Rap and Fashion

Talia Levinas

Virginia Commonwealth University

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Abstract

The presence of rap culture in fashion demonstrates a trend in marketing, bringing cultural riches 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.

In my research I found that rappers use fashion as a tool to boost 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 rise in hip-hop culture’s stereotypically elitist industry to value street style and producer collections that are more relevant to popular culture and minority groups.

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 blowing, and legs poised with sass homed only by the queen bee herself, Beyoncé’s 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 world MUSLIM 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 Tom Ford, referring to his copy of Jay-Z’s BP football jersey (Crisel). 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 reflects directly to Jay-Z’s rap lyrics and plays on the look of urban streetwear.

The presence of rap culture in fashion demonstrates a trend in marketing of bringing cultural riches 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 streetwear’s influence on the high-end styles. This phenomenon has up-ended fashion’s stereotypically elitist industry to new 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 streetwear and high-end fashion.

Fashion’s appropriation of urban culture proposes the assimilation of rap-inspired streetwear 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.

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

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Works Cited


“Run the World.” Jay-Z. “Run the World.” In The Rap Genius. I would like to thank Professor Prichard for guiding me in the creation of this poster.

Rapper ASAP Rocky wearing designer Givenchy

Mouth adorned with grills and lipstick

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

Gucci sneaker