

## CCL9064 Final Blog Portfolio

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### The 'Sk8ter Boi' Aesthetic; Navigating Gender-bending, Racism, & Intersectionality

#### **The Art of Being a *Sk8ter***

*"He was a skater boy/ She said "See you later, boy"/ He wasn't good enough for her",* wrote Avril Lavigne in her hit 2002 power-pop single '*Sk8ter Boi*'. While listening to my then-favorite song on my dad's Sony Ericsson, my elementary-school self ruminated in the question of whether cisgender females like myself could be seen as a trendsetting *Sk8ter Boi*.

Embodying such a character seemed to transcend being able to cruise on a skateboard. Lavigne's lyrics cements the notion that a skater is "a punk" and many would have "a problem with his baggy clothes". Searching for the term on Pinterest would barrage users with images of men in loose dark clothing, beanies, graphic tees, tattoos, and a *lot* of black.

Growing up in a relatively conservative family, all urge to dress in a remotely "masculine" manner was suppressed, and hence, this blog seemed like the perfect opportunity (or excuse) to encapsulate this *Sk8ter* persona by dressing as one every day for 5 weeks. I was eager to finally provide my elementary-self with an answer.

### **Why Do We Ascribe So Much Judgment To Clothing?**

Curating this look, in the beginning, was highly fulfilling. The visceral satisfaction stemmed from choosing a body practice that allowed the uptake of gender-bending i.e a form of social activism that destroys restrictive gender roles and challenges sex-role stereotypes (Iskra, 2021).

Yet, while it was refreshing to undertake an air of defiance, a rather negative counterpart emerged; self-consciousness.

Friends often flippantly referred to me as the “TB” (tomboy) of the group, ousting me as masculine and therefore, different from other peers in our girl “squad”. Though I identify myself as bisexual, they increasingly made jocular remarks on how “gay” I am. They unintentionally reinforced how I stuck out in this effeminate and heteronormative group. Overall, being surrounded by ladies whose standard of fashion pertained to tight halter tops of pastel and floral patterns, my plain loose tee and beanie seemed unattractive in comparison.



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Feeling unattractive was hard enough to deal with, but a larger issue loomed over as I realized while my friends are generally open-minded people, standards of femininity are so deeply ingrained within females especially due to mainstream media, I felt a sense of discomfort I anticipated would only occur in conservative settings. Ultimately, What you wear isn't a mere form of self-expression as members of society, intentionally or not, heavily associate it with not just gender but sexuality.

In "Queering spectatorship in K-pop", the restrictiveness of clothing is discussed as it is elucidated that feminine people, such as participants in Rupaul's Drag Race, are not considered heterosexual by the masses since exaggerated costumes were already marked by homosexuality (Oh, 2015). Even for my friends who are allies of the queer community, it's hard for them to detach the idea of clothing from sexuality. Perhaps it's difficult to unlearn what myopic conservatives previously taught at school. Nonetheless, the same way they assume all the drag queens on the show are gay, it's simple for them and many others to look at a female dressing in dark baggy clothing and joke about their manliness or how they're a lesbian.

## Racism and Ethnocentrism in Hong Kong

As time passed, the jarring contrast between empowerment and frustration materialized, and I felt as though my self-confidence depended on external factors. Some days, I would skate at nearby parks late into the night with just one friend of mine. This allowed me to follow through with my body practice while keeping the public scrutiny at a minimum.

During one late-night excursion, my friend made an interesting comment on how I looked like a “druggie”. Upon further staring at the metal rings on my finger, black bandana, and chains on my neck, the statement was retracted. Apparently, I looked like “one of those Nepalese gangsters that hang out at Southorn”. Southorn Playground in Wan Chai is a common hangout spot for ethnic minorities and so, I instinctively snickered at the comment. There was no malicious intent in the remark, but it soon sunk in that it wasn’t a tasteful but crass joke. Stereotyping drug users and gangsters is already a cheap



jab, but laughing at how I looked like a *Nepalese* gangster revealed this offensive bias my friend and I had internalized.

We’re both Filipinos yet were making callous remarks of another Southeast Asian group, associating them with “druggies” and gangs. Individual racism includes personal prejudiced beliefs based on race (Meek, 2021), and so it was alarming how we were being racist by



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perpetuating stereotypes. In “How Race Becomes Biology”, Gravelle states how “systemic racism becomes embodied in the biology of racialized groups” (Gravelle, 2009, 54), introducing a larger discussion of how institutionalized racism feeds into pre-conceived notions of race. As ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, we are all too familiar with comments like “brown kids are lazy delinquents and that’s why they don’t get into university” when in reality the education system in Hong Kong and the language requirements create added obstacles to these minorities. There’s a painful truth of institutionalized racism behind many racial stereotypes, including that of minorities taking drugs, yet be it due to ethnocentrism or ignorance, we were too blind to acknowledge it.

Upon further reflection, I realized that becoming a *Sk8ter Boi* meant subjecting myself to coming off as some stereotypical juvenile by the general public. Rather than embracing that entirely, however, my coping mechanism was to project this insecurity onto jokes about other groups. It’s disappointing to see how fast I was willing to throw all forms of “political correctness” out the window, just to ease my mind with the discomfort I was facing as I dealt with this persona.

### The Intersectional Lens

The final week allowed me to look at the process from a holistic perspective and I attempted to comprehend the tumultuous journey I set foot on. The challenges posed to me regarding comments on both sexuality and race made me realize the convoluted nature of my experience had to do with the specific identity that I have.

Intersectionality refers to an analytic framework for understanding how aspects of one's identity are combined in the creation of different types of discrimination and privilege (Meek, 2021), and this framework shed light on why this body practice seemed more challenging than expected. At the start, I saw myself as a cisgender female attempting to dress in a somewhat masculine manner for 5 weeks. In reality, however, I was a brown bisexual woman attempting to do so.

In "Doing Out", Broomfield discusses intersectionality by sharing his experiences as a queer black male and his struggle of wondering which community would claim him (Bobel & Kwan, 2019). He sheds light on how layers of one's identity create a complex struggle and how lonesome it can be navigating that since there aren't many that can really resonate with that exact hardship.

His story atop of the disorientation I experienced while navigating through the 5 weeks made me more empathetic to androgynous ethnic minorities. I began to process how frustrating it must be to be for them to be pigeon-holed into various stereotypes. A relatively masculine minority female could be misgendered or depicted as queer and atop of that be stereotyped as a lowlife punk that does drugs.

### So, Can Anyone be A *Sk8ter Boi*?

Frankly speaking, yes anyone, even a brown elementary school girl can be a *Sk8ter Boi*. Anyone can adopt whatever character or fashion sense their heart desires. However, no one's experience as a *Sk8ter Boi* or any other persona would be identical. It's frustrating to have added struggles due to your specific identity, yet in retrospect, I accept how they make the experience irreplicable. My younger self might be proud that I finally dressed like I belonged in Avril Lavigne's music video, but perhaps she would be proudest that I've embraced what makes me a unique *Sk8ter Boi*.



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