**HOW FASHION AFFECTS THE WAY WE PERCEIVE OTHERS**

Raveena Devjee

St. Edward’s University

COMM-2301-02

Dr. King

November 17, 2022

**Abstract**

Fashion is a communication phenomenon that connects individuals who otherwise would have little in common. The way someone dresses can help people figure out what someone's interests, passions, or hobbies are and can even create niche groups of people who enjoy the same type of clothing. In this case, streetwear fashion has revealed multiple groups of people who wear this category of fashion for different reasons. Fashion is a way to express oneself and create an image for themselves the way they want others to perceive them and a way to help the person wearing the clothing feel more comfortable in their skin and express themselves the way they want. The way someone decides to dress can have an effect on how that person is viewed by society or just the people around them. That is why figuring out how clothing effects the way we see ourselves and others is so important.

**Key Words**

Fashion; Express; Streetwear; Perceive; Clothing; Society; Effect

Clothing has not always been a form of expression, however, throughout the year's different types of fashion have appeared which has created many niche groups of people who all enjoy the same types of fashion. Fashion is important economically yes, but more importantly for people. It has a way of shaping lives and creating a story for ourselves, whether this story is true or not. It creates an image for others about ourselves and can affect the way someone is treated or viewed in specific situations or throughout society.

The focus of this paper is on streetwear fashion. The popularity of streetwear fashion has only grown since the start of its appearance in the 1990s (Wikipedia, 2022), and a lot of the influence these clothes have on the public is based on the fact that Hip-Hop culture has had a huge role in projecting the popularity of streetwear to the public eye alongside African-American culture.

Streetwear fashion is heavily influenced by pop culture and celebrities apart of this movement also play a big role in what becomes popular, what stays popular, and what dies off. A particular type of group that has emerged since the start of streetwear fashion is a group of people who call themselves Hypebeasts. These people are often described as people who are passionate about the latest fashion trends within some subcultures of fashion. These subcultures can include skate fashion, sneakers, high fashion (Luxury brands), and fashion designed by people with a high profile in the Rap/Hip-Hop community.

Hypebeasts have made an image for themselves on the internet as kids who dress in multiple different styles and mismatch things that don’t really go together but in the community of Hypebeasts that take their hobby and fashion seriously, there is a lot of history and information that goes with these clothes. Some Hypebeast brands include Supreme, Off-White, Yeezy, Nike, New Balance, and many more. Alongside these brands, there are specific designers and artists that dedicate their work to the streetwear fashion industry and have been able to make a name for themselves within the industry. Some of these artists include Virgil Abloh, James Jebbia, Nigo, and Hiroshi Fujiwara, while artists such as Takashi Murakami and Kaws were able to make a name for themselves in the fashion space as well as the art space by collaborating with various brands and artists.

Some of the physical spaces I will visit will be stores across Austin that cater to people who are into this type of clothing. My research question is along the lines of “How does fashion affect the way we may perceive someone?”. The reason this study is so important is that, although fashion is personally defining, it is also culturally defining and can affect the way other cultures view one another, as well as how other people just see other people. In this sense, fashion is a way of communicating our ideologies, beliefs, hobbies, and interests while having to say nothing at all. This makes fashion one of the few forms of communication that are not verbal and is also considered a form of art. It can connect people in ways that people would never have deemed possible in the past before, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, or any other factor. That is what makes clothing special.

The goal of this research is to open up people's eyes to the importance of something that we may not always see as important, like clothing, something we do or use in everyday life that we don’t put much thought into, and may still be an important topic of conversation. I also hope to accomplish being able to show that even though someone may dress in a certain way or in a way society may deem as inappropriate or ‘uncool’, it does not make a person who they are and there can be various different reasons as to why someone chooses or does not choose the dress the way they do.

I believe this paper contributes significantly to a heuristic line of thinking, encouraging future research on the same topic and ideas. In this proposal, the sections I will incorporate include a literature review, a methodology/logistics section, limitations/suggestions for future research, and a budget/timeline section, alongside a reference page.

**Literature Review**

Communication scholars have researched different concepts linked to fashion. One of these concepts is communication linked with aesthetics, identity, and place.

Aesthetics, put simply, is the appreciation for beauty, whether it be in nature, music, visual arts, or other things people appreciate beauty in. Some aesthetics that have been studied in the communication space include dance, theatre, music, and fashion. A person's clothes can help connect the individual with a subject, alongside the aesthetics of the clothes themselves, people are able to create unity between the subject (Person) and the object (Clothes) with a mutual dependency on the individual and our thought process, which makes it possible for a group of individuals with no other collective interests rather than clothes (Kang, 2018), to become a smooth sailing group of people. The reason the idea of aesthetics is so important is that as we evolve as the human race, so do our ideologies and beliefs, along with what becomes popular and trendy and what fades out of the spotlight. Haute Couture, for example, is highly contested for its split opinion of whether this type of clothing should be considered art. They contest the theory that high-end fashion is not considered wearable art, due to “the general view of fashion as not being in the realm of art because, as a form of bodily adornment, it is fickle and impermanent.” (Venkatesh et al., 2010, p. 461). Various scholars have said the body is like a human canvas. In this sense, fashion takes on the same aesthetic art form as tattoos. Although people argue that fashion is unstable and temporary, fashion has a long history of being able to grasp people's attention and keep it.

Alongside aesthetics, there is a link with identity. In a study done by the authors of *The Aesthetics Of Luxury Fashion, Body And Identity Formation*, (Venkatesh, 2010) they surveyed thirty women on what they thought of fashion and their self-identity and body image. The results showed that women tend to feel that there is a sexual connotation between fashion and models. “The body is central to such an engagement; indeed, it constitutes the basic canvas for all human performance.” (Venkatesh et al., 2010, p. 461), therefore fashion is a manifestation of one's self which is why fashion is a part of a lot of young people's way of self-expression. An article called *‘Swagger’: Urban Youth Culture, Consumption And Social Positioning* (Mason, 2018) explain that marginalized young people challenge their social space with fashion. The word swagger refers to “a popular term used within contemporary youth culture that refers to the performance of style, involving knowledge of what to wear and how to wear it (Harvey et al., 2013).” (Mason, 2018, p1118). Swagger is also closely related to Hip-Hop culture and music culture in general, predominantly dominated by Black people. In a study done by author Mason and his colleagues in Maple and Meadow homework clubs, two areas of Forgefield, Ireland, focus groups were used in order to understand the mindset of a young person and their ideas surrounding fashion and identity. Something interesting that came up a lot in Mason’s research was identity correlated with undertones of race and class.

Carrying on identity, race, and class plays a huge role in people's views on fashion and brands. Mason’s focus groups gave a lot of insight into how marginalized young people and teens alike view clothing. In a focus group with two teenage boys with the phononyms of Ceclo and Maqil, Mason asked questions about ‘getting known’, or in other words, popularity. The research showed that when teens grow up in an environment where they are aware that they are less fortunate than the people around them, they have different values. Maqil and Ceclo clearly valued being noticed. Black teens living in disadvantaged neighborhoods feel like they need to get popular with the White kids. They use ‘black masculinity’ (Mason, 2018), in order to attain status in school. (Mason, 2018, p. 1128). When talking about race and views, it is important to remember that on some occasions, white people view the issue of racism differently. In a newspaper article written for the *Hilltop Views*, author Sienna Wight reviews St. Edward’s University’s common read for this academic year, *How The Word Is Passed* by Clint Smith. Clint went to Confederate memorabilia and asked tour guides and fellow visitors their thoughts on this controversial historical time. Due to different ways of storytelling between African-Americans and White people, there are different viewpoints on what the war was really about since some White people's families were not slave owners which can shape subconscious ignorance.

Some gaps in the argument could be a connection between fashion and these three concepts, as well as place. A place could have a lot to do with how someone views someone else's clothes because of multiple factors. Some of these factors could be religion, country, or just other personal reasons. Due to some people having religious reasons for not wearing certain types of clothes or clothes that say too much or expose too much, there could be a judgment towards people who do wear this type of clothing. Another concept I see as a gap in the arguments is in Mason’s article. Researchers also participated as volunteers in the homework clubs they were researching, which leaves some questions such as were the teens really being as honest as they could have been. It is also important to note that participants were hesitant in answering questions about their own community. There was also a reduced amount of time spent in the field, from four nights a week down to two nights a week due to funding issues for both homework clubs. Students would also talk about drug dealing and other illegal activities which leaves the researchers with a moral dilemma.

These themes show a variety of different aspects to the deeper level of what fashion is. Being able to recognize the more serious details about fashion as an art form and how fashion affects people in their everyday lives is vital to my research question and being able to understand why people wear what they wear or why people choose not to wear certain brands of clothing etc.

**Methodology/Logistics**

The people I will be sampling are people who work at stores that sell this specific type of fashion and plan on not using too many participants in efforts to not get any data saturation. I plan on using purposive sampling, in order to focus my study on the specific group I am studying, Hypebeasts. This will help ensure that other opinions on other types of fashion are balanced with my group of focus. My unit of analysis will be individuals working in stores that generally sell streetwear fashion. The sampling method that will be used for this paper is cluster sampling. I decided to use this because I feel like the most effective way for me to gain a good sense of how other people view this particular type of fashion would be to visit the various stores known to sell specifically streetwear fashion. I think there would be no issue in sharing the goals of the study with the participants. There is nothing that would cause any of the participants to be offended about the goals of the study and therefore there would be no reason for me not to share the purpose of the study with my participants.

Gaining access to the site will not be a difficult task since this group of people is not an exclusive group. In addition, I have a similar type of fashion sense as the people I am studying and share alike interests, therefore it would not be hard to gain access to the field. Also, the “field” would just be stored in an outlet or a mall that is public, leading me to believe that there would be no gatekeepers for the group apart from possibly the owners of the store. I do not think they would restrict me from conducting research though as they are rarely even in the store.

The researcher role that I think would best fit my project is observer-participant, because I would not consider myself to be a part of the specific group that I am studying but I would need to talk to people part of the group on a more personal level to get a deeper understanding of peoples feelings towards others, which could not be conducted by being a complete participant nor could I be a complete observer. However, I would be able to incorporate participant-observer due to my knowing enough information about the group and subject to hold a conversation but for the most part, I think my researcher role would be observer-participant. This role ensures that I am able to engage with the group of people and be able to observe and take field notes without having to worry about the individuals in the group noticing since they would be aware that I am conducting a study.

The relationship I intend to have with my participants will be friendly. I think being friendly would be more of a benefit to my research in order to get the information that I want. From my own experience, if you state your intentions and act in a friendly way, people are more likely to give you what you want. In my case, what I want is their information and feelings. This would require a little trust building, so being pleasant and approachable would be the best tactic in my opinion. In the sense of being collaborative with my participants, I think being able to engage in various activities or conversations would be valuable in finding out deeper information and reasoning about people's feelings and beliefs.

To ensure the quality of the study, I will be ensuring I do my best to incorporate some warrants of interpretive research. For starters, I believe that this is a topic worth studying because it helps show other researchers and possibly the general public that there are deeper meanings to the things in life we deem as simple. I intend to use rigor with all of the proper techniques and be ethical in my research methods etc. As I said before, I need my participants to trust me so my demeanor needs to be approachable, therefore I will be honest and share my true intentions of the research with my participants, integrating sincerity and credibility. To guarantee a thick description, triangulation will be in use as well. Instead of just observing or just surveying, I plan on mixing multiple methods and data use as well as incorporating multiple sources and information from various authors, etc. As for resonance and transferability, if everything works out, then my paper should use both these things to make sure I have something impactful to say in a way that is understandable and suitable, while also incorporating a significant contribution to the conversation. Coherence will be integrated throughout the entire study by making sure my sources are relevant and adding quality to my findings.

I think the approach to guide my analysis of data would be the iterative approach. I think this approach would work best for this project since the ideas of fashion are always changing and people's opinions on trends change as well. As the years go on, certain fashion trends die and new ones emerge, so some things that are deemed as “cool” now, may not be in the next few years. Because of this, I think that second-level coding would be the best method to use for this project since the goal is to collect more data and refine the new data.

**Limitations/Suggestions For Future Research**

Although these limitations are not major setbacks, it is still important to acknowledge them. One of the limitations that comes to mind is not being able to attend specific events that could help with my research such as conventions since they come at specific times of the year and for other reasons too. Another setback could be the sample of people. Due to the locations where this group of people is most prominent, a lot of the people being surveyed maybe store employees, which opens another separate question, if employees of these stores view people differently than the general public who only purchase these clothes. Some other limitations could include location, meaning I am unfortunately restricted to one city in one state in one country. This means it would be almost impossible for me to generalize how every single person in the world feels about streetwear fashion, therefore my research would only be able to be a generalization of Austin, Texas. Other than that I do not see anything else as an issue for my conducting my research or anything else that I would consider a problem.

My research can open a lot of doors for future research. For example, it can help other communication scholars dig deeper into the multiple reasons people may view streetwear in specific ways. As I have said before it helps show other communication scholars that there are deeper meanings to simple things in life and can encourage all types of interesting research to be done. I also think it contributes to the conversation of how people view themselves because of social situations and other factors. Clothes are not just to cover ourselves, but rather also a way for us to express ourselves and form connections with people without having to even say anything, or by having some similar interests to start a conversation.

**Budget/Timeline**

| Budget  |
| --- |
| Cost of gas | $40.00 a week/approx. $150 overall 5 weeks |
| Notebook for jotting/note taking | $0.99 from Walmart |
| Compensation (Store employees)  | $100 for 10 participants |
| Compensation (Shoppers)  | $100 for 10 participants |

5-month budget of research for the group named Hypebeasts.

| Timeline |
| --- |
| Month 1 | Observe store employees and store goers |
| Month 2  | Interview store employees and store goers |
| Month 3  | Transcribe all interviews |
| Month 4  | Analyze data and revise manuscript |
| Month 5  | Review final paper for peer-reviewed journal |

5-month timeline of research for the group called Hypebeasts.

**References**

Hope, C. (2022). The kid stays in the picture. *Esquire*, *1*, 90–99.

Castaldo Lundén, E. (2020). Exploring fashion as communication: The search for a new fashion history against the grain. *Popular Communication*, *18*(4), 249–258.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2020.1854952>

Rosén, M. (2022). What makes a fashion apparel brand cool? An exploratory study on Gen-Z men.

[https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1691733/FULLTEXT01.pdf](https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2%3A1691733/FULLTEXT01.pdf)

Venkatesh, Joy, Sherry, & Deschenes. (2010). The aesthetics of luxury fashion, body, and identify formation. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *20*(4), 459–470.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20778662>

Wight, S. (2022). Common theme invites us to reckon with the history of slavery in America. *Hilltop Views*, 4.

Streetwear. (2022, January). Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Streetwear>

**Informed Consent Form**

You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate.

*Project Title:* How Fashion Affects The Way We Perceive Others

*Principal Investigator:* Raveena Devjee

*Contact Information:* Raveena- 3001 S Congress Ave, Austin, TX 78704. +1 (832) 488-0533. rdevjee@stedwards.edu.

Dr. Stephen A. King- 3001 S Congress Ave, Austin, TX 78704. 512-428-1090

*Purpose Of Study:* The purpose of this study is to study the idea that how people dress affects how someone else views them and comes up with decisions on who that person is just by clothing.

*Procedures:* If you agree to this study, you will be asked to engage in an interview with researcher Raveena, asking questions regarding your views on fashion. These interviews will take around 10-15 minutes.

*Risks And Benefits Of Being In The Study:* There are no foreseeable risks of participating in this study. The benefit of participating in this study is that you as a participant will be able to voice and express your own opinions about fashion brands and various other topics about clothing and streetwear. It will also benefit future research on other reasons people view fashion differently.

*Anonymity:* This study will not reveal any names of participants, since you have not signed any other form expressing the fact that you are okay with being named. The steps I will take as a researcher to ensure anonymity is making sure I am the only one looking at data and analyzing the data as well. I will not allow any others to look over any papers regarding interview answers.

*Voluntary Nature Of Study:* As a participant in this study, your participation is completely voluntary, meaning you are able to back out of this study at any time with no repercussions. You are also allowed to refuse to answer any questions during an interview.

*Contacts And Questions:* The researcher conducting this study can be contacted at rdevjee@stedwards.edu. You are always more than welcome to ask any questions or concerns regarding the study. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, St. Edward’s University, [(512) 448-8400](https://www.google.com/search?gs_ssp=eJzj4tTP1TcwrDDIKjBg9BIrLlFITSlPLEpRL1YozcssSy0qziypBADBxgvt&q=st+edward%27s+university&oq=st+edewar&aqs=chrome.2.69i57j46i10i433i512j46i10i131i433i512j0i10i512j46i10i175i199i512j0i10i512l2j46i10i175i199i512l2.3934j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8) if any other problems happen during the study.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records. If you are not given a copy of this informed consent form, please request one.*