

ON BLACK STYLE: BLACK STYLE IN THE BLOGOSHPERE

by

Simone Verginia Ejawa Aziga

Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours), Queen's University

A major research paper
presented to Ryerson University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the Program of
Fashion

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2013

© Simone Verginia Ejawa Aziga 2013

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION FOR ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF A MRP

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this MRP. This is a true copy of the MRP, including any required final revisions.

I authorize Ryerson University to lend this MRP to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I further authorize Ryerson University to reproduce this MRP by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I understand that my MRP may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This creative research project titled *On Black Style: Black Style in the Blogosphere* is an explorative study of black style and black identities as seen through the fashion blogosphere. It explores how the fashion blogosphere has allowed individuals of Black African descent to advance sartorial representations of black identities in fashion media, as well as visualizations of black style. Data were collected from two groupings of voluntary participants. The first involved 2 fashion bloggers of Black African descent; the second involved 36 individuals of Black African descent from the Greater Toronto Area and Montréal who were recruited as street style participants. Themes drawn from analyses of the findings include post-black style, the problematic portrayal of black subjects in fashion media, and the incalculable influence of black style in the fashion blogosphere. Presented as an online fashion magazine, *On Black Style* features 20 street style participants. It is viewable at www.onblackstyle.com.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my dear family for your unshakable support throughout all my years of education.

Thank you to my close friends for being my close friends.

Thank you to my new friends in the Fashion MA program. Special thanks to Ashley Sivil for her generous assistance and intelligent mind.

Thank you to Steve Combes of Broadview Station for your patience and excellent web design work.

Thank you to my primary and secondary supervisors, David Brame and Bernie Murray.

Thank you to Joseph Medaglia, Dr. Ben Barry, and Dr. Alison Matthews David for your enthusiastic support and encouragement.

Thank you to all the participants.

Dedication

To my much loved siblings: Steven and Marita.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Dedication	v
List of Figures	vii
List of Appendices	viii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Literature Review	3
Black Style and Post-Black	3
Dress, Identity, and the Struggle of Representation	6
Advent of the “Fashion” Blogosphere	10
Street Style and Style in Subculture(s)	13
Chapter Three: Methodology	16
Methods Overview	16
Interviews With Fashion Bloggers	17
Street Style Photographs and Interviews	17
Locations for Street Style Photographs	18
Informed Consent Process	19
Limitations	20
Researcher Bias	21
Chapter Four: Results	23
Content Analysis: Interview Responses	24
Visual Analysis of Street Style Photographs	30
Chapter Five: Case Studies on Two Fashion Bloggers of Black African Descent	34
Lougè Delcy of <i>Dapper Lou</i>	34
Anita Clarke of <i>I Want I Got</i>	36
Chapter Six: Discussion, Creative Outcomes, and Conclusion	40
Discussion of Results	40
Creative Outcomes	44
Further Directions and Conclusion	49
References	51

List of Figures

Figure	Page
1: Layering as seen on Spencer.....	30
2: Kevin with hair styled in a “hi-top fade”	31
3: Afrocentric fashion as seen on Jan, Kathleen, and Niapsou.....	32
4: Similar outfits worn by Herve, Claudia, and Oreka	33
5: Lougè Delcy, photographed by Benjamin Rosser	34
6: Anita Clarke photographed by David Yan	37
7: Homepage of <i>On Black Style</i>	45
8: Editorial spread featuring street style participant Cynthia.....	46
9: First page of Herve’s editorial spread.....	47
10: First page of Jonathan’s editorial spread	48
11: <i>On Black Style</i> logo.....	49

List of Appendices

Appendix	Page
A: Recruitment Script and Interview Questions for Fashion Bloggers	55
B: Recruitment Script and Interview Questions for Street Style Participants	58
C: List of Locations for Street Style Photographs	60
D: Fashion Blogger Consent Form	62
E: Street Style Participant Consent Form	66
F: Lougè Delcy's Interview Transcript.....	70
G: Anita Clarke's Interview Transcript	75

Chapter One: Introduction

This creative research project is an investigation of current black identities as seen through fashion media. Beginning in the early 21st century, the advent of the fashion blogosphere and the proliferation of fashion blogs signaled a drastic shift in the modes in which individuals participated, experienced and viewed fashion (Rocamora, 2011). Thus, this creative research project examines how Web 2.0 websites within the fashion blogosphere (e.g., “street style,” “style diary,” and “fashion” blogs) have been instrumental in shaping and voicing expressions of black identities as seen through fashion media. The purpose of this creative research project is to investigate how and why these blogs have allowed for a wide array of emerging and established fashion figures ranging from stylists, writers, designers, and models among others to (re)define and progress sartorial representations of black identities. Whether intentional or not, blogs of this nature put forth an ethos that challenges the predominant narratives of blackness that exist in fashion media, most notably black subjects as the Other or non-existent. Arguably, “fashion-themed” blogs (Pham, 2011) are a means by which individuals of Black African descent¹ have reclaimed black identity. This creative research project questions why street style, style diary, and fashion blogs created by individuals of Black African descent bring forth contemporary notions of blackness that subvert the predominant representations of black subjects in fashion media. By answering this larger question, this project determines how blackness and in turn post-blackness is exhibited in these blogs, and how they are indicative of the advancement of black style.

Although there are identifiable trends and items of fashion that are commonly associated

¹ Black African descent refers to those with African ancestry and can be identified African-American, African-Canadian, African-British, African-Caribbean, and so forth. “Black” or “black people” are commonly used terms as well.

with black culture (e.g., hip-hop fashion), black style² is nuanced and elusive. Carol Tulloch (2004) explains that although black style may be broadly defined as “the dress culture of people of African descent” (p. 11), most importantly “black style ... is an expression of the ways in which different kinds of people in the African Diaspora have negotiated and defined their sense of self in spite of the legacy of inequality meted out through race and class” (p. 14). A vast array of research has been conducted on black style. Fashion theorists and writers like Tulloch, Gwendolyn O’Neal (1998), and Van Dyk Lewis (2003) among others have written extensively about the convergence of blackness and fashion. This convergence has yet to be considered within the context of the fashion blogosphere. Topics in relation to the fashion blogosphere and the shifts in fashion media (from print to the Web) are a rapidly emerging area of research in the field of fashion with limited academic scholarship. The contextual translations of black style into the fashion blogosphere, which is exemplified by the participants of this research, signal the progression of this discourse.

By seeking to uncover the meaning and nuances of this subject matter, this research articulates that these blogs are an intersection for the construction of diverse black identities in the African Diaspora and visualizations of current black style. The creative component of this creative research project, titled *On Black Style*, takes the form of an online fashion magazine. Content derives from interviews and street style photographs taken in the Greater Toronto Area and in Montréal. Ultimately the goal of this creative research project is not to define black style in monolithic terms; it instead situates this subject matter into the lineage of black style with reference to historical, cultural, and social parameters. It defines both textually and visually what black style can mean in today’s cultural conditions.

² “Black style” and “black fashion” are often used interchangeably. Black style will be predominantly used for this creative research project.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Broadly speaking, this creative research project is an investigation of black identities as seen through fashion media. Thus, the following four themes can be identified for the purposes of this literature review: black style; dress and identity; the fashion blogosphere; and street style and style in subculture.

Black Style and Post-Black

As previously indicated, there is a vast amount of literature that is thematically relatable to the term “black style.” Informed by the work of fashion and cultural theorists as well as scholars, this creative research project addresses black style within the context of the fashion blogosphere. Entangled with the interrogation of black style is the interrogation of the term “black.” When speaking on the politics and history of black hairstyling practices, Kobena Mercer (1987) asserts that

black peoples of the African Diaspora have developed distinct, if not unique, patterns of style across of a range of practices from music, speech, dance, dress and even cookery, which are politically intelligible as creative responses to the experience of oppression and dispossession. (p. 34).

Carol Tulloch (2004) suggests that although it may be broadly defined as “the dress culture of people of African descent,” “the dress styles of black people,” or “the ways in which those in the African Diaspora have managed their sense of self and place through the styling of the body” (p. 11), black style is both elusive and rife with complexities. Tulloch does note in accordance with Mercer that “black style ... is an expression of the ways in which different kinds of people in the African Diaspora have negotiated and defined their sense of self in spite of the legacy of

inequality meted out through race and class” (p. 14). Van Dyke Lewis (2003) contends that black fashion and

its formation within the Diaspora are defined through two double qualifications; one being of the Diaspora and the Western world and the other of being black and of the Diaspora, ... the iconography of black fashion remains a problem of denoting authenticity and confirming origins, and not committing to a hermetic closure. (pp. 173-174).

Attaching the prefix “black” to style and fashion may imply that the black body and the clothes, hairstyles, and accessories that adorn it are a privileged site of the construction of cultural identities.

Conversely and by employing a quantitative methodological approach with an Afrocentric theoretical framework, Gwendolyn O’Neal’s (1998) “African-American Aesthetic of Dress: Current Manifestations” explores the African-American aesthetic(s) of dress, how it is manifested and culturally perpetuated, and how African-Americans perceive it to be. O’Neal categorizes this aesthetic into four elements: “the affinity for ‘high affect’ colors; ‘style’ or individual expression; improvisations and exotic features; and the tendency to dress up” (p. 170). The article provides a comparative analysis of African-American dress before the widespread popularity of the fashion blogosphere. Style, as O’Neal concluded, is often used by African-Americans to articulate their refusal and resistance to mainstream culture; allowing them to assert and (re)define representations of blackness in fashion. She writes:

Although objects of dress are designed and manufactured by the dominant culture, African-Americans may use these objects to dramatize cultural differences in the manner in which they wear them and in the attitude that supports their expressiveness. Thus, the

object is not complete as purchased but is reshaped by the wearer to express nonverbal messages of resistance, conflict, accommodation, rebellion, or even cultural identity.

Style allows the wearer to don the garb of the dominant culture while refusing to accept that culture's definition of him-or herself. (p. 173)

In the final summation of her article "Style-Dress-Fashion: From Black to Post-Black," Carol Tulloch (2010) expresses that the appropriate usage of the terms "style, dress, fashion, black" and "post-black" may be an area for further research. She states, "what needs to be considered now is when, and where these terms come into play" (p. 297). Her discussion of the term post-black and the invisibility of the black body in visual culture relates to this creative research project. According to Tulloch, post-black applies to individuals in the African Diaspora who are seeking to explore what it means "to be black" today through style narratives, all while referencing the cultural, social, and historical lineage of blackness. Post-black enables them "to exercise the agency to make choices that an individual needs to construct a 'sincere self': the 'genuine feeling' an individual expresses in an autobiography as the way that individual wishes to present themselves to the public" (p. 283).

Much discussion has focused on the term post-black. The term emerged from *Freestyle*, a 2001 exhibition held at the Studio Museum in Harlem and curated by Thelma Golden. In "Post-Black, Old Black," Paul C. Taylor (2007) questions the complexities surrounding its meaning and usage. He argues that for the artists who were included in this exhibition "the traditional meanings of blackness" were too confining. "New meanings have emerged: new forms of black identity that are multiple, fluid, and profoundly contingent along with newly sophisticated understandings of race and identity, marking what Neal describes as the shift from essential

notions of blackness to metanarratives on blackness” (p. 626).³ Taylor continues to suggest that post-black is not just for artists and is not a substitution for black. Post-black should be perceived as an evolution. As Taylor writes,

it is a feature of the post-soul condition, ... to be post-black is to experience the contingency and fluidity of black identity, to have to wrestle with the question of how to orient one’s self to the various options for black self-consciousness, and to do all of this while relating one’s self to the similarly fluid meanings and practices of the wider society. (p. 627)

Under these considerations, one could question whether or not the participants of this creative research project (the bloggers and the street style participants) are exercising their “post-blackness.” Through their personal styling and their blogs, they denote diverse black identities and what today’s black style can be exhibited as. To borrow the words of Monica Miller (2009), they are exercising “black sartorial agency” (p. 4). This creative research project expounds upon these concepts to understand the contemporary “aesthetic” of black style as found in the fashion blogosphere. It speaks to the complexities of black style and expose how the practices of representation of black identities have been influenced by the fashion blogosphere.

Dress, Identity, and the Struggle of Representation

When critically examining representations of blackness in fashion-related imagery, one could argue that the most common portrayal of the black subject can be identified as the Other. The black subject portrayed as bestial and hypersexual can be subsumed under portrayals of the Other. bell hooks’s (1992) essay “Eating the Other” in *Black looks: Race and Representation* discusses the exploitation and commoditization of the Other that is commonplace in visual

³ Taylor cites Mark Anthony Neal’s (2002) *Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-Soul Aesthetic*. New York, NY: Routledge.

culture. With reference to theorists Edward Said and Franz Fanon, hooks writes about her observations of the portrayals of visible ethnic minorities as seen in fashion media, specifically fashion editorials and advertisements. She suggests that visible ethnic minorities are included as a ploy to suggest racial diversity when in actuality these portrayals rely heavily on racial stereotypes. “The world of fashion,” she writes, “has also come to understand that selling products is heightened by the exploitation of Otherness” (1992, p. 28). hooks argues that the inclusion of the contemporary portrayals of the Other in fashion-related imagery is “a seasoning that can liven up” white culture (1992, p. 21). The struggle of the representation of the black subject in fashion media is precisely the basis for this creative research project. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall writes in his seminal essay “What is ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture” (1996c) that:

Within culture, marginality, though it remains peripheral to the broader mainstream, has never been such a productive space as it is now. And that is not simply the opening within the dominant of spaces that those outside it can occupy. It is also the result of the cultural politics of difference, of the struggles around difference, of the production of new identities, of the appearance of new subjects on the political and cultural stage (p. 470).

Later Hall explains that what he is referring to in this passage is the struggle over cultural hegemony as in the shift in the balance and dispositions of cultural power (1996c, p. 471).

Discussions surrounding the practices of representation are applicable to new cultural spaces of production such as digital media and the fashion blogosphere. If one applies Hall’s writings to the fashion discourse, the exoticization, tokenism, marginalization, and exclusion of the black experience and black subjects in fashion media are being challenged in these spaces. Marginality may still exist but with the growing demand for diversity of all kinds within fashion-related imagery, it is a space that is slowly diminishing. In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural*

Politics, hooks (1990) suggests, with reference to her previous writings on counter hegemonic cultural practices, that

marginality as a site of transformation where liberatory black subjectivity can fully emerge, emphasizing that there is a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structure and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance, as a location of radical openness and possibility. (p. 22)

It is in the former space of marginality that fashion bloggers and street style participants of Black African descent operate—perhaps unbeknownst to them and without explicit radical intentions.

In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Hall (1996a) identifies two types of cultural identities, one that is singular “in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’” (p. 393) and another that recognizes the significant difference between those who share a cultural identity. Hall explains that cultural identities should not be thought of as “being eternally fixed in some essentialised past” but rather as “a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (p. 393). As noted earlier, entangled with the interrogation of black style is the interrogation of the term “black.” Hall tells us that “we” (meaning those of Black African descent) are in constant negotiation with a series of different positionalities, not with a single set of oppositions. He points to the “diversity, not the homogeneity, of the black experience” and the recognition of the differences within the differences that “that place, position and locate black people” (1996c, p. 476). He writes,

The point is not simply that, since our racial differences do not constitute all of us, we are always different, negotiating different kinds of differences—of gender, of, sexuality, of class. It is also that these antagonisms refuse to be neatly aligned; they are simply not reducible to one another; they refuse to coalesce around a single axis of

differentiation (1996c, p. 476).

The participants in this creative research project are negotiating the “different kinds of differences” within blackness through the fashion blogosphere and through personal style. In “New Ethnicities,” Hall (1996b) refers to this more explicitly as the debate surrounding the reductive “essential black subject”; in his view, this debate calls attention to

the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category “black”; that is, the recognition that “black” is essentially a politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed transcultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in nature. What this brings into play is the recognition of the immense diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experience of black subjects. (p. 444)

If “black” is a constructed category then what of black style? Black style mirrors Hall’s aforementioned “diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experience of black subjects” and the multiplicity of the black experience cannot be reduced to a singular definition. In accordance with Hall, rather than discussing a singular black identity, this creative research project will uncover and highlight diverse black identities seen in the fashion blogosphere and found in the Greater Toronto Area and in Montréal.

Malcolm Barnard (1996) has written about the intersections between fashion and cultural identities. “Fashion and clothing are not used simply to indicate or refer to social and cultural positions” he explains; “they are used to construct and mark out that social and cultural identity in the first place” (p. 36). He continues by saying that

fashion, dress and clothing are ways in which people communicate not only things like

feeling and mood but also the values, hopes and beliefs of the social groups of which they are members. They are, then, the ways in which society is produced and reproduced; it is not only that the people are first members of groups and then communicate their membership, but that membership is negotiated and established through communication. (pp. 36-37)

Arguably then, black identities can be constructed, communicated, and negotiated through fashion. As Fred Davis (1992) has argued “clothing does indeed communicate, but not in the manner of speech or writing; what it communicates has mostly to do with the self, chiefly our social identity as this is framed by cultural values bearing on gender, sexuality, social status, age etc.” (p. 191). With reference to the relationship between fashion and identity, Joanne Entwistle (2000) suggests accordingly:

How we perform our identity has something to do with our location in the social world as members of particular groups, classes [and] cultural communities. The clothes we choose to wear represent a compromise between the demands of the social world, the milieu in which we belong and our own individual desires. (p. 114)

Advent of the “Fashion” Blogosphere

Fashion critic Robin Givhan (2007) noted that “an awful lot of people not only have an opinion about fashion, they also believe those opinions are worth broadcasting” (para. 2).

Undoubtedly, the digital realm has provided a platform for the dissemination, consumption and deconstruction of fashion. “The rise of the fashion blogger was inevitable,” writes Givhan; “Fashion has evolved from an autocratic business dominated by omnipotent designers into a democratic one in which everyone has access to stylish clothes, anyone can start a trend, and the definition of *designer* ... has become astonishingly malleable” (para. 3). Agnès Rocamora (2012)

has addressed the recent “shifts in the representation of fashion” and the ways in which fashion-themed blogs have effectively changed the “production, consumption and circulation of fashion discourse” (p. 93). “The rise of the fashion blogosphere,” she writes, “has resulted in the coming to prominence and the growing influence of individuals [bloggers] who had no intuitional affiliation to the field of fashion when they started their blog” (p. 100). Individuals and places that were once invisible or neglected by fashion media now occupy their own domain (both literally and figuratively) within the blogosphere. Rebecca Blood (2004) explains that in their beginnings, she hoped that “weblogs could become an important new form of alternate media, bringing together information from many sources, revealing media bias, and perhaps influencing opinion on a wide scale—a vision [Blood] called ‘participatory media’ ” (p. 54). Bartlett and Rocamora (2009) assert in “Blogs de mode: Les nouveaux espaces du discours du mode” [Fashion Blogs: New Spaces of Fashion Discourse] that “fashion-themed” blogs expand upon the basic format of the weblog; delving deeper into subjectivity and self-presentation, allowing their creators to act as cultural intermediaries as well as producers and consumers of fashion.

Rocamora (2011) notes in “Personal Fashion Blogs: Screens and Mirrors in Digital Self Portraits” that “personal fashion blogs assert themselves as a privileged space of identity construction” (pp. 410-411). At their root, “fashion-themed” blogs are a means of cultivating self-presentation and identities through fashion. Minh-Ha T. Pham (2011) speaks about fashion-themed blogs and racial identities and focuses on blogs made by individuals of East Asian descent in “Blog Ambition: Fashion, Feelings, and the Political Economy of the Digital Raced Body.” She stresses that “fashion-themed” blogs permit individuals to exert some control and agency over externally produced representations that are cultivated in other fashion-related imagery. Fashion bloggers of Black African descent cultivate their personal identities but also

black identities. In varying ways, they have utilized the open accessibility of blogging to reclaim control over the imaging of black subjects and black style in fashion-related imagery. Despite this, as Pham (2012) states, African-American fashion bloggers with largely successful fashion blogs “do not receive nearly the same levels of national and global attention conferred on some of their White and Asian English speaking counterparts” (p. 10) and have yet to be widely recognized by the fashion media.⁵ This, as Pham notes again, brings into question the mythology and “popular rhetoric about the digital democratization of fashion media” (2012, p. 10).

In “Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity and Identity on the Internet,” Lisa Nakamura (2002) writes that the Internet is capable of creating *images* of identities, and influencing how they are understood. Nakamura coins the term “cybertype” to “describe the distinctive ways that the Internet propagates, disseminates and commodifies images of race and racism” (p. 3). In her view,

identity online is still *typed*, still mired in oppressive roles even if the body is left behind or bracketed. ... Chosen identities enabled by technology ... are not breaking the mold of unitary identity but rather shifting identity into the realm of the ‘virtual,’ a place not without its own laws and hierarchies. (p. 4)

She also writes about the “myth of the Internet as the access as-ultimate-equalizer ... with its claims to ‘erase borders’ and magically produce equality simply via access” (p. 27). These claims make the Internet distinctly different from other forms of media such as film and television. The active presence and usage of the Internet by those of Black African descent does not guarantee accurate representations of blackness.

⁵ Examples of these “fashion-themed” blogs include *Street Etiquette* and *The Fashion Bomb Daily*.

Street Style and Style in Subculture(s)

Ted Polhemus (1994) explains the intersections between street style, authenticity, and the expression of individualism in *Street Style: From Sidewalk to Catwalk*. He proposes a profound definition of street style:

Like holy relics, street style garments radiate the power of their associations. Every age uses dress and body decoration to signal what is most important at that historical moment. Throughout most of our history that message has been, “I am rich,” or “I am powerful.” If today more and more people use their dress style to assert: “I am authentic,” it is simply evidence of our hunger for the genuine article in age which seems to so many to be one of simulation and hype. (p. 7)

He explains further, “the Street is both the stage upon which the drama unfolds and the bottom line metaphor for all that is presumed to be real and happening in our world today” (p. 6). The street functions as a “litmus test of street credibility” and is a channel for the expression of identity through dress (p. 6). “The authenticity which street style is deemed to represent” writes Polhemus, “is a precious commodity. Everyone wants a piece of it” (p. 8). With this interpretation, one can easily envision how the stage of the street has been positioned in the fashion blogosphere. The implied authenticity is heightened because street style blogs appear to be predicated on celebrating and capturing real fashion as worn by ordinary people.

Rocamora (2012) argues “the idea that street fashion blogs present fashion as it is, unmediated, is reinforced by the absence of words and writing, ...the privileging of images over words” (p. 103). However, the proliferation of street style blogs has complicated the definition of street style and the stage of “the Street” has been re-contextualized. The Street has been constructed as the backdrop for fashionable display (Rocamora, 2012, p. 102). Ruth La Ferla

(2012) recently addressed this shift in street style a *The New York Times* article titled “Who Am I Wearing? Funny You Should Ask”: “street style—once fashion’s last stronghold of true indie spirit—has lately been breached, infiltrated by tides of marketers, branding consultants and public relations gurus, all intent on persuading those women to step out in their wares” (para. 7) and arguably been reduced to its aesthetic qualities. In “The Myth of Street Style,” Sophie Woodward (2009) notes that Polhemus’s ideas on street style and authenticity are “a pivotal part of how street style is mythologized, and as such is still present in the current myth of street style, as it offers an antidote to the lack of authenticity that is alledged to characterize the late-modern world” (p. 88). She writes “the mediated version of street style present in fashion magazines, has mutated: the subversive has become ordinary” (pp. 88-89).

bell hooks (1994) recounts a story about personal snap shots and family photographs taken by African-Americans in “In Our Glory.” She writes that photography in the early to mid-20th century “was more fascinating to masses of black folks than other forms of images making because it offered the possibility of immediate intervention, useful in the production of counter hegemonic representations, even as it was also an instrument of pleasure” (p. 49). She posits that “photographs taken in everyday life, snapshots in particular, rebelled against all of those photographs practices that reinscribed colonial ways of looking and capturing the images of the black ‘other’” (p. 50). In some ways, street style photography within the parameters of this creative research project is enveloped with this notion. Once again, it will visualize and study what black style can be exhibited as in the Greater Toronto Area and in Montréal. Within the parameters of curated online fashion magazines, it seeks to present accurate representations of a select grouping of black identities expressed as personal style and in the fashion blogosphere.

Although he speaks mostly about style in British youth subcultures, Dick Hebdige’s

(1979) notions of style in subculture are applicable when considering contemporary black style as it seen in the fashion blogosphere. In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Hebdige states:

Style in subculture is, then, pregnant with significance. Its transformations go ‘against nature’, interrupting the process of “normalization.” As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the “silent majority,” which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus. Our task becomes, like Barthes’, to discern the hidden messages inscribed in code on the glossy surfaces of style, to trace them out as “maps of meaning” which obscurely re-present the very contradictions they are designed to resolve or conceal. (p. 18)

While the imagery and blogs that are the focus of this creative research project may not be explicitly “offending the silent majority,” they are negating the commonly perceived imagery of black subjects in fashion and black style. The fashion blogosphere has proven to be an integral part of the (re)imaging of contemporary black style. For example, *Street Etiquette*, a fashion-themed blog operated by two African-American men (Joshua Kissi and Travis Gumbs), routinely challenges the predominant notions of black masculinity in fashion. In this way this “fashion-themed” blog, along with others of similar nature, can be considered to be counter hegemonic. Arguably, since its creation in 2008, *Street Etiquette* has put forth an alternative ethos that moves away from the heavy influence of hip-hop culture and towards way of dress that emphasizes strong tailoring, careful accessorizing, and slim silhouettes (Caramanica, 2011).

In summary, this literature review provides a concise summation of the published writings surrounding the four themes identified. This creative research project examines the convergence between: black style; post-blackness; dress and identity; the fashion blogosphere; and street style.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Using a qualitative methodological approach positioned with a perspective based on postcolonialism, this creative research project is informed by the writings of cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall and bell hooks. Postcolonialism considers “the political and cultural ramifications of colonial occupation on both colonizing and colonized societies” (Young, 2001, p. 6).

As Robert C. Young (2001) explains, postcolonial theory provides a framework for the analysis of the “cultural history of colonialism, and investigates its contemporary effects in western and tricontinental cultures, making connections between the past and the politics of the present” (p. 6). This creative research project (through its subject matter and data collected) challenges the remnants of colonial thought, which marginalizes black subjects in fashion media.

Methods Overview

This creative research project involved voluntary human participants and required approval from Ryerson University’s Research Ethics Board. Confirmation of approval was received in October 2012. The Primary Investigator (PI) Simone Aziga collected data from October 2012 to February 2013. There were two groupings of human participants: fashion bloggers and individuals selected for street style photographs. Fashion bloggers participated in an open-ended interview with the PI. They were also asked to submit photographs from their blog for content analyses and to support their interviews. Street style participants were asked to pose for a series of street style photographs and participate in an open-ended interview. Using the data collected, the PI edited an online fashion magazine titled *On Black Style*; the creative component of this creative research project is available at www.onblackstyle.com.

It also was presented at Ryerson University's Exhibition of Graduate Research from the Fashion MA program (*Unravelling Fashion Codes*) on April 25, 2013.

Interviews With Fashion Bloggers

Case studies were conducted on two "fashion-themed" blogs which include: *Dapper Lou* and *I Want – I Got*. Each "fashion-themed" blog met the chief characteristic of being operated by an individual of Black African descent. It can be assumed then that both are representative of black identities found in the fashion blogosphere. Each fashion-themed blog has also achieved some level of popularity or following. The PI recruited the fashion bloggers by email for voluntary interviews. Once the fashion bloggers agreed to participate, they were sent a consent form by email. Once the consent form was signed and returned, the PI began the interview process.

Generally speaking, the interview questions inquired about the fashion blogger's personal motivations behind the origination of their blog; the method(s) used to create content; their perceptions about their position within the fashion industry; how they view black subjects in fashion media; and how they define black style (see Appendix A). There were 20 questions in total. Fashion bloggers were able to decline to answer any question or end the interview altogether. These interviews were conducted by email correspondence and Skype. Those who answered the interview questions by email correspondence were allotted a week-long time frame to complete and return their responses. These interviews were conducted to understand how black identities operate in the fashion blogosphere from the lived experiences of these fashion bloggers.

Street Style Photographs and Interviews

The PI traveled to various public locations (i.e., "on-the-street" interactions) and fashion-related events in the Greater Toronto Area and in Montréal to select voluntary participants for

street style photographs and accompanying short interviews. These participants were selected at the discretion of the PI. Each street style participant was an adult of Black African descent with an expressive fashion sense. Once the PI identified a possible street style participant, she approached her or him and introduced herself as a graduate student in the Master of Fashion program at Ryerson University who is conducting a creative research project. She explained the creative research project and asked if he or she would like to be a participant (see Appendix B). Once the participant showed an interest in being included, the PI presented the consent form and further described the creative research project as well as the extent of participant involvement. Once they signed the consent form, the PI took a variety of photographs of them.

For the majority of the street style participants, verbal open-ended interviews were conducted and audio recorded. The questions revolved around their personal style, how they define black style, how they view blogs made individuals of Black African descent, and how they participate with the fashion blogosphere (see Appendix B). The interaction between the street style participant and the PI lasted for an average of 10 minutes. These interviews were later transcribed. Street style participants were given a blank consent form for their records and were notified by personal email when the creative component of this creative research project research project was viewable online. Based on the data and using thematic analysis, conclusions were formed about personal style, trend identification, the influence of fashion blogs, and what black style can mean within today's cultural conditions. Twenty exemplary street style participants are featured in *On Black Style* with a series of photographs and edited interviews.

Locations for Street Style Photographs

The Greater Toronto Area and Montréal were selected as the locations for data collection for three primary reasons. First, the largest concentration of individuals of Black African descent

in Canada reside in these areas (Statistics Canada, 2008). Secondly, these areas are key centres for the Canadian fashion industry. In other words, they are two Canadian “fashion cities.” Lastly due to logistical reasons, it was most feasible to travel between these areas (see Appendix C). In addition to public (“on-the-street”) locations, fashion-related events (e.g., World Mastercard Fashion Week in Toronto; Semaine Mode Montréal/Montreal Fashion Week in Montréal; and independent fashion shows; pop-up shops) as well as retail stores (e.g., thrift stores, fast-fashion retailers) were selected as recruitment locations. They were selected because those who attend these events and frequent these locations are likely to be active participants in the fashion blogosphere and have a distinctive personal style.

Informed Consent Process

Fashion bloggers were first contacted by email. The PI located the emails of the fashion bloggers on their blogs and emailed them. If the fashion blogger agreed to be a participant, the PI replied with another email with the consent form attached. The text of this email summarized participant involvement and the consent form. Fashion bloggers were encouraged to ask questions and review all the information provided. The consent form explained: the purpose of this creative research project; what the participant is being asked to do; what the PI will do with the data collected; the risks and the benefits of participation; confidentiality; and the contact information of the PI (see Appendix D). Once the consent form was signed, the interview process began. Those who were interviewed by email correspondence were sent interview questions in a Word document. This document also stated that participation was voluntary. Those who were interviewed by Skype phone call coordinated a mutually convenient time with the PI to conduct the interview. During the Skype phone call, the PI reminded the fashion

blogger that participation was voluntary and that he/she could decline to answer any questions or stop participation permanently.

As noted earlier, potential street style participants were approached in various public locations and at fashion-related events. Once the PI identified a possible street style participant, she approached him or her and introduced herself as a graduate student in the Master of Fashion program at Ryerson University who is conducting a creative research project. Once the street style participant showed an interest in being included by verbally answering with yes or no, the PI presented the consent form. She then further described the creative research project as well as the extent of participant involvement. Again, the consent form explained: the purpose of this creative research project; what the participant is being asked to do; what the PI will do with the data collected; the risks and the benefits of participation; confidentiality; and the contact information of the PI (see Appendix E). Once the street style participants signed the consent form and the data had been collected, street style participants were given a blank consent form for their records. They were encouraged to email the PI with any questions or to terminate participation.

Limitations

The limitations of this creative research project are varied due to the unpredictable nature of data collection. For fashion bloggers, the limitations include: fashion bloggers who declined to be participants; fashion bloggers who declined to answer certain interview questions; data collection methods (i.e., some fashion bloggers asked to be interviewed by Skype phone call due to time constraints); the quality and sincerity of the interview responses; and the quality of the photographs from each blog. For the street style participants, the limitations include: time constraints (i.e., street style participant was not able to give detailed responses or pose for

extended period of time; the amount of time available for the PI to recruit street style participants); the quality and sincerity of the interview responses; equipment issues (i.e., with camera and audio-recording device); the quality of the photographs; environment conditions (i.e., fashion-related events such as World Mastercard Fashion Week are crowded; winter weather conditions can impede the ability to take photos on the street); language barriers (i.e., for street style participants in Montréal); physical challenges (i.e., the PI attended fashion-related events and was unable to photograph all potential participants at the same time); age range (i.e., it can be assumed that all participants are in the 20 to 30 age range). These limitations presented challenges to the research and consequently the final outcome of the creative component.

In several ways, this creative research project speaks to the complex diversity amongst those who identify as being of Black African descent. Possible street style participants were identified and selected at the discretion of the PI. In all cases, the PI visually identified individuals as possible street style participants. This raises additional limitations. For example, some individuals may self-identify as someone of Black African descent but may not possess the physical features commonly associated with this racial category. Alternatively, some individuals may possess the physical features commonly associated with this racial category but may not self-identify as such. This creative research project is not presented as a conclusive study of black identity as seen through fashion. It is an exploration of the identities that comprise blackness and an implication for future research.

Researcher Bias

It should be noted that Simone Aziga, the PI, is of Black African descent. She acknowledges her personal investment in this creative research project and researcher bias. However, the researcher bias provides incomparable methods of engagement in addition to

personal insight into the subject matter of this creative research project. For example, if the PI was Caucasian or of another racial background, potential participants may react differently to her. They may be reluctant to participate and question why she is conducting this creative research project. The racial background of the PI gives her access to this grouping of individuals and the ability to collect data.

Chapter Four: Results

At the outset of this creative research project, the PI proposed to interview and collect data (images) from three bloggers who operated “fashion-themed” blogs. She proposed to recruit between 30 and 50 street style participants, with an equal number of participants from the Greater Toronto Area and from Montréal. The implications of this creative research project were hindered by the difficulties in the recruitment of fashion blogger participants. The individuals who created “fashion-themed” blogs such as *Street Etiquette*, *Style Pantry*, *Marian Kihogo*, *The Fashion Bomb Daily*, and *Where Did U Get That* would have been ideal fashion blogger participants. These fashion bloggers along with several others were contacted. They did not respond to emails or declined to participate. This may be attributed to the methods used to contact and collect data from fashion bloggers. Additionally, the subject matter may have also made fashion bloggers reluctant to participate, as they may not identify themselves as purveyors of black style in the fashion blogosphere. For future research of this kind, the methods of data collection should be altered to simplify the recruitment process, specifically the methods of obtaining participant consent. Suggestions include corresponding in-person interviews with fashion bloggers and selecting fashion bloggers who are easily accessible to the PI. Case studies were conducted on Lougè Delcy of *Dapper Lou* and Anita Clarke of *I Want – I Got*. These case studies have been reported in this paper but were not included in the final product of *On Black Style*. As a result, the creative component *On Black Style* was restructured to mainly feature street style participants. This was done to reflect that much of the analysis is centered on the data collected from this grouping of participants and to present cohesive and curated space.

Thirty-six street style participants were recruited with 20 from the Greater Toronto Area, 13 from Montréal, and three from Hamilton, Ontario. 15 street style participants were identified

as men and 21 were identified as women. The most common occupation was student enrolled in a post-secondary educational institution; 12 participants identified themselves as such. Six street style participants identified themselves as fashion bloggers. All of them operated “fashion-themed” blogs that pertained to their personal style. Although the age of each street style participant was not collected, it can be assumed that all are between the ages of 20 to 30. This may be attributed to the locations of recruitment. On average, 150 photographs were taken of each street style participant, varying from full-body length, portrait, to close-up detail. They were asked to stand comfortably while photographs were taken. As originally proposed, the interviews with the majority of street style participants were audio recorded and later transcribed. Due to time constraints and environment conditions, nine street style participants conducted their interviews by email correspondence. Interviews with six street style participants were considered incomplete (i.e., these interviews were conducted but not audio-recorded due to equipment difficulties or declined to be interviewed). During the course of the interview and based on their responses, some street style participants were asked elaborate and clarify their statements.

Content Analysis: Interview Responses

Through the analysis of the interview responses from both groupings of participants, four themes can be identified: the importance of personal style; the problematic portrayal of black subjects in fashion media; the incalculable influence of the black style in fashion blogosphere; black style defined as self-expression.

During the open-ended interview process, participants were asked to describe their personal style, define the term “black style,” and whether their racial identity influences their personal style (see Appendix B). When asked to describe their personal style, the most common adjectives used were “eclectic,” “varying” (Jonathan: “It varies”), and “different.” Others

included “eccentric,” “avant-garde,” “ugly,” “preppy,” “constantly changing,” “vintage,” “DIY,” and “unique.” Common influences among participants on their personal style were mood and comfort. Many participants expressed that their personal style is uniquely theirs. With differing responses, participants articulated that they place a greater emphasis on expressing their identity through their personal style and less on style that is racialized. Some participants indicated that in no way does their racial identity dictate how they dress—as one participant stated, “I like to look at style and not think of race” (Claudia). Another street style participant explained,

It’s the person that makes the style. Your character is a huge part of it. But I feel like, you know, black, white, Asian, whatever your race may be, it doesn’t really matter. We all appeal to our own demographics but it’s about breaking boundaries with style. (Herve)

A select number of participants explained that their personal style allowed them to counteract and exert control over stereotypical representations of black subjects. For them, style allowed them exercise individual choice. When asked if his racial identity had an influence on his personal style, one participant explained:

Yes and no. I would say that I wear what I want to wear, when I want to wear it. I love trends and yes, I love drawing inspiration from other black people who are into fashion. ... I never think to put on something because I’m black. I have some African garb and I’m not African but I... put it on just ‘cause it’s fun and I appreciate what it is. I never want someone to say he’s wearing that just because he is black. (Andrew)

Another participant indicated that she deliberately dresses in a way that genuinely reflects her identity and allows her to challenge negative representations of black femininity. When asked about her thoughts on black style and the influence of racial identity on style, she stated:

I would say [my racial identity] has an influence but I don't think there is a black style. I think there's an influence in the sense of... I think some black people, myself in particular and my partner, we may avoid certain looks to not be stigmatized as falling into some black stereotype. For example, my partner probably wouldn't wear baggy pants because it just categorizes him. There are certain things I wouldn't wear as well that sort of contradict my personal style. I'm constantly trying to undo negative images of black womanhood. I'm not going to perpetuate them in how I dress. (Jan)

Similarly, an additional participant noted that stereotypical notions about black masculinity have an influence on his personal style:

If [my racial identity] does the connection that I do see is as ... counter to the dominant ideas about what black style should be. Ideas about masculinity, ideas about "what is black?"... I keep going back hip-hop example but all that kind of stuff. I don't sag my pants. I don't buy stuff with like basketball teams. Even brands, I try not to wear brands. I try to challenge this walking billboard, consumerism type of thing. I try to wear certain things that are not masculine per se. Like sometimes I wear women's clothing ... women's cardigans, women's scarves, whatever. (Phill)

For these three participants along with others, personal style is a mode of refusal and resistance to the dominant conceptions about how black people are supposed to or expected to dress. This suggests that their racial identity does have particular influence on how they dress. Whether explicitly or not, these participants have used style to transcend what they consider to be negative and restrictive ideas about blackness.

In general, the majority of participants felt that there is a lack of representation of black subjects in fashion media. Many referred to beauty and fashion advertisements as examples.

When asked to describe her perceptions of the representation of black subjects in fashion media, a participant said:

In terms of advertisement(s), there's still a lag in featuring black models for fashion and beauty campaigns. Usually if a woman of colour is showcased, it's in the mindset to purposely demonstrate variety. I'm all for illustrating cultural diversity, I have an issue when the colour of one's skin being at the forefront. I look forward to the day when a model is beautiful and she happens to be black. (Candice)

Many expressed that when black subjects are represented in fashion media, they are portrayed in stereotypical roles. Some described the representations of black subjects as “exoticization” and “tokenism.” Many participants felt that the imagery of black style/black fashion often alluded to hip hop/”gangsta” culture. One male participant also noted, “the spectrum of black fashion isn’t really represented enough especially for males” (Andrew). Two participants had more positive perceptions. As one explained, “black people are well represented in [the] fashion industry and they do have lots of influence. Black top models and André Leon Talley are few examples about black people who have had success in fashion” (Wilnik).

The Sartorialist was the most common “fashion-themed” blog visited by participants. Other included: *Dapper Lou*; *Refinery29*; *Tommy Ton*; *HighSnobette*; *HighSnobiety*; *Clara’s Closet*; *Creative Boys Clubs*; *V Man*; *The Locals*; *Hypebeast*; *Beautylish*; *Little-Nails*; *HeyFranHey*; *Michael Hyatt*; *Aux Jours Le Jour*; *Upscalehype*; *Marcus Troy*; *Isaac Likes*; and *Katherine Is Awesome*. Several participants noted that they enjoyed viewing fashion-related imagery on Tumblr to find inspiration on how to dress. When asked if they visited any “fashion-themed” blogs that depict black style or predominantly feature black subjects, two participants named Tumblr blogs such as *Black Fashion* and *Black and Killing It* as examples. When asked

the same question, others said they visited “fashion-themed” blogs such as *Style Pantry*, *Street Etiquette*, *The Fashion Bomb Daily*, and *Concrete Loop*. Two participants said they visit “fashion-themed” blogs based in European, Middle Eastern, and East Asian countries. Three participants said they do not visit “fashion-themed” blogs at all, or at the very least, infrequently. Certain participants were asked if they felt that blogging has changed the ways that individuals of Black African descent and black style are represented in fashion media. Some were unsure and others inferred that blogging has provided a platform for those who are not normally at the forefront of fashion media.

When asked to define or describe black style, participants often paused and carefully considered their responses. Some even stated that the question was difficult to answer or questioned the existence of black style. Adjectives such as “cool,” “swag,” “eclectic,” “authentic,” “fun,” “beautiful,” “colourful,” “mysterious,” “subjective,” and “different” were used. Once again, several participants stressed their preference for personal style that is free of stereotypes and racial boundaries over style that racialized. Many participants suggested that black style is culturally driven. Others shared a common belief that in the past black style has been defined as rooted in hip-hop culture. Other relatable terms to hip hop culture used by participants include “urban” and “street.” Some suggested that this definition had a negative connotation and they demonstrated a reluctance to identify with it. When asked about her thoughts on the term black style one participant stated:

[Black style] doesn’t really mean very much to me ... outside of stereotypical conceptions about how black people are “supposed to” dress ... with reference to that I think mainly hip-hop culture, specifically mainstream hip-hop culture, especially like in

music videos where it's very like scantily clad with an emphasis on like urban styles, like that doesn't have relevance to me. (Jan)

Some participants also questioned whether African, Afrocentric, "tribal" fashion could be used as examples of black style. However for the majority, black style could not be defined with a monolithic or singular definition. One participant profoundly defined black style as a political statement:

I feel like that term [black style] is almost ... I don't think anything is apolitical.

Sometimes when I see black people and they're dressed so outrageously, I think that in of itself is like a political statement ... like "I'm going to do whatever the fuck I want, regardless of my race, regardless of where you think I come from or what I like." I think black style, I don't know, I think it can be like a catalyst or statement. Black style to me is a political statement. I feel like black people ... our aesthetic means something. ...

It's not apolitical. It's not something I can really define but what I'm seeing now in 2012, I feel like black people are using their aesthetic to say something about themselves, to transcend some type of state of mind. (Kirsten)

Similarly, one participant described black style as a state of being:

Black style is how we carry ourselves, how we put our clothes together, the way we do our hair, the way we wear our glasses. Maybe we wear them a bit further down, just for the style. It's the way we present ourselves. I feel like if you understand black style then you kind of understand art and creativity. It's explosive. (Samille)

Through the construction and styling of the self, participants believed black style reflects the diversity of black identities. For them, black style instinctively functioned as a tool for authentic self-expression.

Visual Analysis of Street Style Photographs

Street style participants were selected because they appeared to be of Black African descent and were dressed distinctively. The street style photographs display a wide range of appearance and dress with few pronounced consistencies. As a result, they can be used to support the conclusion that black style mirrors the diversity of those identified as of Black African descent. Within the denoted consistencies, the layering of clothing and accessories was the most evident trend (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Layering as seen on Spencer. He was photographed on February 5, 2013 at Semaine Mode Montréal/Montreal Fashion Week in Montréal, QC.

Some street style participants exhibited subtle stylistic references to hip-hop fashion that can be traced back to the late 1980s to mid 1990s. Male participants in particular exhibited the tendency to dress this way (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Kevin with hair styled in a “hi-top fade.” The iconic haircut was most popular in the late 1980s to mid 1990s. He was photographed on November 16, 2012 near Yonge Street and Dundas Street East in Toronto, ON.

The following street style participants displayed examples of Afrocentric fashion. Both female participants have styled scarves as turbans (see Figure 3). This is a recent popular trend in mainstream fashion.



Figure 3. Afrocentric fashion as seen on Jan, Kathleen, and Niapsou. Jan was photographed on November 28, 2012 near James Street South and Bold Street in Hamilton ON. Kathleen and Niapsou were photographed on February 5, 2013 at Semaine Mode Montréal/Montreal Fashion Week in Montréal, QC.

Although the following participants were photographed while wearing strikingly similar outfits, they do not provide sufficient evidence to form any conclusive arguments. They cannot be construed as representative of black style in its entirety (see Figure 4).

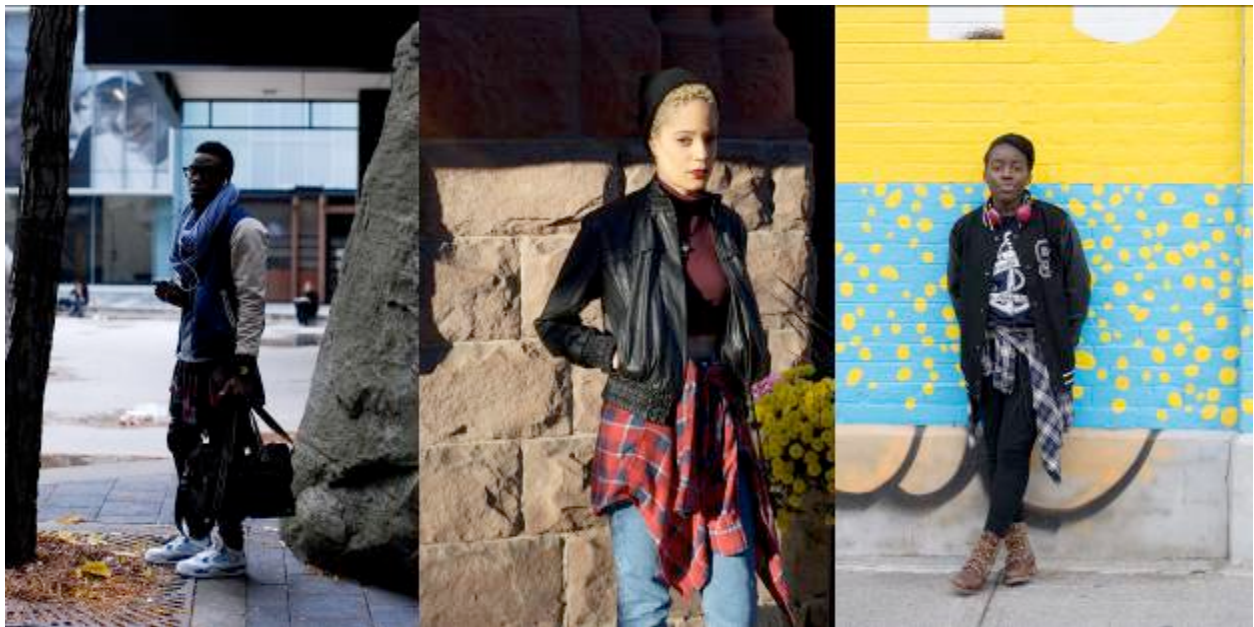


Figure 4. Similar outfits worn by Herve, Claudia, and Oreka. Herve was photographed November 12, 2012 near Dundas Street East and Victoria Street in Toronto, ON. Claudia was photographed on November 8, 2012 near Yonge Street and Elm Street in Toronto ON. Oreka was photographed on November 20, 2012 near Queen Street West and Cameron Street in Toronto, ON.

Chapter Five: Case Studies on Two Fashion Bloggers of Black African Descent

Lougè Delcy of *Dapper Lou*

Based in Brooklyn NY, *Dapper Lou* is a menswear street style/style diary blog founded in 2009 by a young African American man named Lougè Delcy (see Figure 5). What started out as side project for Delcy has now developed into a regularly updated blog with content ranging from: street style photography; personal style; fashion event coverage; fashion trend forecasting; fashion news. During his interview, Delcy explained that he was prompted to create *Dapper Lou* because he felt that there “are not too many sites dedicated to menswear” (Delcy). *Dapper Lou* showcases his “perspective on what [he] consider[s] menswear to be” (Delcy).



Figure 5. Lougè Delcy, photographed by Benjamin Rosser. This is one of photographs from the February 1, 2013 blog post titled “Reflections – Shot by Benjamin Rosser.”

(See also <http://www.dapperlou.com/>)

As the name of his blog implies, Delcy dresses dapperly and chronicles his personal style through blog posts listed under the section “Just Dapper.” Described as a “juxtaposition between traditional and modern menswear,” his outfits are a combination of vintage, luxury, and fast fashion. For example, on February 1, 2013, Delcy published a blog post titled “Reflections – Shot by Benjamin Rosser” in celebration of African-American History month. Delcy included five photographs of himself alongside inspirational quotes from iconic leaders of Black African descent such as Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He is dressed in a collared shirt, tie, blazer, and trousers with a wide-brimmed hat and a large face watch (see Figure 5 above).

Similar to the duo behind *Street Etiquette*, he has become recognized for his distinctive personal style, which eschews loose fitted, athletic wear synonymous with hip-hop/“gangsta” culture. When asked to describe his personal style, he explained:

I always tell people that it’s a mix between the old and new. It’s classic but at the same time it’s ... I’ll be 90% classic but then I throw in something new to kind of throw it off a little bit or vice versa. It always seems classic with a little bit of edge and youth to it. My personality might the edge and the youth, I don’t know. To me, it’s just marrying the two worlds of the old and new and of course technology. (Delcy)

In a relatively short period of time, *Dapper Lou* has received a substantial amount of media attention. It has been featured in print and online publications namely: *Vogue.it*; *GQ*; *The Times UK*; *Complex Magazine*; *Sharp Magazine*; *the Huffington Post*; *ESPN Magazine*; *R29 Man*. Additionally, Delcy has participated in collaborative projects with luxury fashion brands such as Van Cleef & Arpels and Gucci. When asked if he thinks that he has been “accepted” by the fashion industry, Delcy replied, “I wouldn’t say I think I’m accepted. Based on what I’ve

been doing, it clearly show acceptance. I think the industry has already answered that question for me” (Delcy).

During the course of his interview with the PI, he spoke freely about his blog and answered all questions that pertained to it. When asked to define black style, he replied, “I don’t know actually. I don’t know because black encompasses so much. Black style is global, I mean that’s what it means to me ... there’s so many different types of black people, it’s a global thing” (Delcy). He declined to answer any questions about how he perceived the representation of black subjects in fashion-related imagery as well as the influence of the fashion blogosphere on black style and black subjects in fashion media (see appendix F).

Anita Clarke of *I Want– I Got*

She may work full time in information technology but within the small community of Canadian fashion bloggers Toronto based fashion journalist Anita Clarke ranks among the most prominent (see Figure 6). *I Want – I Got* was created in the summer of 2005. The content of *I Want – I Got* focuses on: fashion trend forecasting; Toronto fashion events; personal style; product reviews; local and international fashion news; reader dialogue. Clarke explains, “I never had a real mandate or manifesto. Everything you need to know is in the title, *I Want – I Got*. The blog is basically me talking about the things I like and things I’ve purchased with some random [things] tossed in” (Clarke). When asked about what she thought about her position in the fashion industry and whether she has been accepted, Clarke replied, “I don’t really think about my position like this or at all. I know in the Toronto scene I’ve made a place for myself as a knowledgeable source about the [fashion] industry but I don’t think about this on a larger industry scale, it’s too global” (Clarke).



Figure 6. Clarke photographed by David Yan for the blog post titled “I want – I got Editorials – Philip Sparks Spring 2013.” Published on April 1, 2013.

As listed on the “About” section of *I Want – I Got*, Clarke has received media attention from several Canadian publications like *ELLE Canada Magazine*; *Fashion Magazine*; *Flare Magazine*; *The Toronto Star*; *The Globe & Mail*; *Masthead*; *Metro*; *24hours*; *National Post*; *Eye Weekly*; *Now Magazine*. She has been mentioned in publications outside of Canada such as *Refinery29*, *China Textile News Weekly Magazine*, and the *Ming Pao Daily News*. Clarke is a fixture at fashion weeks in the city of Toronto and maintains close relationships with Canadian fashion designers such as Greta Constantine. She has been featured in window displays for Holt Renfrew and other fashion-related advertisements for Canadian brands. She maintains an open dialogue with her readers and continues to be at the forefront of Canadian fashion.

Clarke describes her personal style as “a bit schizophrenic. I can go from jeans, sneakers and a t-shirt to 5-inch heels and a flirty dress or business casual for work. I don’t tend to be really feminine in my style. I love androgyny, draping, and straight lines” (Clarke). Although *I Want – I Got* is very much focused on Clarke, she rarely showcases images of herself or her personal style in any blog posts. One exception is a blog post titled “I want – I got Editorials – Philip Sparks Spring 2013,” published on April 1, 2013 (see Figure. 6). As Clarke explains in the post, she was commissioned by the MasterCard Stylicity project to coordinate three editorial photoshoots with Canadian fashion retailers. In the photographs, she models items from Canadian designer Philip Sparks’s Spring 2013 collection. This post does not highlight her personal style but rather her position as a fashion blogger in Canada.

In Canada, Clarke is one of the very few prominent fashion bloggers who is of Black African descent. During the course of the interview not only she was asked specific questions about her blog, she was also asked questions about her perceptions on black style and representation of black subjects in fashion-related imagery (see Appendix G). Clarke defined black style as “not a monolith” (Clarke). When asked for her perceptions about how individuals of Black African descent are depicted in the mainstream fashion media in print and online she replied, “There isn’t enough of it. There have been some strides in the last few years and lots of discussion but we still see editorials like Donna Karan’s Haiti inspired ad campaign from Spring 2012 where black people are more props than people” (Clarke). She was also asked if she thought that “street style,” “style diary,” and “fashion blogs” made by individuals of Black African descent have been instrumental in shaping and voicing contemporary expressions of blackness as it relates to fashion; she replied:

Yes, it’s so much easier for people to explore and be exposed to different styles thanks to

these mediums. Street style blogs have definitely changed the way many people look and interact with fashion since their rise in popularity. It's also taken it global where we can see that not everyone is influenced by black American pop culture and that there are other experiences out there. (Clarke)

Similarly she believed that these blogs have increased the visibility of the black subject in mainstream fashion media in a positive way. She responded with:

Yes. Based on advertising and models, fashion looks very white. However there are many types of people that work behind the scenes in like editors, socialites, and make-up artists, hair stylist, etc. The focus on industry players in street style blogs and magazine features have created a new focus on individuals that wasn't necessarily there before. (Clarke)

Although there are differences between *Dapper Lou* and *I Want I Got*, both Delcy and Clarke positioned themselves in the fashion blogosphere and fashion media more broadly. It can be speculated that both exemplify what black identities in the fashion blogosphere can mean.

Chapter Six: Discussion, Creative Outcomes, and Conclusion

Although the sampling of participants was small and purposive, it uncovered significant themes on post-black style, black sartorial agency, and the influence of black style in fashion blogosphere. The analysis of the results is predominantly informed by the data collected from the street style participants. The open-ended interviews conducted with these participants in particular elicited findings of which the themes are drawn from. Despite this, the sampling and results does not (and in many ways could never) offer conclusive evidence, especially on the reasons why “personal style,” “style diary,” and “fashion” blogs created by individuals of Black African descent bring forth contemporary notions of blackness that subvert the predominant representations of black subjects in fashion-related imagery. More than anything, the sampling and results encourage an investigative dialogue and directions for future research.

Discussion of Results

Exploring the complexities within the elusiveness of black style acted as means to understand the significance of the blogs that are the basis of this research. Carol Tulloch (2004) in accordance with Kobena Mercer, defines black style as “an expression of the ways in which different kinds of people in the African Diaspora have negotiated and defined their sense of self in spite of the legacy of inequality meted out through race and class” (p. 14). Coupled with this definition, the results define black style as the personal style of an individual of Black African descent that is in negotiation with representations of blackness in fashion-related imagery. They corroborate Gwendolyn O’Neal’s (1998) previous findings on the African American aesthetics of dress where she stated, “style allows the wearer to don the garb of the dominant culture while refusing to accept that culture’s definition of him or herself” (p. 173). If black style is defined as such, “personal style,” “style diary,” and “fashion” blogs created by individuals of Black African

descent can be thought of as extensions of its resistive capabilities. *Dapper Lou* and *I Want – I Got* illustrate this notion. Between these two “fashion-themed” blogs, there may be several differences in terms of content and presentation but they share the commonality of being predicated on self-representation and agency. Both fashion bloggers noted that they express themselves through their blogs. By doing so they are not only presenting a self-created, self-controlled image of themselves but also of black identities. Arguably, their personal style and the mere existence of their respective “fashion-themed” blogs defines black style and reclaims ownership over *externally* produced imagery of black subjects in fashion media. The writings of cultural theorist Stuart Hall provides framework to further understand why and how the data collected operates as visualized constructions of identity and practices of self-representation. It is consistent with Hall’s (1996a) writings in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” where he explains that cultural identities are never stable but in constant production and evolvment *within* representation, which explains why personal styling can be thought of as practices of self-representation. In the same text, Hall identifies two types of cultural identities, one that is singular “in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self,’” (p. 393) and another that recognizes the significant difference between those who share a cultural identity. The participants may share the common trait of being of Black African descent living in the Diaspora but they all express their cultural and racial identity in different ways. Even though there are inherent limitations, the street style photographs especially are visually demonstrative of the “different kinds of differences.”

Ted Polhemus’s (1994) definition of street style can be paraphrased as an authentic expression of identity through style. If one applies this definition to the street style participants, it is evident that they embody authentic expression of not only their personal identity but black

identity through style. Street style participants were selected because they had distinctive fashion sense and were of Black African descent. As previously discussed, they often indicated that they placed greater emphasis on personal style rather than style that is bound within racial distinctions.

Just as Paul C. Taylor (2007) explains with reference to post-blackness, for these participants the traditional meanings that surround blackness (and thus black style) were too restrictive. Taylor writes,

to be post-black is to experience the contingency and fluidity of black identity, to have to wrestle with the question of how to orient one's self to the various options for black self-consciousness, and to do all of this while relating one's self to the similarly fluid meanings and practices of the wider society. (p. 627)

Additionally Tulloch (2010) writes that “post-black” enables individuals “to exercise the agency to make choices that an individual needs to construct a ‘sincere self’” (p. 283). By constructing their identities through personal styling and appearance, participants have constructed unique examples of black identities that are constantly in negotiation (and in some cases negation) with *externally* reproduced imagery of black subjectivity. Once again Hall (1996c) explains that the antagonisms that comprise blackness cannot be coalesced “around a single axis of differentiation” (p. 476). Select participants even stated that their personal style allows them to subvert what they believed to be negative imagery. These practices of self-representation independent of racial boundaries suggest that they desire to transcend the confines of blackness and progressing towards post-blackness.⁶ In varying ways, they are grappling with what it means to be “black” and orienting themselves through visual demarcation. Through their interview

⁶ Taylor states that post-black does not substitute black; it is evolutionary.

responses and personal styling (their “black sartorial agency”), street style participants expressively reinforced the notion that black style mirrors the multiplicity of black identity. Although street style participants may be solely concerned with the self and aesthetics, they have employed the communicative power of style to visually position themselves within their social surroundings, in reference to Malcolm Barnard, Fred Davis, and Joanne Entwistle’s writings.

It is important to consider that these practices of self-representation independent of racial boundaries unveil additional problematic complexities. Statements by participants such as “I don’t see colour” (Spencer) and “I like to think of style and not think of race” (Claudia) as well as exhibited discomfort or declining to answer certain interview questions⁷ implies that select participants have a desire to disassociate themselves with discussions that address racial inequality. This disengagement and complete renouncement of these discussions conveys that they seek to rid themselves of the after effects of colonialism. Neglecting to confront these issues does not diminish them. Problems arise when assumptions are formed based solely on difference. Fundamentally, this research has begun to divulge what it means to be “black” in today’s cultural climate. Acknowledging and vocalizing difference is not the equivalent of encouraging prejudice.

The results indicate that both groupings of participants perceived “Otherness” as portrayed by black subjects present in fashion-related imagery in the same way that bell hooks describes as exoticized, tokenized, marginalized, and excluded from the mainstream fashion media. With two exceptions, many participants viewed these portrayals negatively. Undoubtedly then, issues in representation and inclusion in fashion media persists, despite the increased visibility of black subjects that the fashion blogosphere has helped usher in and despite the levels

⁷ Lougè Delcy of *Dapper Lou* declined to answer interview questions that inquired about how he felt about the representation of black subjects in fashion-related imagery. See Appendix F for the transcript from his interview.

of success that these “fashion-themed” blogs have achieved. As Pham (2012) along with others have explored, the so-called “democratization” of fashion may have increased visibility of marginalized subjects in fashion media but it is debatable if it has increased privilege and acceptance. The number of widely successful “fashion-themed” blogs created by those of Black African descent is still disproportional to those created by Caucasian and East Asian fashion bloggers. As noted in her case study, Anita Clarke has been recognized within the Canadian fashion industry but she is of the few fashion bloggers of Black African descent to do so.⁸ Additional research is needed to closely trace the struggle to counteract the binary oppositions that positions black subjects.

Participants may not be able to control the predominant representations of blackness that are circulated in fashion-related imagery but they are in control of themselves and their personal style which (as suggested in the results) prompted them to either dress expressively or to start their own “fashion-themed” blogs. These “practices of self-representation” are subversive because they are self-created. They are in negation with *externally* produced representations of blackness and allowing fashion bloggers to insert themselves within the fashion blogosphere. In more simple terms, while blackness and black identities have been defined through fashion related-imagery in one way, the participants of this creative research project have defined them in another.

Creative Outcomes

During the course of the research process, *On Black Style* naturally presented itself as the appropriate title for the creative component.⁹ If the title was simply *Black Style* it would imply that the creative component is a definitive representation of black style. *On Black Style* connotes that

⁸ Candice Pantin of *Montreal in Fashion* (<http://www.montrealinfashion.com>) is another well-known Canadian fashion blogger of Black African descent. She was recruited as a street style participant but declined to participate as a fashion blogger.

⁹ *Fitting In: Black Style in the Blogosphere* was originally selected as a title.

the subject matter is being explored through this medium. *On Black Style* takes the form of an online fashion magazine. The Web was selected as the ideal platform because it allows the data collected to actively engage with the discourse (the fashion blogosphere) that it is intertwined with. It also allows for continuous additions of street style participants and reformations of its format.

It was originally proposed that content would derive from interviews with popular fashion bloggers of Black African descent, contributed photographs, and original street style photographs as found in Toronto, Montréal, and Hamilton. Based on the issues with participant recruitment, the final product focuses primarily on the street style participants. *On Black Style* is a full-screen static slideshow, beginning with a foreword from the PI and quote from one of the street style participants. There is a horizontal navigation panel at the bottom of the web page with white caption boxes that describe each slide. These white caption boxes identify each street style participants by name and the date they were photographed (see Figure 7).

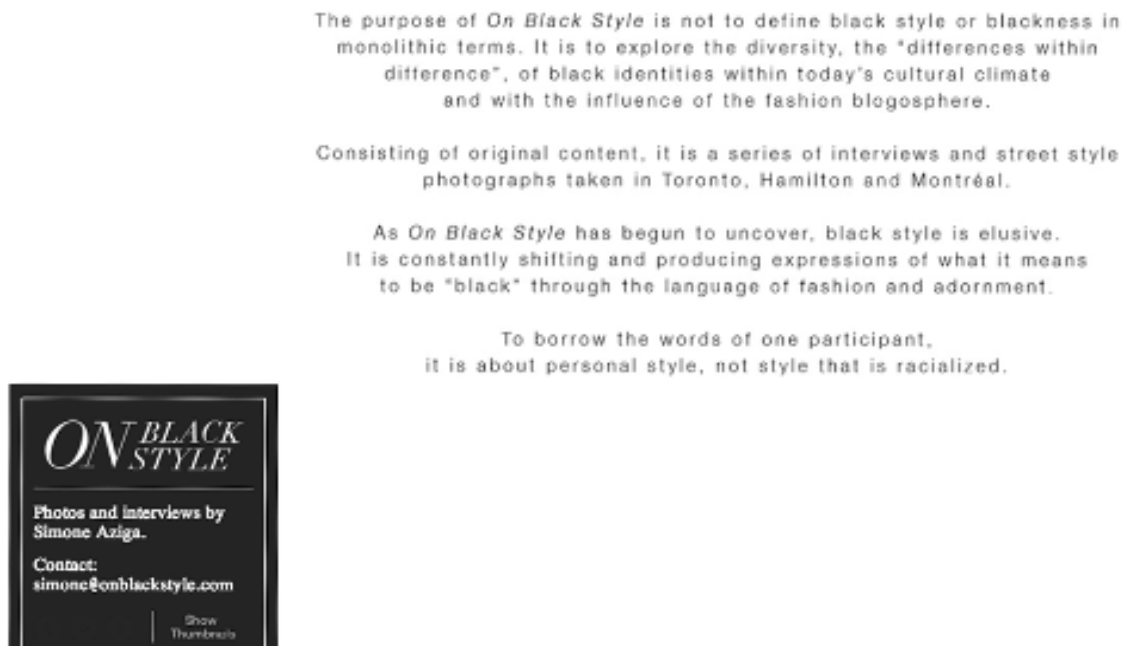


Figure 7. Homepage of *On Black Style*.

Twenty exemplary street style participants are featured in an editorial layout style with edited versions of their transcribed interview and photographs (see Figure 8). It was important to showcase street style participants individually to frame them as idiosyncratic black identities and refute any conceptions of a *singular* black identity.



Figure 8. Editorial spread featuring street style participant Cynthia.

The exemplary street style participants were selected based on the following criteria: the expressiveness of their clothing and personal styling; comparability to other street style participants; the quality of the street style photographs; the quality of their interview.

For example, participants such as Herve (see Figure 9) and Spencer were photographed in outfits that subtly reference hip-hop and perhaps hipster culture. In contrast, the photographs of Jonathan (see Figure 10) and Andrew showcase a style of dress that could be described as classic, preppy, and tailored. Between just these four participants, the spectrum of black style particularly for black men has been visually investigated and denoted.



Figure 9. First page of Herve's editorial spread.



Figure 10. First page of Jonathan's editorial spread.

To textually connect *On Black Style* to the themes uncovered in the results, two pull quotes have been selected from each interview. These pull quotes underscore the notion that black style can be defined as personal style of an individual of Black African descent that is in negotiation with representations of blackness. Depending on the quality of the interview responses, these pull quotes refer to the participant's definition of black style and how they describe their personal style. They been utilized to highlight the elusiveness of black style through the divergent descriptions provided by the participants. Taking inspiration from online and print fashion magazines (see Figure 11), the layout design is deliberately simplistic and sparse to draw the audience's attention to the photographs and to ensure the ease of readability. Moreover, it is deliberately "image heavy" to metaphorically allude that it is centralized on the (re)imaging black subjects as seen through fashion media. Simply put, the contextual translation of street style to the web captures that *On Black Style* is black style in the blogosphere.



Figure 11. *On Black Style* logo.

Further Directions and Conclusion

This creative research project involved more female than male participants. Within the street style participants, male participants exhibited a more varied and expressive style of dress. The strongest direction for further research points to a close examination of black men's fashion and black dandyism that would expand upon Monica Miller's (2009) *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of the Black Diasporic Identity*. Structured in a similar way to this iteration of this creative research project, male individuals of Black African descent would be recruited as street style participants and others would be invited to submit photographs of themselves to the PI. The data collected could be compared to "personal style" or "style diary" blogs created by male individuals of Black African descent such as *Dapper Lou*, *Street Etiquette*, *KJohnLaSoul*, and *ProprPostur*. Additionally, the data could also be analyzed in comparison to black men's fashion from the past (e.g., the zoot suits of the 1940s) to the present day. Other

further directions include print editions of *On Black Style* and continued additions of street style participants to the online fashion magazine.

To conclude, the results of this creative research project ultimately shifted its focus from closely examining the fashion blogosphere to broadly examining how black style can be defined within cultural, social and historical parameters of the present day. The importance and implications of this research hinges on the elusive definition of blacks style. Yet, it has begun to address, black style is the ways in which individuals of Black African descent have chosen to express themselves through personal styling and appearance. Black style is inherently unstable, constantly shifting and producing visualizations of what being Black means through the language of fashion and adornment.

Through the practices of self-representation as seen on “fashion-themed” blogs and through street style, it eschews the concept of an “essentialised” black subject (or black identity) and introduces diverse black identities that are subversive and counter hegemonic. *On Black Style* contributes to the growing dialogue about embracing diversity and more specifically the diversity that constitutes difference in the fashion discourse.

References

- Barlett, D., & Rocamora, A. (2009). Blogs de mode: Les nouveaux espaces du discours du mode. [Fashion blogs: New spaces of fashion discourse]. *Sociétés*, 104(2), 105-114.
- Barnard, M. (1996). *Fashion as communication*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Blood, R. (2004). How blogging software reshapes the online community. *Communications of the ACM*, 47(12), 54-55.
- Caramanica, J. (2011, August 17). Pushing the boundaries of black style. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/18/fashion/pushing-the-boundaries-of-black-style.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
- Clarke, A. (2012). About. *I Want – I Got*. Retrieved from <http://iwantigot.geekigirl.com/about/>
- Clarke, A. (2013, April 1). I want – I got editorials – Philip Sparks Spring 2013 [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://iwantigot.geekigirl.com/2013/04/01/i-want-i-got-editorials-philip-sparks-spring-2013/>
- Davis, F. (1992). *Fashion, culture, and identity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Delcy, L. (2012). Bio – Contact. *Dapperlou.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.dapperlou.com/p/bio-contact.html>
- Delcy, L. (2013, February 1). Reflections –Shot by Benjamin Rosser [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.dapperlou.com/2013/02/reflections-shot-by-benjamin-rosser.html>
- Entwistle, J. (2000). *The fashioned body: Fashion, dress and modern social theory*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Givhan, R. (2007, August 10). Everyone's a fashion critic. *Harper's Bazaar*. Retrieved from <http://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/fashion-articles/fashion-critic-givhan-0907>

- Hall, S. (1996a). Cultural identity and diaspora. In P. Williams & L. Chrisman (Eds.), *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory: A reader* (pp. 392-401). London, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Hall, S. (1996b). New ethnicities. In D. Morley & K-H. Chen (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies* (pp. 442-451). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1996c). What is “Black” in Black popular culture? In D. Morley & K-H. Chen (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies* (pp. 468-478). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hedbige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The meaning of style*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (1990). *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics*. Toronto, ON: Between the Lines.
- hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- hooks, b. (1994). In our glory: Photography and black life. In D. Willis (Ed.), *Picturing us: African American identity in photography* (pp. 43-53). New York, NY: New Press.
- La Ferla, R. (2012, September 12). Who am I wearing? Funny you should ask. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/13/fashion/new-york-fashion-week-street-style-is-often-a-billboard-for-brands.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
- Lewis, V. D. (2003). Dilemmas in African diaspora fashion. *Fashion Theory*, 7(2), 163-190.
- Mercer, K. (1987). Black hair/style politics. *New Formations*, 3, 33-54. Retrieved from http://amielandmelburn.org.uk/collections/newformations/03_33.pdf
- Miller, M. L. (2009). *Slaves to fashion: Black dandyism and the styling of the Black diasporic identity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Nakamura, L. (2002). *Cybertypes: Race, ethnicity, and identity on the Internet*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- O'Neal, G. S. (1998). African-American aesthetic of dress: Current manifestations. *Clothing and Textiles Journal*, 16(4), 167-175. doi:10.1177/0887302X9801600403
- Pham, M-H. T. (2011). Blog ambition: Fashion, feelings, and the political economy of the digital raced body. *Camera Obscura*, 26(1), 1-37. doi:10.1215/02705346-2010-013
- Pham, M-H. T. (2012). "Susie Bubble is a sign of the times": The embodiment of success in the Web 2.0 economy. *Feminist Media Studies*, 13(2).doi:10.1080/14680777.2012.678076
- Polhemus, T. (1994). *Street style: From sidewalk to catwalk*. New York, NY: Thames and Hudson.
- Rocamora, A. (2011). Personal fashion blogs: Screens and mirrors in digital self portraits. *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, 15(4), 407-424.
- Rocamora, A. (2012). Hypertextuality and remediation in the fashion media. *Journalism Practice*, 6(1), 92-106.
- Rosser, B. (2013). Dapper Lou (Lougè Delcy) [JPEG file].
- Statistics Canada. (2008). *Visible minority groups, 2006 counts, for Canada and census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations - 20% sample data (table)*. *Highlight tables*. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/d9ynyn9>
- Taylor, P. C. (2007). Post-Black, old Black. *African American Review*, 41(4), 625-640.
- Thames, G. S. (2010, February 24). Are Black fashion bloggers being ignored? *Clutch Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.clutchmagonline.com/2010/02/are-black-fashion-bloggers-being-ignored/>
- Tulloch, C. (Ed.). (2004). *Black style*. London, UK: V&A Publications.
- Tulloch, C. (2010). Style-fashion-dress: From Black to post-Black. *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, 4(3), 273-304.

Woodward, S. (2009). The myth of street style. *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, 13(1), 83-102.

Yan, D. (2013). Anita Clarke in Philip Sparks Spring 2013 Collection [JPEG file].

Young, R. C. (2001). *Postcolonialism: An historical introduction*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Appendix A: Recruitment Script and Interview Questions for Fashion Bloggers

Recruitment Script for Fashion Bloggers

The following message was sent by email to fashion bloggers from the PI's Ryerson webmail account for recruitment.

Hello *(full name of blogger(s) and the name of their blog)*,

My name is Simone Aziga and I am a second year graduate student in the Master's of Fashion program at Ryerson University. The Fashion MA program at Ryerson is an inter-disciplinary graduate program which specializes in theoretical and practical research on fashion and all its subcategories.

I am currently working on my Master's Research Project and I am studying how social media and online media publications such as "street style", "style diary" and "fashion" blogs, have been instrumental in voicing contemporary expressions of blackness as it is related to fashion. This research will hopefully capture a pivotal moment in the lineage of black style and inform audiences about the new representations of blackness in fashion. In addition to doing this research, I plan on completing an accompanying creative project which will take the form of an online fashion magazine.

I am contacting you because I am seeking to conduct voluntary interviews with popular fashion bloggers of African descent. Your blog *(name of blog)* has proven to be *(more detailed reasoning as to why their blog has been selected. For example the blog Street Etiquette has increased the visibility of individuals of African descent as seen through the mainstream fashion discourse. It puts forth an alternative ethos for black masculinity in fashion that moves away from the heavy influence of hip hop/gangster culture and towards way of dress that emphasizes strong tailoring, careful accessorizing and slim silhouettes)*.

Participation in this research project involves answering interview questions by email. There are twenty questions in total. You will have one week to complete them and email your answers to me. Your answers will be reviewed and I may email you again to clarify. These answers will then disseminated throughout the online fashion magazine. I would like to assure you that the research project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at Ryerson University. However, the final decision about participation is yours.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at simone.aziga@ryerson.ca. I will then send a confirmation email with a consent form attached. Once I have received your signed consent form, I will send the interview questions. Your participation in this research project would be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, I would be more than happy to answer them.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Simone Aziga

simone.aziga@ryerson.c

Fashion Blogger Interview Questions

1. When was your blog started? What motivated you to start it?
2. What is the mandate behind your blog?
3. What is the process behind making content for your blog? This can be answered in point form.
4. How do feel about the reception to your blog?
5. Describe some of your most popular posts/projects. Why do you think they were popular?

6. Compare your blog as is today to what it was when you first started. What has changed and what has remained the same?
7. What do you think about your position in mainstream fashion? Do you think you have been accepted?
8. What are your perceptions about how individuals of Black African descent are depicted in the mainstream fashion media in print and online?
9. Do you think that “street style”, “style diary” and “fashion blogs” made by individuals of African descent have been instrumental in shaping and voicing contemporary expressions of blackness as it relates to fashion?
10. Do you think that they have increased the visibility of black subjects in mainstream fashion media in a positive way? Why or why not?
11. What benefits have you gained by starting and maintaining this blog? Can you share any negative aspects?
12. Do you consider yourself a part of a “movement” or “cohort” of similar blogs? Why or why not?
13. Describe what interests you about fashion.
14. Describe what influences you as a blogger.
15. What are some of your favourite blogs and why?
16. In your opinion, what makes a good fashion blog? This can be answered in point form.
17. Describe your personal style.
18. Finish this sentence: “Black style is ...”
19. Do you think your blog reflects your definition of what black style is today?
20. Where do you see your blog in the next five years and beyond?

Appendix B: Recruitment Script and Interview Questions for Street Style Participants

Recruitment Script for Street Style Participants

Hello,

My name is Simone Aziga and I am a second year graduate student in the Master's of Fashion program at Ryerson University. I am currently working on my Master's Research Project and I am studying how social media and online media publications such as "street style", "style diary" and "fashion" blogs, have been instrumental in shaping and voicing contemporary expressions of blackness as it is related to fashion. This research will hopefully capture a pivotal moment in the lineage of black style and inform audiences about the new representations of blackness in fashion.

I am approaching you because I am looking for participants to pose for street style photographs. If you volunteer as a participant, you will be photographed for a street style photograph. You will be then asked to answer three short questions about black style in the blogosphere. I will also ask for your first name, age and place of residence. This process should take approximately a maximum of 10 minutes of your time.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at Ryerson University. However, the final decision about participation is yours.

Would you like to be a participant?

Street Style Participant Interview Questions

1. What's your name, occupation and city of residence?
2. Can you describe your personal style?
3. Do you follow fashion blogs? If so, which ones?
4. Do you follow any fashion blogs that showcase "black style"?
5. How do you feel about how black people and black style are represented in fashion media?
6. How would you describe black style?

Appendix C: List of Locations for Street Style Photographs

October 25, 2012: Queen Street West and Augusta Avenue Toronto ON

October 26, 2012: David Pecaut Square, King Street West between John Street and Simcoe Street, Toronto ON (World Mastercard Fashion Week)

November 7, 2012: Queen Street West and Cameron Avenue, Toronto ON

November 7, 2012: Queen Street West and Spadina Avenue, Toronto ON

November 8, 2012: Yonge Street and Gould Street, Toronto ON

November 8, 2012: Yonge Street and Elm Street, Toronto ON

November 9, 2012: Queen Street West and Ossington Avenue, Toronto ON

November 12, 2012: Dundas Street East and Victoria Street, Toronto ON

November 16, 2012: Gerrard Street East and Church Street Avenue, Toronto ON

November 16, 2012: Yonge Street and Dundas Street West, Toronto ON

November 20, 2012: Queen Street West and Cameron Avenue Toronto ON

November 22, 2012: Queen Street West and John Street, Toronto ON

November 22, 2012: Yonge Street and Dundas Street West, Toronto ON

November 23, 2012: Near Dundas Street West and Euclid Avenue, Toronto ON

November 24, 2012: James Street North and Mulberry Street, Hamilton ON

November 28, 2012: James Street South and Bold Street, Hamilton ON

December 9, 2012: Queen Street West and Dovercourt Road, Toronto ON

January 15, 2013: Queen Street West and Bathurst Street, Toronto ON

January 16, 2013: Queen Street West and James Street, Toronto ON

February 4, 2013: Arsenal, Montréal, QC (Montréal Fashion Week/Semaine de Mode Montréal)

February 5, 2013: Arsenal, Montréal, QC (Montréal Fashion Week/Semaine de Mode Montréal)

February 5, 2013: Off The Hook, 1021 Ste-Catherine Ouest, Montréal, QC.

February 15, 2013: Daniels Spectrum, 585 Dundas Street East, Toronto ON (Masquerade –
Multimedia Fashion Presentation and Masked Ball Party)

February 21, 2013: James St. North and Cannon St. East, Hamilton ON

Appendix D: Fashion Blogger Consent Form



Everyone Makes a Mark

FITTING IN: BLACK STYLE IN THE BLOGOSPHERE

Consent Agreement for Bloggers

You are being asked to participate in a creative research project titled “Fitting In: Black Style in the Blogosphere.” Before you give your consent to be a volunteer participant, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR

Simone Aziga

Present Ryerson University, Toronto ON, Canada
Master’s of Art, Fashion

2010 Queen's University, Kingston ON, Canada
Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours) with Distinction

GRADUATE SUPERVISOR

David Brame, amazingdavid@ryerson.ca

Assistant Professor of fashion illustration and digital illustration
School of Fashion at Ryerson University, Toronto ON, Canada

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The purpose of this creative research project is to investigate how “street style”, “style diary” and “fashion” blogs made by individuals of Black African descent,* have been instrumental in shaping and voicing new expressions of black style as it is related to fashion. This project will address how and why these blogs have allowed for a wide array of emerging and established fashion figures, ranging from stylists, writers, designers, models among others, to redefine representations of black identity in fashion. Whether intentional or not, these blogs challenge the predominant narratives of blackness that exist in fashion, most notably the black subject as the exotic or as non-existent.

Three to four popular fashion bloggers of Black African descent will be recruited for voluntary interviews. Between 30 and 50 participants will be recruited for a series street style photographs for another portion of this creative research project.

The Primary Investigator has selected you as a possible participant because you are popular blogger of Black African descent.

*This term refers to those who are African-Canadian, African-American, African-British, African-Caribbean etc.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

You will be asked to:

1. Participate in an interview conducted by email correspondence. The questions will revolve around the personal motivations behind the origination of your blog; the method(s) you use to create content; your thoughts about the most popular posts on your blog; your thoughts on the viewer reaction to your blog; your perception about your position within mainstream fashion; how you view the black subject in fashion presently and how you define black style. There will be 20 questions in total and you will have a week to complete and email your responses to the Primary Investigator.
2. Submit photographs from your blog to be included in this creative research project. It is preferable that these images are new and not already posted online. If this is not possible, The Primary Investigator will ask for permission to use photographs and information from your blog. All photographs and information will be credited.

The Primary Investigator (Simone Aziga) will then:

1. Review your interview responses and photographs. She may email you again to follow up.
2. Gather 30 to 50 other participants for a series of street style photographs and short interviews.
All of these photographs and interview responses will be analyzed for similarities.
3. Curate an online exhibition/fashion magazine using the photographs and gathered interview responses. Your interview responses and photographs as well as those from two to three other popular fashion bloggers of Black African descent will be included in this online exhibition/fashion magazine. The title of this online exhibition/fashion magazine will be “Fitting In: Black Style in the Blogosphere.”
4. Send you a link by email to “Fitting In: Black Style in the Blogosphere” once it is viewable online.
5. Store any data collected (responses, photographs, audio recordings etc.) on a secured and encrypted USB key for a period of three (3) years, after which they will be destroyed. The online exhibition will exist online for indefinite period of time.
6. Potentially use of the data collected to publish book/print publication or present at a public event. You will be notified if this occurs.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS THAT MAY ARISE

The risk of public exposure

The photographs and interview responses gathered for this creative research project will be publicly displayed on the Internet. They will be presented in a manner that will make participants easily identifiable. The interview responses will be disseminated throughout this project and will be associated with the respective participant.

The risk of discomfort

Although participants will be made aware of the nature of this creative research project and how they will be involved, they may become uncomfortable with their image and interview responses being used.

The risk of third party plagiarism

Due to the “open access” nature of the Internet, other parties may copy, re-publish and re-distribute the photographs and interview responses used for this study/creative project.

Once the photographs and interview responses are displayed on the Internet, it is nearly impossible to control access. If you begin to feel uncomfortable, you can choose to discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently.

BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This creative research project will capture a pivotal moment in the lineage of black style. If you agree to be included in this study, you will be a participant in an emerging area of research in the field of fashion. This will be one of the first research studies that will theoretically address black style as it relates to online media in the 21st century. It will illustrate the present state of black style and the cultural significance of the blogosphere. Although it cannot be guaranteed, the bloggers who participate may be able to gain positive publicity and popularity. It cannot be guaranteed that you will receive any other benefits from participating.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Anything that is collected for this creative research project will always remain in the possession of the Primary Investigator. **This does not mean you will give up your ownership your image in the photographs.** Anything that is collected for this creative research project will be stored on a secured and encrypted USB key for a period of three (3), after which it will be destroyed. However, the online exhibition will be publicly displayed and will continue to exist online indefinitely. It can never be fully “deleted” from the virtual space of the Internet. Since this is a graduate initiated research project, David Brame, Aziga’s graduate supervisor, will have access to the photographs and interview responses.

INCENTIVES TO PARTICIPATE

You will not be paid to participate in this research project.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed. At any particular point in the research project, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether. **Please note that once the material (photographs and text) has been published online it is not possible to withdraw completely. The material can never be fully “deleted” from the virtual space of the Internet.**

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT

If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact.

Simone Aziga
simone.aziga@ryerson.ca

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042

AGREEMENT

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)

Email address

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix E: Street Style Participant Consent Form



Everyone Makes a Mark

FITTING IN: BLACK STYLE IN THE BLOGOSPHERE

Consent Agreement for Street Style Photographs

You are being asked to participate in a creative research project titled “Fitting In: Black Style in the Blogosphere.” Before you give your consent to be a volunteer participant, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR

Simone Aziga

Present Ryerson University, Toronto ON, Canada
Master’s of Art, Fashion

2010 Queen's University, Kingston ON, Canada
Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours) with Distinction

GRADUATE SUPERVISOR

David Brame, amazingdavid@ryerson.ca

Assistant Professor of fashion illustration and digital illustration
School of Fashion at Ryerson University, Toronto ON, Canada

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The purpose of this creative research project is to investigate how “street style”, “style diary” and “fashion” blogs made by individuals of Black African descent,* have been instrumental in shaping and voicing new expressions of black style as it is related to fashion. This project will address how and why these blogs have allowed for a wide array of emerging and established fashion figures, ranging from stylists, writers, designers, models among others, to redefine representations of black identity in fashion. Whether intentional or not, these blogs challenge the predominant narratives of blackness that exist in fashion, most notably the black subject as the exotic or as non-existent.

Between 30 and 50 participants will be recruited for a series street style photographs. Seven popular fashion bloggers Black African descent will also be recruited for another portion of this creative research project.

The Primary Investigator has selected you as a possible participant because you are an individual of Black African descent and have a keen fashion sense.

*This term refers to those who are African-Canadian, African-American, African-British, African-Caribbean etc.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

You will be asked to:

7. Pose for a street style photograph. **This photograph does not need to include your face and/or other identifiable physical attributes but it must clearly display your clothing.**
8. Provide your first name, occupation and city of residence. **You can choose to not disclose certain parts this information or remain anonymous.**
9. Answer three questions verbally that will be recorded with an audio recording device. The questions will revolve around how you view blogs made individuals of African descent, how you view the black subject in fashion presently and how you define ‘black style.’ This should take a maximum of ten minutes.
10. You will be given a blank copy of this consent form for your records.

The Primary Investigator (Simone Aziga) will then:

1. Analyze your photograph and transcribe your interview responses
2. Gather a minimum of 29 other participants for this portion of this study. All of these photographs and interview responses will be analyzed for similarities.
3. Curate an online exhibition using the photographs and gathered interview responses. Interview responses from popular fashion bloggers of Black African descent will also be included in this online exhibition. The title of this exhibition will be “Fitting In: Black Style in the Blogosphere.”
4. Send you a link by email to “Fitting In: Black Style in the Blogosphere” once it is viewable online.
5. Store any data collected (responses, photographs, audio recordings etc.) on a secured and encrypted USB key for a period of three (3) years, after which they will be destroyed. The online exhibition will exist online for indefinite period of time.
6. Potentially use of the data collected to publish book/print publication or present at a public event. You will be notified if this occurs.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS THAT MAY RISE

The risk of public exposure

The photographs and interview responses gathered for this creative research project will be publicly displayed on the Internet. They will be presented in a manner that will make participants easily identifiable. The interview responses will be disseminated throughout this project and will be associated with the respective participant.

The risk of discomfort

Although participants will be made aware of the nature of this creative research project and how they will be involved, they may become uncomfortable with their image and interview responses being used.

The risk of third party plagiarism

Due to the “open access” nature of the Internet, other parties may copy, re-publish and re-distribute the photographs and interview responses used for this study/creative project.

Once the photographs and interview responses are displayed on the Internet, it is nearly impossible to control access. Despite efforts to conceal identity (covering or removal of the face, for example), you (as a participant) can still be identified by other physical attributes. **It will be at your discretion of how much of your personal information is displayed in the online exhibition. Additionally, you can choose to remain anonymous. If you begin to feel uncomfortable, you can choose to discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently.**

BENEFITS OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

This creative research project will capture a pivotal moment in the lineage of black style. If you agree to be included, you will be a participant in an emerging area of research in the field of fashion. This will be one of the first research project and studies that will theoretically address black style as it relates to online media in the 21st century. It cannot be guaranteed that you will receive any other benefits from participating.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Anything that is collected for this creative research project will always remain in the possession of the Primary Investigator. **This does not mean you will give up your ownership your image in the photographs.** Anything that is collected for this creative research project will be stored on a secured and encrypted USB key for a period of three (3) years, after which it will be destroyed. However, the online exhibition will be publicly displayed and will continue to exist online indefinitely. It can never be fully “deleted” from the virtual space of the Internet. Since this is a graduate initiated research project, David Brame, Aziga’s graduate supervisor, will have access to the photographs and interview responses.

INCENTIVES TO PARTICIPATE

You will not be paid to participate in this study.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time. At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether. **Please note that once the material (photographs and text) has been published online it is not possible to withdraw completely. The material can never be fully “deleted” from the virtual space of the Internet.**

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT

If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact.

Simone Aziga
simone.aziga@ryerson.ca

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042

AGREEMENT

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)

Email address

Signature of Participant

Date

I (the Participant) acknowledge that I will be photographed and audio-recorded.

I (the Participant) acknowledge that this data will be published.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix F: Lougè Delcy Interview Transcript

(Conducted by Skype telephone call on February 19, 2013)

1. When was your blog started? What motivated you to start it?

My blog was started around, I want to say like, 2009 2010. Like I started it in 2009 but I really didn't focused on it, developing original content until 2010 and the motivation was pretty much that there are not too many sites dedicated to menswear. So I decide to take on the challenge and so my perspective on what I consider menswear to be.

2. What is the mandate behind your blog?

(So is that like the mandate behind your blog) Yeah that's sort of one of the main reasons.

Obviously since then the vision has developed but that was the initial idea.

3. What is the process behind making content for your blog? This can be answered in point form.

Well I would say that I would have to see what's going on with menswear, I want things to be relevant to the industry. So if there's tradeshow's going, if there's fashion week going on or if there's events I want make sure that it corresponds with those things.

4. How do feel about the reception to your blog?

I've been getting good feedback, a lot of people enjoy, they like it, they say it's solid. They say it's consistent, they say things like that.

5. Describe some of your most popular posts/projects. Why do you think they were popular?

One of my most popular posts was about my trip to Paris. For me it was a great learning experience and was a great motivations for my readers. They, how can I say this, they like when I travel, things like that. Also another great post was my project with Van Cleef & Arpels. That project was amazing because in under three years I was able to [... collaborate, participate] with one of the most well known designer jewelers. That for me was very exciting and a great

accomplishment.

6. Compare your blog as is today to what it was when you first started. What has changed and what has remained the same?

I think the street aspect of it has remained the same, the street the personal style have always been there, even the product reviews, the Lou's picks. Essentially you know the core of the site has remained the same, I just think that it has become more developed. The photography is better, now a lot of my personal style is shot not just on the street but shot in the studio. It has just become more stylized I would say.

7. What do you think about your position in mainstream fashion? Do you think you have been "accepted?"

I wouldn't say I think I'm accepted. Based on what I've been doing, it clearly shows acceptance. So I think the industry has already answered that question for me.

8. What are your perceptions about how individuals of African descent are depicted in the mainstream fashion media in print and online?

No answer

9. Do you think that "street style", "style diary" and "fashion blogs" made by individuals of African descent have been instrumental in shaping and voicing contemporary expressions of blackness as it relates to fashion?

No answer

10. Do you think that they have increased the visibility of the black subject in mainstream fashion media in a positive way? Why or why not?

No answer

11. What benefits have you gained by starting and maintaining this blog? Can you share any negative

aspects?

I've learnt so much more about clothing, the way it's made. I've learnt so much about people and the way they react. It's just a learning process. I've learnt so much about photography. I've learnt about so many different things. As a blogger, as a documentator, pretty much like you wear a lot of different hats. I don't think people realize that sometimes you have to be a creative director your shoot, sometimes you have to be a photographer, sometimes you have to be the model, sometimes you have to be whatever the job calls for. I don't think people really realize that. To do all those things, has helped me become better at all those things. There's so much that goes in it, I don't think people really realize the amount of work that we put into our site.

12. Do you consider yourself a part of a "movement" or "cohort" of similar blogs? Why or why not?

I mean, I may be a part of many movements. My personal style changes very often, so maybe this day I'm into this movement and maybe the next day I'm into something else. I don't know if I am a part of a movement if I am then ... I am definitely a part of the blogger generation definitely. So yeah definitely a part of the generation of this whole blogosphere.

13. Describe what interests you about fashion.

In general, what interests me about fashion is the detail. I think that kind of sums it up. Sometimes you look at clothes, and then you can *look* at clothes. If you really pay attention, it's like "oh wow, I didn't notice this, I didn't notice that." For me, it's all in the details, it's all in those little things that make fashion and the clothes look like more than just clothes. Maybe even adding an interesting art spin to fashion. There's a lot of things that interest me, those are just a few.

14. Describe what influences you as a blogger.

I'm influenced greatly by when I travel. I think that to me is like inspiration to the max for me. Things that I see online. Anything and everything essentially. I mean you look out on the street,

especially in New York City, it's filled with inspiration. Which is good, I always train my mind to think creatively.

15. What are some of your favourite blogs and why?

I like Karen from *Where Did U Get That*. I look at *The Sartorialist*. I look at *Street Etiquette*. I look a few sites.

16. In your opinion, what makes a good fashion blog? This can be answered in point form.

Original content. Original content coming from a distinct perspective is what makes a good blog.
Or a distinguished eye.

17. Describe your personal style

I always tell people that it's a mix between the old and new. It's classic but at the same time it's ...
I'll be 90% classic but then I throw in something new to kind of throw it off a little bit or vice versa. It always seems classic with a little bit of edge and youth to it. Or my personality might be the edge and the youth I don't know. So to me it's just marrying the two worlds of the old and new and of course technology.

18. Finish this sentence: "Black style is ..."

I don't know actually. I don't know because black encompasses so much. Black style is global, I mean that's what it means to me. I mean, there's so many different types of black people, it's a global thing.

19. Do you think your blog reflects your definition of what black style is today?

I mean I'm black and it's my style so I guess so.

20. Where do you see your blog in the next five years and beyond?

In the next five years and beyond I see me continue doing what I'm doing and continuing to work on similar project that I am working on now. And just keeping it up, that's it.

Appendix G: Anita Clarke Interview Transcript

Submitted by email on January 23rd 2013.

1. When was your blog started? What motivated you to start it?

I started June 21, 2005. It was initially a way to record things I liked on the Internet in a visual manner. In 2006, I started writing for blogTO which gave me my start as a writer with media access and it also encouraged me to develop my personal blog further. In 2009 I left blogTO and made my blog my solitary focus.

2. What is the mandate behind your blog?

I never had a real mandate or manifesto. Everything you need to know is in the title, I want – I got.

The blog is basically me talking about the things I like and things I've purchased with some random tossed in.

3. What is the process behind making content for your blog? This can be answered in point form.

- Finalize idea for the post, Attend event, preview, party, etc
- Prepare images for posting (this usually takes awhile)
- write content
- Upload images and add to post
- review post and schedule it for publishing

4. How do feel about the reception to your blog?

I'm absolutely amazed at the reception of my blog. I never anticipated the reaction it would generate or the opportunities it would bring my way. I've been very lucky and I'm thankful for the opportunity.

5. Describe some of your most popular posts/projects. Why do you think they were popular?

The most popular posts are the fashion trend forecasting ones. I gather fashion trend resources

together for the upcoming seasons. It give the reader a centralize location to find research material.

I also have a feature called Ask a Geek which answers readers questions. One really popular post is about the different Canadian brands that make good winter coats.

6. Compare you blog as it today to what it was when you first started. What has changed and what has remained the same?

It was really unfocused and a bit amateur. Now, it looks more professional and I've become part of the story among the things I want and the things I got.

7. What do you think about your position is in mainstream fashion? Do you think you have been “accepted?”

I don't really think about my position like this or at all. I know in the Toronto scene I've made a place for myself as a knowledgeable source about the industry but I don't think about this on a larger industry scale, it's too global.

8. What are your perceptions about how individuals of Black African descent are depicted in the mainstream fashion media in print and online?

There isn't enough of it. There have been some strides in the last few years and lots of discussion but we still see editorials like Donna Karan's Haiti inspired ad campaign from Spring 2012 where Black people are more props than people.

9. Do you think that “street style”, “style diary” and “fashion blogs” made by individuals of Black African descent have been instrumental in shaping and voicing contemporary expressions blackness as it relates to fashion?

Yes, it's so much easier for people to explore and be exposed to different styles thanks to these mediums. Street style blogs have definitely changed the way many people look and interact with fashion since their rise in popularity. It's also taken it global where we can see that not everyone is

influenced by black American pop culture and that there are other experiences out there.

10. Do you think that they have increased the visibility of the black subject in mainstream fashion media in a positive way? Why or why not?

Yes, based on advertising and models fashion looks very white. However there are many types of people that work behind the scenes in like editors, socialites and make up artists, hair stylist, etc.

The focus on industry players in street style blogs and magazine features have created a new focus on individuals that wasn't necessarily there before.

11. What benefits have you gained by starting and maintaining this blog? Can you share any negative aspects?

I've met a lot of amazing people and made new friends. I've gotten access to previews, parties, galas and places that I wouldn't have access to normally. I'm not much of a swag hound but not to mention it would be disingenuous. Honestly, there isn't anything really negative about it. I've been doing this for 7 years and you have your ups and downs with the blog but generally the whole experience for me has been really amazing. Sometimes the lack of sleep sucks but that's more a grip than anything.

12. Do you consider yourself a part of a “movement” or “cohort” of similar blogs? Why or why not?

No. I'm pretty solitary in my blog pursuits and do my own thing. I like complete control over I want – I got and never felt the need be part of a group of blogs based on similar fashion sensibilities. I'm part of a group of blogs for advertising purposes but that is a financial matter.

13. Describe what interests you about fashion.

I love the creative side of the business (the designers and fashion shows) and I love wearing clothing. However, as I've spent more time in the industry the business side of business is very compelling.

14. Describe what influences you as a blogger.

Friends, family, designers, art, music, books, food, movies, animals, my environment, technology, work

15. What are some of your favourite blogs and why?

I'm a blogger that really doesn't read fashion blogs on a regular basis. I did in the beginning but between my full time job as a Software Test Analyst, events and creating blog content there isn't much time for pleasure browsing. I read a lot of traditional fashion media and I have a subscription to wwd.com which keeps me on top of most things going on.

16. In your opinion, what makes a good fashion blog? This can be answered in point form.

A good fashion blog has style, personality and an opinion. It's well written and has an easy to read layout. It has great images.

17. Describe your personal style.

I think of my style as a bit schizophrenic. I can go from jeans, sneakers and a tshirt to 5 inch heels and a flirty dress or business casual for work. I don't tend to be really feminine in my style. I love Androgyny, draping and straight lines. I love black but I incorporate a lot of colour in my clothing.

18. Finish this sentence: "Black style is ..."

is not a monolith.

19. Do you think your blog reflects your definition of what black style is today?

I think my blog reflects the definition of my style. It's a personal effort that's not focused on defining a whole group of people.

20. Where do you see your blog in the next five years and beyond?

I've never really had a plan with the blog and I still don't. My career is in IT so it's always been a labour of love. I hope it's still providing me with enjoyment in 5 years time.