

# Final Blog Portfolio

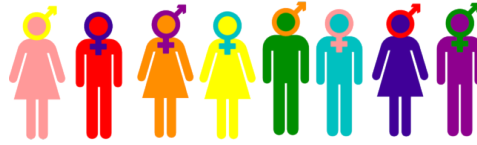
CCGL9064 BODY POLITICS

SUZANNE MUI

## Week 3

During the first half of the week, I feel good about wearing dresses. I feel pretty wearing dresses and skirts and often I match my outfit with more feminine and carefully picked choices. However, in hindsight, when I think about it, I started to think: is this a choice out of my own personal autonomy, or is my decision influenced by other things like social beauty standards as well as the craving for attention and appreciation that could be a product of the male gaze? Sontag (2004) discussed about the concept of co-spectatorship in war photographs, how the photographer and the photo viewers as co-spectator, a bystander to other people's suffering. That makes me wonder: Am I, alongside with other people who look at me as I happened to be well-dressed that day and femininely beautiful, co-spectating myself? Are they instilling the value judgement in my beauty when I am the only person who can decide whether I am beautiful enough or not? Am I, who is also co-spectating myself, internalizing the patriarchal beauty values endorsed by the male gaze, by letting myself be well-dressed and show myself to the world as I walk into the streets? Am I agreeing to patriarchal beauty standards and think that girls should wear dress/ skirts because this way of dressing is exclusively beautiful on women but not men?

I think there are not dispositive answers to those questions. But there is one thing I can be sure with: by choosing to wear a dress on a day I would go out, I am not making this decision in isolation of my own will. I can hold egalitarian views and believe in feminism, and still be influenced by patriarchal beauty standards and the male gaze by the way people perceive me. This is because what I think, is a conglomerate of the values I pick up and acknowledge. I am a product of the society I live in as well as a product of the things I choose to believe in, but not mutually exclusive to either.



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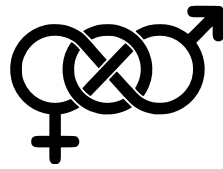
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## Week 4

During the second half and for the entirety of the fourth week, I didn't feel comfortable wearing dress partly attributed to my menstrual cycle. Although I am onto this bodily practice and I am kind of bound by my academic duty, I know I won't be trapped by these dresses forever. And I started to think about women from past times, such as in Victorian Era and in ancient China, who don't get to wear pants or other outfits even if they don't feel comfortable. Wearing pants today is nothing more than a normal practice for most women around the world. But for women who challenged gender norms in the 19th century, it would be considered very brave of them. Despite the fact that they are fighting for the greater good of other women, their deviant actions might attract stigmatization or prejudice even from their fellow gender. It would be very difficult to stick to their deviant practice against social norms.

This is exactly what Greenhalgh (1994) contended. She argued that women in China who were subjected to the birth control policies were giving birth for themselves as well as for the "patriarchal families", and therefore reinforced patriarchal values. Women would look at other women who don't conform to the birth policy with a sign of disapproval or even prejudice. From this, I would like to draw parallels to my body practice. As I wore dress, although it was partially my own predilections, I could be affected the male gaze because I may adjust my actions based on the positive or negative social sanction I receive. If I get compliments for being pretty wearing a dress/ skirt, it is likely that I would wear them more often. If I get comments for not putting enough effort in getting dressed by just opting for trousers for convenience, it might also deter me from wearing pants. Lastly, despite my perception of myself as being a rather liberal person, I might have also exerted the ideology onto myself in my future actions and onto other women. It might be more likely for me to have given compliments to a person who wore dress/skirt than one who wear pants because I may mimic other people's actions through socialization.



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## *Week 5*

As I come to my final blog post, I began to reflect on what it means to be feminine and its correlation to my practice of wearing dresses or skirts, which is mostly exclusive to females even until today.

Butler (1990) argues that gender is a social construct. As such, gender is the social and cultural perception that society has on us. But does wearing a dress automatically mean one is behaving femininely? What does it mean to be feminine? Adhering to female exclusive fashion? Being demure and gentle? And even if we fulfill all these qualifications that society classify as feminine, does it mean we are automatically becoming womanly? Being a member of society ourselves, we should also have a say on who we are and not just simply dictated by the tyranny of the majority. If gender norms are simply a construct of tyranny by the majority, then it would become a disciplinary tool (Foucault, 1997) to members of society. Society would be categorized with binary divisions, segregating the conformists and the deviants. This should not be; our actions should not be gendered and used to draw inference as to whether we are behaving in accordance with our biological sex. Gender is a liberal expression of our own identity: we should not define someone's gender by the way they behave to the outside world, but by what they identify as in their own proclamation.

In getting involved with this body practice, I came to this conclusion about what gender means to me. Gender to me, is not just a social construct, but a negotiation between the autonomy of expressing our own identity, and society's acknowledgement of one's voice and standing.

# REFERENCES

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