Body Practice Blog Portfolio

OF Wearing Sleeveless Clothes 😏

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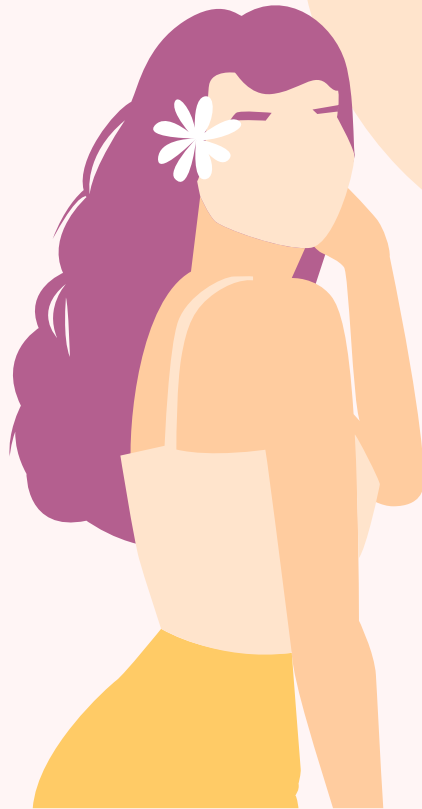# ●Body Practice Blog Porfolio_wearing sleeveless clothes

☆My body practice and motivation

Hello everyone!☺ I am Kalista. My body practice is wearing sleeveless clothes. I got the idea when I saw a beautiful sleeveless dress browsing Taobao. Yet, I have never bought sleeveless clothes, and none of my friends wear sleeveless clothes. However, I often saw foreign students wearing these in HKU, so I began to wonder why my friends nor I had ever chosen these clothes. Thus, I invited six of my friends to show their opinions. Click on the following video to see their responses!

Kalista's body practice
——Wearing Sleeveless Clothes

https://youtu.be/8zAJnSBfTaM

In the video, we can observe some ideas. William and Jerry think these clothes are not conservative enough. More notably, many showed anxiety about their body images. All three girls claimed they were too fat, although they were not overweight. This anxiety not only affected girls--Leon claimed he had no muscles. As for myself, I refused to try on these clothes also because I lacked confidence in my body image. So I decided to take the plunge, hoping to combat body anxiety and inspire my friends to feel more confident in their bodies. I bought several dresses without sleeves on Taobao and wore them to campus as much as possible. I also encouraged my friends to try my clothes and discussed our feelings. I have gained a lot during my journey, and I would like to share them with you in this portfolio.

✩Culture and Power in Clothing

Clothing, as one of the most visible forms of consumption, performs a major role in the social construction of identity." (Crane 2000) As humans evolved, clothing no longer had a simple function of covering the body but served as an expression of value and self-cognition. Yet, through my observation, our value is significantly affected by society, so is our clothing.

At the beginning of my practice, unfortunately, on September 12, the Taliban announced that universities in Afghanistan would be segregated by gender and that women would be required to follow a new dress code on campus. The girls were required to wear a hijab and cover a large part of their bodies. Luckily, society here doesn't have such formal norms, yet some informal norms keep us from wearing some clothes.

r in September, Kabul saw a protest by women calling on the Taliban to protect their rights

Image Source: BBC news

The obvious example would be the anxiety of body image. We do not choose clothes that we think are beautiful or comfortable, but rather choose clothes that fit us and can cover our "imperfections." More notably, in my video, the imperfections for girls are not slender enough; and for boys are not muscular enough. This clearly implies gender stereotypes and social values today.

Despite the norms and values, we are also affected by cultural power. As mentioned earlier, my friends from Mainland seldom wear sleeveless clothes, yet I noticed many foreign students wearing them. This is primarily influenced by the different cultures of China and the West (Yin, Yu and Xu 2007). Confucianism has influenced China for a long time, and its clothing culture is introverted. It pays attention to the social ethics and moral function of clothing, so Chinese people have always been reserved and rigorous in their choice of clothing from ancient times to today. While western clothes pay more attention to the beauty of the human body, they expose more parts of the body (Liu 2016). This also reflects cultural hegemony--I naturally prefer conservative clothes that cover more parts without thinking about the rationale.

✰Experiencing Body Shaming

In the beginning, I chose a black sleeveless dress and wore it to school for lunch. This was my first attempt. Cathy took this picture for me and encouraged me that I looked great. Yet, since I still didn't think my arms were slim enough, to be honest, I immediately put on a coat to cover my arms after the photo was taken. That discomfort made me acutely aware that I was suffering from severe body anxiety.

I understand this is due to the influence of social norms and values, as discussed previously. During the process, I noticed that nowadays, these could be spread widely and rapidly with the Internet.

For instance, when I browsed social media "Little Red Book" 小红书 for tips on wearing sleeveless clothes, the app started showing me videos about weight loss, mostly about how to slim down my arms. I knew it was just pushing content based on its algorithm that it thought would be of interest to me. I realized the implications of the algorithm-- that social media is helping spread the social norm and value that sleeveless clothes require slender bodies.

Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) argued that young people often post better-looking images of themselves on social media since these are consistent with the social norms. This is more likely to lead to body anxiety among young people, as defeating the social norms and not pursuing a slender body would be regarded as humiliating (Bordo 1993). In the example of Little Red Book, the bloggers were mostly young, slim boys and girls with perfect bodies. They also often share the slimming exercises or recipes they use. Although the images are biased and the authenticity can't be guaranteed, it's easy to feel anxious about my body. One tends to feel insecure about himself, exposed to images like these.

Later, I tried to encourage myself to take off my coat more often. Over the practice, I was able to go longer and longer without a coat, which I thought was a sign that I was getting over my body anxiety and learning to accept myself. One of my friends was influenced by me and ordered several sleeveless clothes to my delight. She also said she would like to try to overcome her body anxiety, even though she is already pretty slim.

✩Tracking Body

An unexpected phenomenon occurred during my process of fighting body anxiety that I unconsciously started tracking my body. It wasn't my intention, but since I showed my arms more, I began to pay more attention to my weight and what I ate. As Frith and Gleeson (2008) mentioned, one could strategically use clothing to manage physical appearance and anxiety. And that's exactly what I did before, by covering up what I thought was less than perfect and showing what I thought looked a little better. Practicing sleeveless clothes took that away from me, so I paid more attention to my body.

I didn't blame myself for this--though I wanted to resist the social norm, this process involves risk "psychological and involve identity conflict" (Bobel and Kwan 2019: 3). I knew the goal of resisting body shaming would be achieved gradually. At first, I only measure the weight often and use a ruler to measure dimensions. Later, I downloaded a tracking app "吃饭打卡" (tracking your meals) 🍚 to record my daily weight, the time and content of my meals, and my mood. While the reason for this was body anxiety, the tracking process helped me gradually enjoy a healthy eating routine. As I became more in control of my body and what I ate each day, I got rid of a lot of that anxiety and lost a little weight along the way. It was very beneficial for me. Tracking not only gives me a better understanding of my health but also allows me to make choices based on it (Schüll 2016: 203). Now I'm better able to plan when and what I eat, and my body is much healthier as a result.

✩My feelings...

I originally chose this project because I wanted to get rid of body anxiety and encourage my friends to feel confident in their bodies. Over the course of six weeks, I have noticed how social norms, values, and cultural power are embodied in clothing and affect our lives. I was also fully aware of the impact of various media publicity on body anxiety in this process. Now I gradually accept my body better. At the same time, the positive attitude of my friends also made me realize that we all have the potential of resisting social norms, though it takes a long time and huge courage. The practice is very meaningful, and I'm glad I tried.

✩Bibliography

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✩Thanks for reading