another shared:

> …there’s a lot of “authentic self” not captured here that I feel pressured to change: my word choice, my volume, my style, etc. etc.

This study was limited in its capacity to evaluate various factors that would provide a more comprehensive assessment of a genetic counselor’s “authentic self”. As voiced by survey respondents and discussed in the literature, authentic selfhood consists of more than an individual’s physical appearance and demography. One way in which future research could better include authentic, comprehensive assessment of “authentic self” would be to deploy a mixed-methods or community-based participatory research design in which interviews with key
informants could be used in the development of future quantitative measure. By allowing the genetic counseling community to define “authentic selves” for themselves, nuances missed in this study may be picked up in future research.

Additional factors to consider for future studies would be a larger sample size. While some of the study’s planned analyses could not be completely pursued due to the limited number of respondents, a larger sample size in future research may enable more compelling regression models with multiple predictors. A larger volume of respondents would also prove to be more representative of the perspectives of the genetic counseling profession. There may very well be unique challenges faced by genetic counselors in minority groups, but there were not enough respondents in the study to speculate about them. More efforts to recruit genetic counselors from subgroups, especially those in a minority (i.e. Black individuals, male genetic counselors, non-binary genetic counselors), should be considered. Possible recruitment measures for future studies could be sharing the survey with various minority genetic counseling networks and focusing on distributing the survey in geographic locations where there is a higher population of these specific demographics. Additionally, future studies could solely focus on Black genetic counselors or male genetic counselors to oversample these minorities to ensure the sample size is large enough to analyze.

**Study Limitations**

While this survey was distributed through various genetic counseling networks and social media, approximately 3.9% practicing genetic counselors responded to the survey. Due to the low response rate, the conclusions made from this sample may not be representative of the
Genetic Counselors on Expressing their “Authentic Self”

As evident in Research Question 1b, various factors were identified to be close to statistical significance with data in the direction theoretically expected (e.g. see practice settings and language), but the sample size was too low in some categories (i.e. only 10 respondents reporting working in rural settings) to make comprehensive conclusions for the genetic counseling profession. Similarly, for Research Question 2A, variables focused on respondents of Black heritage were removed due to sample size restrictions. With a sample size of only 4, meaningful hypothesis tests cannot be ran based on these respondents.

The survey design itself may have imposed additional limitations. While this survey mainly asked about respondents’ physical appearance, qualitative feedback underscores the importance of incorporating factors beyond physical features. Such measures were ultimately beyond the scope, available resources, and time constraints of this study.

In hindsight, some of the study’s questions could also have been optimized to better measure respondents’ expression of their “authentic selves.” As one respondent stated,

I think the wording on some of these questions is a bit confusing. For example, for several of the questions it assumed your answer only applied if you chose the most extreme (Don't shave legs at all) where as if you shave your legs but you ONLY do it because you feel forced to at work I don't think you're getting that data. And if you only have a 'somewhat unconventional haircut' but would prefer to have a 'very unconventional haircut' then you’re also not getting that data.

It is a possibility that additional respondents who did not contact the author may have had difficulty understanding the question or providing answers that would best answer the question. Similarly, survey respondents could have also had their own differing interpretations of the
presented survey questions that possibly colored their responses. Both instrumentation and respondent bias could have greatly impacted the study, as the survey data was completely dependent on respondents’ understanding of the questions. To improve upon the readability of the survey and respondents’ appropriate understanding of the questions, future studies could conduct a focus group of genetic counselors to thoroughly assess the survey to ensure the integrity of the investigator’s research questions are preserved.

The distribution of the survey may have introduced some limitations. Because distribution of this survey depended on genetic counseling professional networks and social media, practicing genetic counselors who do not receive access to the NSGC listserv may not have been well represented in the survey. As each professional network is limited by its membership, the yield for each avenue of distribution is variable and may also be a reflection of the specific demographics in a particular organization. Similarly, the respondents who became aware of the study via social media may additionally represent their own unique demographic. A limiting study sample demographic may have significant implications on the study as the data were dependent on perspectives from genetic counselors of varying backgrounds to better represent the opinions of the entire profession and to draw comprehensive implications in the context of a quickly evolving professional setting. Possible recruitment measures for future studies could be particularly focusing on surveying minority genetic counseling networks and ensuring that minority groups are accurately represented in the study. Additionally, future studies could oversample these minorities to ensure the sample size is large enough to analyze and that a high representation of minority respondents are present, especially given their low numbers in the profession.
CONCLUSION

This research study is the first investigation assessing genetic counselors’ perspectives towards their self-expression in the workplace. The primary objective for this study was to identify factors that influence genetic counselors’ expression of their “authentic self,” and its implications on traditional expectations of professional appearance. The study reinforces current literature describing the multiple identities that comprise an individual’s authentic selfhood, the genetic counseling profession and research on guidelines for professional attire. The results of the study may be useful to genetic counselors in gaining a better understanding of their “authentic self” and how they express themselves in the workplace. These findings may also provide additional insight into the expectations and challenges to professional appearances for other employees in quickly evolving professional settings. As expressing authentic selfhood is related to employee satisfaction, these findings also have implications for employers in considering how to create and maintain a workplace where their employees feel supported.

Fortunately, most respondents reported feeling supported by their employers in expressing their true identities regardless of demography. Statistically significant associations were identified between respondents’ comfort with wearing culturally or religiously-identifying clothing along with respondents’ perceived feelings of employer support and their job satisfaction. Additionally, multilingual genetic counselors were more likely to report perceived discrimination from a client. The results of this study strongly suggest that the freedom to express cultural and religious identities and languages are central to many respondents’ sense of true selfhood.
The study identified multiple areas that would benefit from additional studies. Future research should focus on evaluating additional factors influencing a genetic counselors’ sense of self, other predictors of employer support, client discrimination, and job satisfaction to provide additional insight into the genetic counseling profession and its implications in a rapidly changing professional landscape.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT NOTICE
National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC) & Minority Genetics Professional Network (MGPN)

Genetic Counselors’ Perspectives on Expressing their “Authentic Self” in the Workplace

Calling ALL genetic counselors! We’d like to hear from you! The purpose of this exploratory study is to identify genetic counselors’ experiences with and attitudes toward expressing their “authentic self” in the workplace. We are asking genetic counselors who work in all settings and specialties to take part in this survey that is estimated to take 10 minutes to complete. We will ask for information related to your professional role and what constitutes your self-expression and authenticity at work. Thank you!

Complete the survey [hyperlink to URL: https://kgi.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_71jEi0JUzOBswqp]
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT NOTICE (SOCIAL MEDIA - TWITTER)
APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM*
*presented before each survey

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Genetic Counselors' Perspectives on Expressing their “Authentic Self” in the Workplace

Principal Investigator: Brynna Nguyenton
Faculty Advisor: Ashley Mills, MS, LCGC

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the Keck Graduate Institute. Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information, so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You may print out a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?
The purpose of this research is to identify genetic counselors’ experiences with and attitudes toward expressing their “authentic self” in the workplace.

Why are you asking me?
Current genetic counselors are being recruited for this study in order to 1) obtain responses from as many genetic counselors as possible and to 2) describe overall patterns and correlates of genetic counselors' comfort displaying their “authentic self” in the workplace.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?
Participants will be asked to complete an 36-item, anonymous online survey that will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

What are the risks to me?
The Institutional Review Board at Claremont Graduate University (CGU) has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.
If you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact Brynna Nguyenton (PI) by email at bnguyenton18@students.kgi.edu, or Ashley Mills (faculty advisor) by email at ashley_mills@kgi.edu.

If you have any concerns or questions about your rights, treatment, concerns or complaints about this project, or if you wish to discuss the benefits or risks associated with being in this study, please contact the CGU Board at (909) 607-9406 or at irb@cgu.edu.

**Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?**
Information obtained from this research may benefit the genetic counseling community through dissemination through academic conferences or publications.

**Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?**
There will be no personal benefits for participating in this study.

**How will you keep my information confidential?**
All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Participants will not be asked to provide their names and will not be identified when data are disseminated. Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access.

**What if I want to leave the study?**
You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. For example, this could happen because you have failed to follow instructions or because the entire study has stopped.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**
By completing this survey, you are agreeing that you read and fully understand the information on this form, that someone has answered any and all questions you may have about this study, and are assenting to take part in this study. By completing this survey, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate in this study.

Multiple Choice:
I consent to participate in the above study.
I do not consent to participate in the above study.
APPENDIX D: 36-QUESTION SURVEY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Genetic Counselors’ Perspectives on Expressing their “Authentic Self” in the Workplace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What is your age?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What is your sex assigned at birth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What is your gender?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you consider yourself a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ+) community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you speak any other language(s) besides English? If so, what is it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>What race/ethnicity/ancestry best describes you? <strong>Please select all that apply.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>[if 6 = African or Black]</strong> For genetic counselors who are of African heritage, what is your personal style preference for how you typically wear your hair at work?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Text box
- Multiple choice: Male, Female
- Male, Female, Non-binary/third gender, Prefer to self-describe (Text box)
- Multiple choice: Yes, No, No, but I identify as an Ally
- Multiple choice: Yes (Text box), No
- Check boxes: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, African or Black, Hispanic or Latino, Middle Eastern or North African, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, White, Other (Text box)
- Multiple choice: Natural, Dreadlocks, Weave, Braid, Shaved, Other (Text box)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Multiple Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. For genetic counselors who are of African heritage, how much pressure do you feel to wear specific hair styles (e.g. weaves/pressed) to fit into your work environments?</td>
<td>Very pressured, Pressured, Somewhat pressured, Unpressured, Very unpressured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Do you have/have you ever had “unnatural” colored hair at work (“unnatural” color is defined as anything not naturally red, blonde, brunette, black, or gray)?</td>
<td>Yes, No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How would you rate your typical hairstyle at work?</td>
<td>Very unconventional, Unconventional, Somewhat unconventional, Conventional, Very conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. How pressured do you feel (or have you felt) by your current work environment to change your current hairstyle to one that is more “professional”?</td>
<td>Very pressured, Pressured, Somewhat pressured, Unpressured, Very unpressured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. What is the frequency you shave (or remove hair) from your legs?</td>
<td>Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Seasonally, Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. If you keep your legs natural (never remove hair), do you feel comfortable revealing your legs at work?</td>
<td>Yes, No, Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. What is the frequency you shave (or remove hair) from your armpits?</td>
<td>Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Seasonally, Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. If you keep your armpits natural (never remove hair), do you feel comfortable to reveal your armpits at work?</td>
<td>Yes, No, Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Do you have any visible tattoos?</td>
<td>Multiple choice:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q No</td>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>If you answered yes to the question above, identify the locations of your visible tattoos. <strong>Please select all that apply.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Please use the following descriptions to guide your response to the question below about the size of your tattoo(s). <strong>If you have multiple tattoos, consider the total volume of all your tattoos combined.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Combined, your <strong>visible</strong> tattoos would best be described as (pick one):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>If you have visible tattoos, do you feel comfortable to revealing them at work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>If you have visible piercings, identify the locations of your piercings. <strong>Please select all that apply.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When not at work, do you wear any of the following culturally or religiously-identifying garments *(please select all that apply and describe the article(s) you wear)*:  

| Check boxes: | Headwear (Text box), Jewelry (Text box), Clothing (Text box), Other (Text box), Not applicable |

How comfortable do you feel wearing culturally or religiously-identifying garments (i.e. headwear, jewelry, clothing, etc.) at your current workplace?  

| Multiple choice: | Totally uncomfortable, Very uncomfortable, Uncomfortable, Somewhat uncomfortable, Somewhat comfortable, Very comfortable, Totally comfortable, Not applicable |

Various sources in the psychology literature describe an “authentic self” as the true you; when your self-image is congruent with your public image. How supported do you feel expressing your “authentic self” in the workplace?  

| Multiple choice: | Very unsupported, Unsupported, Somewhat unsupported, Somewhat supported, Supported, Very supported |

Have you ever felt discriminated against by your employers while working as a genetic counselor due to your self-expression?  

| Multiple choice: | Yes, No |

Have you ever felt discriminated against by clients/patients while working as a genetic counselor due to your self-expression?  

| Multiple choice: | Yes, No |

Please indicate your level of satisfaction with your current job:  

| Multiple choice: | Very dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Somewhat dissatisfied, Somewhat satisfied, Satisfied, Very satisfied |

How many years have you been a genetic counselor? Please enter a numerical value.  

| Text box |

What is your current practice setting? *(Please select all that apply)*.  

<p>| Check boxes: | Rural (located outside towns and cities), |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suburban (urban area within commuting distance of a city), Urban (cities; area with a high population density and infrastructure), Remote (can be done away from the office in a remote location – this position can be done from home), Other (Text box)</td>
<td>What is your practice/specialty? <strong>Please select all that apply.</strong></td>
<td>Check boxes: Prenatal (before birth; relating to pregnancy); Pediatrics (infants, children and their families); Cancer; Cardiovascular (genetic conditions related to cardiac diseases); Adult, non-cancer; Lab (non-clinical role; laboratory or genetic testing); Neurogenetics (individuals with a neurological/neuromuscular disorder); Industry (positions related to the biotechnology industry); Clinical research; Specialty clinics (Text box); Other (Text box)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Do you work with other genetic counselors?</td>
<td>Multiple choice: Yes, No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>What other kind of health care providers and/or interdisciplinary team members do you typically work directly with? <strong>Please select all that apply.</strong></td>
<td>Check boxes: Doctors, Social workers, Nutritionists/Dieticians, Registered Nurses, Nurse Practitioners, Other (Text box)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Do you see patients in your current workplace?</td>
<td>Multiple choice: Yes, No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**34**  
*If 33 = yes* Which age groups do you work with in your practice? **Please select all that apply.**

**35**  
*If 33 = yes* Please estimate the proportion of your patients who fit in each of the categories below. **Please select all that apply. Enter approximate % of each, adding up to 100%.**

**36**  
Please use this space to expand upon anything else you would like to share regarding comfort level of self-expression in your professional setting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check boxes:</th>
<th>Check boxes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prenatal (development of embryo and fetus),</td>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native (Text box),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pediatric (0-18 years),</td>
<td>Asian (Text box),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Adult (18-35 years),</td>
<td>African or Black (Text box),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult (36-55 years),</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino (Text box),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior (56 years or older),</td>
<td>Middle Eastern or North African (Text box),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Text box)</td>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (Text box),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White (Text box)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>