



2014

Rap and Fashion

Talia Levinas

Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/uresposters>

© The Author(s)

Downloaded from

Levinas, Talia, "Rap and Fashion" (2014). *Undergraduate Research Posters*. Poster 111.

<http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/uresposters/111>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Research Posters by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

Rap and Fashion

Abstract

The presence of rap culture in fashion demonstrates a trend in marketing, bringing cultural niches into the mainstream. This work examines the transition of rap fashion into popular culture, using hip-hop as a muse for the high-end. Specifically, I look at how rappers are beginning to create their own fashion lines and how high-fashion and urban street style incorporate hip-hop characteristics. Rappers use fashion as a way to show off wealth and success, flaunting designer names and labels in music videos, lyrics, and styling. In turn, high-fashion and street style brands use rap figures as guest designers and samplings of hip-hop statements in looks, blurring the elite fashion industry and urbanized rap culture. In my work I looked at articles on hip-hop fashion and primary sources of rappers in the fashion industry to discover the blend of rap in fashion found in popular culture. I discovered that many rap artists highly value fashion and use their success to create rap-inspired clothing brands, both luxury and streetwear. Further in my research I found that rappers use fashion as a tool to boast their wealth and success. Using ostentatious jewelry and designer labels, rappers publicize their knowledge of elite fashion labels as a representation of their status. Rappers advertise their familiarity with designer fashions in their lyrics and music videos as well as in clothing that broadcasts labels. Fashion has begun to incorporate what is typically viewed as black culture bringing it to the forefront of trends and questioning its appropriation. This transition marks the integral marketing strategies and importance of streetwear's influence on the high-end styles. The blur in influences shifts fashion's stereotypically elitist industry to value street style and produce collections that are more relevant to popular culture and minority groups.



Givenchy sneaker



Mouth adorned with grills and lipstick

Introduction

In a debut of concentrated flawlessness, Beyoncé takes the stage in Amsterdam to sing her song about female empowerment, "Run the World," wearing a short sequin-encrusted dress. Hair billowing, and legs poised with sass honed only by the queen bee herself, Beyoncé sports the burnt copper number fresh off the runway from Tom Ford's Fall/Winter 2014 collection. The dress mimics a sports jersey, with the designer's name across the top, the number 61, and then the word MOLLY crossed out below, in reference to the popular club drug. Beyoncé is constantly at the forefront of fashion trends yet this outfit carries a context with it far greater than some of her other sequined mini dresses. The dress is said to be a "knock-off of a knock-off" by designer himself Tom Ford, referring to his copy of Jay-Z's BFP football jersey (Crisell). Both the shirt and the evening dress allude to Jay-Z's song "Tom Ford" off his latest album, *Magna Carta Holy Grail* in which the rapper explicitly boasts "I don't pop Molly I rock Tom Ford" ("Jay Z- Tom Ford Lyrics"). Beyoncé's designer dress epitomizes the crossover of rap culture being integrated into the elite world of fashion, featuring a design that refers directly to Jay-Z's rap lyrics and plays on the look of urban street wear.

The presence of rap culture in fashion demonstrates a trend in marketing of bringing cultural niches into the mainstream, as rap fashion continues to merge with popular culture and is increasingly used as a muse for the high-end. Fashion has begun to incorporate what is typically viewed as "black" culture, bringing it to the forefront while questioning its appropriation. Rappers use fashion as an instrument to show off wealth and success, flaunting designer names and labels in music videos, lyrics, and styling. In turn, high-fashion and street-style brands use rap figures as guest designers and samplings of hip-hop statements in its looks, blurring the lines between the elite fashion industry and urbanized rap culture. This transition marks the integral marketing strategies and importance of street wear's influence on the high-end styles. This phenomenon has up-ended fashion's stereotypically elitist industry to now value street style and to produce collections that are more relevant to popular culture and minority groups. With this blending of culture and fashion, one sees the appropriation of urban street style in fashion evolving through fashion collaborations with rap artists and advancing the crossover between street wear and high-end fashion.

Fashion's appropriation of urban culture proposes the assimilation of rap-inspired street wear into the mainstream market, proving a defiance of cultural barriers by transforming characteristics of hip-hop subculture into a more accessible trend first transformed by celebrities, despite arguments of inappropriate use of black culture in fashion styling due to a disconnect in understanding the deeper subtext.



Beyoncé wearing a dress from Tom Ford's 2014 Fall/Winter Collection

Conclusion

- Fashion is used as a form of expression
- As with any art, there are boundaries to be explored and pushed
- Rappers and celebrities are most influential in breaking the boundaries of fashion and hip-hop culture
- Fashion helps form identity, individuals are responsible for any inappropriate use of cultural cues
- High-end designers collaborate with rappers and translate rap trends into designer fashion
- Rappers use fashion as a form of defending status
- Rap culture has become mainstream and no longer pertains to a single cultural group



Rapper ASAP Rocky wearing designer Givenchy

Works Cited

- Chandler, Robin M., Chandler-Smith, Nuri. "Flax in Ya Gear: Transgressive Politics and the Influence of Hip-Hop on Contemporary Fashion." *The Berg Fashion Library*. The Berg Fashion Library. 2005. Web. 6 Feb. 2014.
- Cheddie, Janice. "Troubling Subcultural Theories on Race, Gender, the Street, and Resistance." *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 14.3 (2010): Web. 25 Feb. 2014.
- Crisell, Mattie. "Tom Ford Makes a Jay Z Joke in His Fall Collection." *New York Magazine*. New York Media. 17 Feb. 2014. Web. 17 Apr. 2014.
- Duncan, Fiona and Solihwa, Armin. "Queer Fashion: 13 Voices Speak On Fashion's Appropriation of Urban Culture." *Bullett*. N.p. 9 Jan. 2014. Web. 18 Feb. 2014.
- "Fashion Edit." *YouTube*. YouTube. 26 Sept. 2013. Web. 6 Feb. 2014.
- "Jay Z-Tom Ford Lyrics." *Rap Genius*. Rap Genius. n.d. Web. 17 Apr. 2014.
- Miller, Janice. "Clothes and Cultural Identities: Music, Ethnicity and Nation." *Fashion and Music*. By Janice Miller. 2011. N.p. The Berg Fashion Library. The Berg Fashion Library. 2011. Web. 17 Mar. 2014.
- Polhemus, Ted. "Street Style." *The Berg Fashion Library*. The Berg Fashion Library. 2005. Web. 20 Feb. 2014.
- "Status Sneakers." *Vogueonline*. Vogue, n.d. Web. 2 March 2014.
- Wardington, Cheryl Ann. "The Black Presence in Fashion." *Network Journal* 11.5 (Apr. 30, 2004). *Ethnic NewsWatch*. Web. Feb. 11, 2014.
- White, Theresa Renee. "Missy 'Adornedness' (Blott And Nicki Minaj): Fashionist! Black Female Sexuality in Hip-Hop Culture—Girl Power Or Overpowered?" *Journal Of Black Studies* 44.6 (2011): 607-626. Academic Search Complete. Web. 13 Feb. 2014.
- Tuloch, Carol. "Style - Fashion-Deals: From Black to Post-Black." *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 14.3 (2010): 279-304. *Berg Fashion Library*. Web. 25 Feb. 2014.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Prichard for guiding me in the creation of this poster.