

CCGL9064 Final Blog Portfolio

Name: Tsai Wai Kit Donald

Introduction

Fashion, by definition, is “a popular style of clothes, hair, etc. at a particular time or place” (Oxford Learners’ Dictionary 2021). Previously, I was a student who was indifferent towards the rapidly evolving fashion trends. After entering HKU, I am stunned to realize how diverse the range of fashion styles among



HKU students is. This includes Korean style, hipster’s style and casual wear, and they are the fashion norms guiding us on how we should dress in HKU. In retrospect, my parents decided on the style of clothes I wore. My wardrobe is full of sharp, dazzling and eye-catching red, blue shirts. In HKU, I notice that my fashion style truly can’t match that of most students here. This is known as “cultural hegemony”, which means that the majority can create consent without the employment of threat or force (Song 2021: Lecture 2, September 8). In this case, peer influence is guiding our dressing behavior.

Fashion is not only about dressing but also related to body politics in terms of the embodiment of specific values. It is a symbol that signifies gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, class and position in society, place and national identity, age and generation (Kaiser 2014:1). Moreover, from my observation, many HKU students wear clothes produced by various transnational corporations, including Uniqlo, Muji and Zara. This illustrates how different institutions, particularly corporations, have promoted particular values and induced a fashion trend. To enable me to step out of my comfort zone, I will experiment with fashion styles that I seldom try out. In this blogging project, I am going to relate my experiences dressing as a gender bender, in suit and ties, and like a defying figure, to specific aspects of body politics, including gender, social class and disciplinary power, and I believe this body practice will serve as a golden opportunity for me to step out of the comfort zone and try something new.

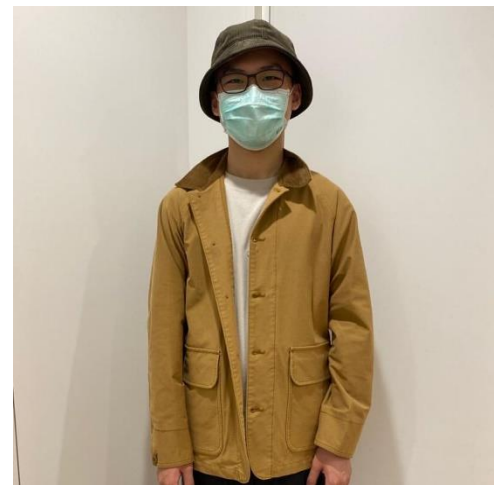
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Fashion and Gender

In a society where gender is socially constructed by institutions such as science (Martin 1991:485), it is nothing peculiar that people have been pressured to adhere to various gender norms. Knowing that fashion is a symbol that can signify gender (Kaiser 2014:1), I will share my experience as a gender bender, a person who attempts to violate the expected gender roles (Iskra 2021: Lecture 4, September 29), in this blog post.

In the first picture, I dressed in a brown coat, wearing a black cap, trying to imitate the woman shown in the second picture. It was really uncomfortable wearing a thick coat and a hat under the muggy weather on the street. Yet, what made me more unpleasant was that I considered myself deviant when I saw that most males on the street were dressing in a sporty, masculine manner, which conformed to the “hegemonic masculinity”, a set of norms defined by a culture that specify what a man needs to gain access to power and economic resources. (Iskra 2021: Lecture 3, September 15) I waited for my friend outside an MTR station as we had planned to dine out together, and the response I received upon his first sight was, “Why are you dressing like this? I almost couldn’t recognize you!” I was instantly overwhelmed by a sense of embarrassment, and he was puzzled about how I dressed until I explained my rationale for doing so.



Due to ethnocentrism, behaviors that fit into certain cultural norms are deemed “natural”, and vice versa. (Song 2021: Lecture 7, October 27) Gender benders, such as drag kings and queens, are often equalized as queers. This resembles the situation in Taiwan in which zhongxing is theorized as a queer deviating from

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the “normative gender binaries and heterosexuality” (Lu & Hu 2021:179). From an intersectional lens, gender benders could enjoy privilege in the queer community but not in a heteronormative Chinese society (Song 2021: Lecture 6, October 20), where they could be subject to symbolic violence. Yet, gender performativity implies that gender is a fluid concept and isn't only bound to sticking to gender norms. (Iskra 2021: Lecture 3, September 15) In this experience as a gender bender, I understood the role of cultural hegemony in opposing my agency since I succumbed to peer influence when I chose not to abide by the gender norms.

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Fashion and Social Class

In this second blog post, I will share my experience of joining a high-table dinner, an HKU long-standing tradition, organized by the English Society. It was a golden opportunity for me to dress in suits and ties, which I seldom experiment with on a quotidian basis.

Clothes have long been regarded as objectified cultural capital symbolizing refined taste, which embodies social class and results from one's habitus or embodied history. (Iskra 2021: Lecture 4, September 29) They are also related to embodied cultural capital as they reflect one's manner and behavior. (Iskra 2021: Lecture 4, September 29) This was prominent in the 18th century as suits and ties could only be worn by male elites possessing an abundance of economic capital in a society. Since suits and ties can now be mass-produced, they have been popularized in the workplace and in "formal occasions such as weddings and funerals" (Barry & Weiner 2017:3). Even people from the lower social class who lack cultural capital "view clothing as a necessity that should require minimal economic investment" (Barry & Weiner 2017:10), showing that under the makeover culture, dressing in suits and ties have become a technology of the self for people to transform the way they present themselves and achieve happiness via being recognized by others. (Iskra 2021: Lecture 8, November 3) It also exhibits people's attempt to sell themselves, manifesting their entrepreneurial self. (Iskra 2021: Lecture 8, November 3) On the other hand, purchasing suits and ties is related to consumerism, a socio-economic system encouraging people to buy goods and services in an ever-increasing amount. (Iskra 2021: Lecture 8, November 3)



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In this high-table dinner, attendees are required by the English Society to dress formally, as shown in the picture on the right. This illustrates how institutions (English Society in this case) could exert their power to shape our dressing behavior. Thus, I was compelled to dress in suits and ties since I knew that I wouldn't be permitted to join the function if I failed to do so. This reveals how the failure of males to conform to hegemonic masculinity would prohibit them from obtaining specific resources. (Iskra 2021: Lecture 3, September 15)



hkuengsoc -

It's time to kick off the start of another school year! English Society, A.A.H.K.U.S.U. cordially invites you to our High Table Dinner, to be held at the start of October! A long-standing HKU tradition, the High Table Dinner allows participants to facilitate intellectual exchange with guests and peers. Of course, you'll also be able to wear a green gown, another HKU tradition that you can experience during this unique event!

The details of the High Table Dinner are as follows:

Date: 7 October 2021

Time: 7:00p.m. – 9:30p.m. (Reception begins at 6:30p.m.)

Venue: BRICK LANE (4/F, CITIC Tower, 1 Tim Mei Avenue, Admiralty)

Dress code: Formal

Price for Member: \$345

Price for Non-Member: \$395

Price for Walk-in: \$420

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Fashion and Disciplinary Power

In the book *Discipline and Punish*, the Panopticon is a metaphor of disciplinary power, which induces “in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility” (Foucault 1977:201) to ensure that power is automatically functioning, and “increases both the docility and the utility” of people (Foucault 1977:218). Schools, one of the institutions primarily performing the function of socialization, constantly educate students about disciplinary power by depicting obedience as a quality good students should have and emphasizing the consequences of not obeying specific rules. In another book *Body Battlegrounds*, acts contesting bodily norms are described as counteracting the “hegemony of social customs that limit individuality” (Bobel & Kwan 2019:4). I am going to devote this final blog post to sharing my experience of embodying a defying figure, which contradicts parents and teachers’ typical perception of me as a good student, as shown in the picture below.

I dressed in a black denim jacket when I hung out with my friends one day, and I received some harsh remarks from them, “The way you dress right now totally differs from our understanding of what type of person you actually are. It’s just like a villain.” Though I wasn’t subject to sovereign power by dressing like a defying figure, the remarks I received from my peers attached me to some form of social stigma, meaning that I was classified as undesirable due to my socially discrediting dressing behavior. (Iskra 2021: Lecture 10, November 17)



Clothes are symbols signifying specific values such as politeness (Song 2021: Lecture 2, September 8), and they are often linked with embodied cultural capital, which is revealed in our habitus since they are one of the criteria indicating whether an individual is courteous and well-behaved (Iskra 2021: Lecture 4,

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September 29). This experience of dressing like a member from the triad community, who is commonly associated with possessing a lack of cultural capital such as education, exhibits the roles of cultural hegemony in shaping personal feelings as I wasn't accustomed to embodying a character that didn't represent me partly owing to the criticisms received from my peers. It also reveals how cultural hegemony impedes the attempt to manifest our agency or potential to challenge various norms (Song 2021: Lecture 2, September 8).

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Conclusion

In this body practice, I realized the role of cultural hegemony in shaping my experiential self in that I would feel comfortable falling into the unmarked category and fitting into the norms, and vice versa. I was sometimes objectified because the way I dressed could be judged by others, while my individuality, dignity and subjecthood were neglected. (Song 2021: Lecture 7, October 27) Owing to my self-consciousness, I was mindful of others' comments and would consequently think about how I should dress to impress others, manifesting self-objectification. (Song 2021: Lecture 7, October 27) Moreover, I was stunned by the correlation between our body and mind since the way we present our bodies could influence our thoughts and feelings as opposed to Cartesian Dualism, which sees the human soul as separate from our physical body. (Song 2021: Lecture 2, September 8) All in all, it was a fruitful experience documenting my experiences throughout the body practice since I discovered that the norms that we typically encounter in our daily lives only constitute a small part of the larger picture of body politics.

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