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***Fashion, Style & Popular Culture*: Special Issue – Displaying and Negotiating Identity: Costume and Ethnic Dress**

'Wear your Identity': Styling identities of youth through dress – A conceptual model

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Abstract

This article exposes how young people use dress to negotiate, articulate and display identity. A diverse group of young people from Manchester, England, were asked to style themselves using items of clothing, or artefacts, which represented their individual and civic identities. Responses to this styling workshop and the accompanying interviews confirmed the powerful part that dressing can play, as young people navigate different cultural contexts and social environments in their everyday life. The research brings new insights into how dress is used as a catalyst for self-awareness, communication and development of self within multicultural urban settings. It proposes a new model for Dress, Youth and Identity (DYI) that provides a structure onto which young peoples' narratives of dress can be mapped and analysed, building upon the model for Dress and the Public, Private and Secret Self (PPSS) proposed by Eicher and Miller.

Keywords

Dress, youth, identity, experience, self, styling

Perspectives on youth and dress

Young peoples' experiences, as articulated from their perspective, through dress, are central to the intentions, methods and analysis set out in this article. Participants are positioned as experts

in their own experience with attention being given to all the elements of dress that hold meaning for them, from everyday dressing, seemingly without thinking, through to garments chosen to proudly display specific elements of identity. Much previous analysis of youth and dress derives from the subcultural theories of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige [1979] 2007, 1988). These texts refer to collective 'subcultures' of youth, that are in some way 'spectacular', or 'breach our expectancies' (Hebdige [1979] 2007: 92), and have tended to focus on white heterosexual males, omitting the experience of young women or LGBT+ communities, for example. Subcultural theory has been criticized for this narrow focus and post-subcultural theorists have since acknowledged these gaps (Muggleton 2002); questioning the relevance of subcultural theory in a multicultural, postcolonial world (Huq 2006); in a society in which identities are more 'fluid' and less 'fixed' (Bennett 1999). In response the methods and concepts set out in this article aim to be inclusive for all young people within the 13–19 age range, and to consider the multi-faceted experience of the individual, rather than categorizing young people into defined cultures. In dress theory Efrat Tseëlon (2010: 155) describes a shift from the *stereotype approach*, as seen in subcultural theory, towards a *wardrobe approach*,

> from researching the *external* dimensions of clothes (e.g. features of fabric and tailoring, historical styles, fashion trends) to the *internal* dimensions (expressed in the lived or reflexive experience of wearing particular clothes in particular contexts for particular reasons or ends).

However, key texts that prioritize everyday dress, exploring the meaning and lived experiences of dressing from the perspective of the wearer, have tended to focus on adult women including; Sophie Woodward's (2007) ethnographic wardrobe interviews, Ali Guy et al.'s (2001) focus

on women's relationships with clothing, Tseëlon's (1995) analysis of expected societal female appearances and how this interrelates with self-perceptions and Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell's collection of dress stories (2004). All of these texts present methodologies that could be applied usefully to the 13–19 age range, however, there has been a distinct lack of recent studies acknowledging the material and emotional connections to clothing from the perspective of young people. The research presented in this article aims to address this omission, proposing a model for the analysis of dress, youth and identity constructed from narratives created by young people themselves. The methods were designed to capture first-hand experience, using the act of dressing as a common language through which young people could clearly articulate their views. The primary purpose of the research was to document the experiences of young people, encouraging them to reflect on their own sense of self; and to explore and articulate their own identity and personal style, through the materiality of the garments and artefacts that hold personal meaning for them. The intention is to give young people their own voice in dress research, and to define a methodological framework, which can support self-expression and identity formation.

Throughout the text, reference is made to 'dress' rather than 'fashion', to include worn artefacts, accessories or adornments to the body as defined by Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne Eicher (1992: 1. This distinction from fashion is important; as described above the methods, analysis and findings discussed in this article are viewed from the perspective of 'lived or reflexive experience', the *internal* dimensions of dress defined by Tseëlon (2010: 155). The focus of this research is how personal meanings interact with the development of individual identities through the act of dressing, rather than the influence of the fashion system or consumerism on these young people. This viewpoint distinguishes the approach of the aforementioned anthropological dress literature and this article, from comparative studies such as Craig Thompson and Diana Haytko's (1997) detailed analysis of 20–30-year-old consumers'

uses of fashion discourses. Where the methods presented in this study utilize the physical acts of 'dressing' and 'styling' as a means through which conversations about identity are articulated, Thompson and Haytko used fashion phenomena as a conduit through which participants narrated their personal history. Many of the findings correlate in the two studies, both recognizing the role fashion or dress plays in identity formation, but the participant viewpoint differs, as Thompson and Haytko focus on 'personalised consumption meanings' positioning the participant as a 'fashion' consumer, whereas in this article personal 'dress' choices and their meanings are the focal point of the analysis (1997: 35). While 'dress' is the subject of this study, the term 'styling' is used to describe the methods employed, denoting a more conscious approach than everyday 'dressing' that results in distinct 'looks', as played out by the young respondents in the creative workshops.

Wear your identity: A methodology

The 'Portrait Youth' project works with diverse youth groups from the Greater Manchester area in the United Kingdom, running creative styling workshops that enable the regions young people to communicate their individual and collective identities through dress. This article analyses the findings from two workshops that took place with the Manchester Youth Council, a group of young people who represent their peers on social and political issues both locally and nationally. We chose to work with this group as the young people involved come from very different backgrounds from across Manchester, yet had a common bond in their passion for their city. The workshops, entitled 'Wear your Identity' (WYI), took place in 2017, working with fourteen participants aged between 13 and 19. The sample comprised of six males and eight females, all of whom were in full-time education. Participants volunteered to take part in the project following several visits to the youth group, in which the researchers presented the project and an outline of the workshop structure. These briefing meetings ensured all

participants, and guardians were confident about taking part and the subsequent use of data. As the group were mostly under the age of 18 rigorous ethics procedures where adhered to, with full parental consent obtained.

The workshop model was influenced by Erving Goffman (1961, 1995) who referred to clothes, among other items related to appearance, as 'identity kits' necessary to assert a 'personal front'. Goffman's study focused on mental health patients and inmates of institutions but was first identified as relevant to dress theory by Roach-Higgins et al. in their volume *Dress and Identity* (1995: 119–20). As a symbolic interactionist Goffman was concerned with the individual in relation to society, and how people present themselves to others. As a theoretical approach this aligns with much of the literature that has influenced this study, and the approach taken to the development of methods to explore identity. Prior to the WYI workshops participants were asked to prepare an 'identity kit', to fill a bag with clothing or artefacts that represented their individual and civic identities, and bring it with them to the workshops. These methods align with David Gauntlett's innovative use of creative tools, such as as Lego or drawing, to enable exploration of identity by participants in creative workshops (2007). Gauntlett's use of everyday media as a conduit for thinking about identity, like the toolkits used in the styling workshops in this project, enabled participants to become actively involved in the research process and have control over the content generated. This participatory approach is central to the 'Portrait Youth' project aims and the development of the WYI workshop model. Each of the two WYI workshops took place over the course of a day on the set of a 'photo shoot' where participants were encouraged to style themselves, in as many ways as they wished to represent their identity, using the props and clothes they had selected and brought with them. A photographer then captured these 'looks' in portrait form. The researchers took time to talk to the young people, to hear their stories and observe their interactions and experiments with dress and styling. During the workshop short, ten- to twenty-minute semi-

structured interviews also took place while participants waited to be photographed. These conversations were framed by a set of open-ended questions prompting participants to talk about their everyday experiences as a young person in Manchester, to reflect on their own identity and to describe the clothes and artefacts in their toolkit, and why they had selected them for the workshop.

For this article, and the development of the proposed conceptual model, the full set of photographs and interview transcripts provided the data for qualitative analysis. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews were analysed and common themes manually identified and grouped. This thematic analysis highlighted a range of behaviours that related to the role of dress in the performance of identity, categorized by the researcher as: concealment, reflection, respect, play, display and conforming. The interviews were then analysed again, keeping each individual narrative intact but mapping occurrences to the identified themes, this time working back and forth between the transcripts and visual images. The use of thematic analysis, alongside visual analysis is set out by Catherine Riessman in *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, 'Spoken and written texts examined alongside visual data show how identities can be revealed, concealed, or fictionalised through images' (2008: 179). This was evident in the findings, exposing both similarities and anomalies between what we could see in the styled images and what we read in the interview transcripts. The workshops provided a rich data set with the scope to examine contemporary identities of youth more broadly, from a sociological perspective, however, for this article the focus is on narratives of dress, to address the lack of literature in this area and challenge generic societal perceptions around how young people to choose to dress. The spotlight is on the everyday experiences of youth, specifically those of young people aged between 13 and 19 living within large urban environments such as Manchester. This focus has enabled the development and testing of a new model for the analysis of identities of youth, as performed through dress.

Public and private identities of youth

Research undertaken with American adolescents by John Michelman et al. (1991) and Eicher et al. (1991) provided evidence of how dress can express the 'visible self', enabling a greater understanding of the 'invisible self' (Michelman et al. 1991: 382) on which this research builds. These qualitative studies informed the Public, Private and the Secret Self model (PPSS) originally developed by Eicher in 1981 and revised in 1994 (Eicher and Miller 1994), where the findings were categorized with reference to the presentation of public, private and secret dimensions of dress. According to this model the 'public' realm denotes everyday dress within formal social roles, the 'private' is used for dress in informal settings with friends and family and the 'secret' for intimate fantasy or role-play. The two studies mentioned above, the first with 100 psychiatric patients aged between 12 and 18 (Michelman et al. 1991), and the second with eleven students from an American suburban high school (Eicher et al. 1991), concluded that discussions around dress are helpful to young peoples' development and can enable deeper conversations about dimensions of self. These young people mostly identified with the style of dress defined as public, or reality dress, sometimes referring to private dress, but found the discussion of 'secret' dress awkward. Kimberley Miller-Spillman et al. (2017) have since extended these findings, using the PPSS model to analyse quantitative data from a group of 18–25-year-olds. For Miller-Spillman's participants the dimensions of dress did expand beyond the public, further into the private sphere than the young adolescents interviewed by Eicher et al., but still entered the secret realm less often. These studies have provided a conceptual platform on which this research builds. The findings of the WYI workshops brought to the surface two questions: If the aforementioned studies suggest that only certain categories of the PPSS model represent aspects of identity and dress most relevant to adolescents, is there a model that can be employed to specifically articulate identities of youth through dress?

Second, how do the public and private dimensions of dress apply when young people describe fluid identities that cross cultural, social and geographical boundaries in their personal narratives of self?

The PPSS model and the research presented in this article are grounded in the theory of symbolic interactionism, which considers the individual in relation to society, particularly in terms of how individuals present themselves to others. Goffman described this as presenting a 'personal front', through the employment of 'items of expressive equipment' such as clothes (1959: 34). Gregory Stone's (1962) essay 'Appearance and self' extended this concept, focusing on the importance of appearance in the early development of self. Stone used the metaphor of 'play' to describe the practice of 'dressing out', the deliberate misrepresentation or reconstruction of self that can transpire when donning a costume, an idea further developed by Eicher (1981) in her categorization of 'fantasy' or 'secret' dress. In the analysis of the WYI workshops this behaviour is reported, but the acts of disidentification evident in the findings are categorized as 'concealing' rather than 'playing' as they bear little relation to the act of play. Stone used the term 'dressing in' to describe playing the 'game' or wearing a 'uniform', a behaviour clearly evidenced in the WYI findings, categorized as 'displaying' or 'conforming'. Stone's influence on Eicher (1981) is evident again as this 'dressing in' aligns to 'reality' dress in the PPSS model. Stone recognized this as an important stage in the development of self, 'Growing up is dressing in. It is signalled by the wish to dress like others who are, in turn, like one's self' (Stone 1962: 114), a hypothesis validated by the 13–19 year olds who took part in this study. Goffman (1959: 114) proposed that identities are played out differently 'on stage' and 'backstage' using this analogy to differentiate between public and private acts of self, for example dressing in the bedroom before presenting oneself to friends at a social event. Eicher's (1981) categorization extends beyond the private and public to include the *secret* self. If Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor is similarly protracted, this secret

realm of dress would perhaps align with the locked door of the dressing room, beyond the relatively open access of the backstage area. In relation to the methods undertaken in the WYI workshops the preparation of the toolkit in the privacy of the participants home, the styling of the outfits in the changing area of the workshop and the performance in front of the camera align with the symbolic interactionalist concepts proposed by Goffman and Eicher, whilst also mapping onto thematic findings from the WYI workshop (Figure 1)

Secret [1]		*Private* [1]			*Public* [1]
Dressing room		*Backstage* [2]			*On-stage* [2]
Preparing the toolkit		*Styling the outfits*			*Photo shoot*
Concealing	*Reflecting*	*Respecting*	*Playing*	*Displaying*	*Conforming*

[1] Eicher (1981)
[2] Goffman (1959)

Figure 1: Mapping metaphors of dress from a symbolic interactionalist perspective.

Miller-Spillman et al. (2017) and Eicher et al. (1991) have highlighted that the majority of dress research has focused on public dress, and the findings of their research with adolescents and emerging adults, using the PPSS model, are mostly framed within the public sphere. However, Eicher et al. noted that their methods (extended interviews conducted in participants' homes) limited the exploration of the secret self in high school students, emphasizing that,

> In apparent contrast to the adult world, the differentiation between public and private self does not seem as marked. Consequently, school clothing that we observed and that the students reported wearing was said to be worn for most social occasions in and out of school. Thus, public and private self do not generally seem to distinguished by dress in this student population. (Eicher et al. 1991: 682)

This distinguishes Eicher's group from the participants in this study who wear a school uniform until 16, as is common practice in the United Kingdom. Findings from the WYI workshops exposed the situation that many of the young respondents were moving freely between public and private experiences of dress in everyday life, dressing appropriately for different cultural or social situations. They describe the social aspects of dress and identity played out through deliberate use of clothing for communication, and the more personal experiences of dress as articulated through their life narratives and material artefacts. This overlapping of experience maps onto the approach to methods where meanings are derived from both the wearer (participant) and the viewer (the researcher) as described by Tseëlon in terms of the 'meaning of clothes' and the 'meanings we give to clothes' (2012: 118). This fluidity of movement between the private and the public, the personal and the cultural, the material and symbolic and the wearer and viewer characterizes this research study and provides an axis through which the clustering or scattering of experience in relation to identity and dress in young people can be analysed.

Dress, youth and identity: The DYI model

In order to conceptualize the visual and textual data from the WYI workshops, a model for Dress, Youth and Identity (DYI) was drafted (Figure 2) based on dimensions of dress identified in the verbal narratives, and photographs of the styled 'looks', produced by the young participants. The DYI model maps these behaviours and attitudes to dress into six categories: concealing, reflecting, respecting, playing, displaying and conforming (Figure 2). The vertical axis provides a reference to Goffman's theoretical model and the movement between meaning derived from intimate personal experience (offstage), through to the dimensions of dress played out in public with a heightened awareness of societal perceptions (onstage). The horizontal axis

builds on the secret, private and public dimensions of self as proposed by Eicher (1981), but extends the private into 'visible' and 'invisible' behaviours. The dimensions of dress identified by the researchers are scattered between these two axes, where they most commonly fall. However, the movement between points and definitions on the model should be read as fluid and overlapping, because the realms of private and public, or personal and social, are not experienced in isolation by the participants. Goffman (1959: 57) acknowledged that identity is fluid and that people perform multiple versions of self, described as 'audience segregation' in his dramaturgical analysis. This plurality surfaces in the findings from this study as the young people use dress to navigate through, or around, different social, cultural and geographical boundaries.

The DYI concept is indebted to Eicher and Miller's model (1994), but does not acknowledge the 'secret' or 'fantasy' realm, at least in the adult definitions of intimacy described in the PPSS model such as: sensual lingerie, sexual fantasies or the assumption of another persona (1994). This removes concepts alien to, or uncomfortable for, the age group being analysed for this research. The DYI model was constructed using responses from the participants who, whilst they did not demonstrate any behaviours belonging to the 'secret' realm as defined by Eicher and Miller (1994), did refer to private acts of concealment and disidentification, and reflections on memories or personal experiences. The DYI model acknowledges this by distinguishing between private meanings associated with dress that are deliberately withheld or altered in public (invisible private), and private acts of dressing that hold personal or private meanings but overlap with shared experiences or external influences (visible private). The six dimensions of dress analysed in this article, extend from the invisible representation of self, through private but visible elements of dress and into the public realm where identities are played out in full view.

Figure 2: Dress, Youth and Identity (DYI) – A model for the analysis of identities of youth, as experienced through dress.

Concealing

Of the fourteen participants taking part in the workshops, six referenced camouflaging elements of their identity or using dress to mask elements of self, whether to disassociate themselves from a given culture, to avoid attention, or to fit in with a community or group. One participant did not reference concealment in the interview, but notably avoided styling himself in the Islamic thobe he brought with him. Yet he included this ankle length, loose-fitting tunic, traditionally worn by Muslim men, in his 'toolkit', as an important representation of his faith. Another participant, Hassan, felt that his identity was 'covered' in his everyday dress, he described feeling pressured to fit in with societal expectations of western dress, rather than wearing the traditional clothing that brought him personal pride, such as the Nigerian robes worn in Figure 3.

> I think my identity is quite hidden because most of the time, like I said before, I feel prouder wearing my traditional stuff and my cultural identity. But then 99% of the time I wear English and western clothes and I think that covers my identity, so I don't really express it that much in what I wear. (Hassan, 18 years old)

> I kind of use it [dress] to separate myself from any given culture because sometimes I find conforming to the culture that I mentioned I was born into can be quite a negative thing that can face judgement, a lot. (Daniel, 15 years old)

Daniel deliberately styled himself in casual, generic clothing, including sweatshirts and T-shirts that were fairly neutral; only a subtle indicator of his personal interests persisted in the form of a small logo on a white T-Shirt, referencing his work with the youth council. He described how he used clothing to signify neutrality and create distance from the stereotypical

perceptions and judgements he felt were associated with young people in his community (Figure 4). Hassan, however, proudly wears his cultural identity, choosing to style himself in items of Nigerian origin in two of his three outfits. In one portrait Hassan mixed his traditional Nigerian robes with *Nike* sportswear accessories that represented his love of cycling, and an *Armani Jeans* branded cap (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Hassan 18, 2017. Photography: Zoë Hitchen.

Figure 4: Daniel 15, 2017. Photography: Zoë Hitchen.

Reflecting

Closely associated with privacy and concealment of identity are some of the personal stories and memories reflected on by the participants during the interviews. Some narratives fell within the 'invisible' realm as participants recounted very personal stories. Other narratives, whilst still private, were made visible through items of dress, or artefacts, and their emotional or sentimental connections to experiences, places or people. Three participants referenced items of jewellery that held emotional value for them. In his photo shoot Elijah wore one, or both, of the necklaces detailed below in all of his outfit choices.

> These two necklaces that I have. One of them was a gift from someone from Rwanda and he gave it to me as a gift. And the second one is a gift from a friend from Greece and she gave me that. But I guess when it comes to stuff like accessories, they have a lot more value and meaning than just clothes themselves because I think clothes are just an expression of your personality, but at the same time for me accessories tend to have a much deeper meaning. (Elijah, 16 years old)

Jewellery maintains a longevity in personal experience that is harder to replicate in clothes, partly due to its materiality: it may be harder wearing, or worn less often than clothing, or treated as precious where clothes play a more functional role. It is also less likely to date or become ill fitting as the body changes, but unworn garments are often kept with no intention of further wear. The keeping of unworn clothes that hold meaning or purpose for the owner, or recipient, has attracted interest within the fields of dress anthropology and material cultures (Banim and Guy 2001; Woodward 2007). In this study, participants were asked to bring along clothes and artefacts that represented their identity, we did not specify the clothes had to be 'worn' in the workshop but only one participant, Sam, brought with him a garment he did not intend to wear. Sam presented a pair of embroidered blue jeans, that no longer fitted, but had a narrative attached to them that had impacted significantly on his development of self (Figure 5).

> Actually, that's the last thing I packed, I actually ran back home to go get it, was jeans – they're no longer my size, 100%, but they're blue and it's what I wore in Nigeria. Anyway. The reason why this holds so much significance to me, was because in 2011, before I came to this country, I travelled to a country called Liberia to visit my father […]. Then came this stranger and he said to me that, he told me his life story essentially

[…]. But he pointed at that one word on that jeans and that word sort of stuck with me today and that's why the word 'revolutionary' sticks with me as well. And the word is 'revolution' as written there on my blue jeans. I can show you today as well. It meant a lot to me and it said, 'You need to change the world and become one.' It's literally stuck with me and it's been my motivation ever since. (Sam, 16 years old)

Figure 5: Sam's (16) 'Revolution' jeans, 2017. Photography: Zoë Hitchen.

Respecting

Like many of the participants Sam's story crosses geographical boundaries, referencing his time spent in Nigeria. Whilst he did not bring traditional African clothing with him for the

workshop, cultural references are evidenced in the clothing that he did select, such as an African print shirt and African print trim on the lapels and pockets of a black formal jacket worn for prom. For this group of young people, cultural dress was an important aspect of identity with many choosing items of traditional clothing that represented their backgrounds, faith or communities. Emmanuella describes how she uses dress to demonstrate her commitment to Ghanaian culture. This respect for communities and family was important for many young people with references being made to the influence of parents or, for one participant, dressing with respect for a deceased relative.

> So, I've brought my traditional Ghanaian Kente with me and I wear those usually when I'm going to church, or to a party or something with family, and it's just like to feel more inclusive because I understand the language, but I'm not the best at speaking it. So, when I wear that it's like I am Ghanaian and I'm not just trying to shun the tradition and everything, but it's still in me and it's like traditional and it shows what I am. (Emmanuella, 19 years old)

The terms 'traditional' and 'cultural dress' used in this article reflect the language used by the participants. This type of dress can also be described as 'ethnic dress', but participants use the terms traditional or cultural when describing respect for, or pride in, aspects of self beyond ethnicity including: beliefs, class or social environments. Jess only made scant reference to her African heritage in the interview and did not initially choose to style herself wearing the African print dress she had with her. However at the end of the session, she wore the dress for a photograph taken with two other participants, suggesting that for her African dress was part of a collective identity, rather than a dominant element in her personal style of dress (Figure 6). References to faith are evident in these narratives and several participants chose to style

themselves with artefacts that represented this element of self. One participant chose to be photographed holding a bible, while another made reference to the importance of a ring worn to represent his Islamic faith.

> It's kind of like, the ring that I'm wearing now because I'm also a Muslim and this says Allah. It kind of gives me that form of guidance throughout my day to day life. Even though it isn't relevant to fashion or anything like that, the fact I'm wearing it gives me a sense of fulfilment and provides strength and clarity just going through life. (Elijah, 16 years old)

Figure 6: Emmanuella (19), Jess (13) and Vanessa (18), 2017. Photography: Zoë Hitchen.

Figure 7: Sumayah (16), 2017. Photography: Zoë Hitchen.

Many of these young people take pride in their cultural backgrounds and use dress to feel accepted and part of a community, to appear culturally appropriate in the presence of certain social groups, such as special occasions with extended family. While spiritual or cultural aspects of dress often have deep meanings for the wearer, this can remain hidden and intensely private. But these 'respecting' narratives also cross into the 'visible private' realm of the DYI model when cultural symbols adorn the body through dress. The participants were acutely aware of the public gaze and described a need to adapt their dress within different environments, respecting the diverse cultures they encountered in daily life.

> For Asian events and things that happen within the family and cultural sorts of things, then I will wear cultural clothing. I won't really wear cultural clothing outside the sort of house, or like events and stuff. (Sumayah, 16 years old).

> Coming from the background that I come from, visiting different places and different occasions to do with different cultures, you have to adapt yourself and the way you dress as a sign of respect, almost, and it's a sign of fitting in. (Mohammed, 16 years old)

Playing

In the DYI model 'play' references taking part, in sporting or social situations, and engaging in activity for pleasure. It relates to everyday dressing for leisure, rather than the phase of development Stone referred to as 'dressing out' and the adoption of costume to play out a fantasy or act out a role (1962: 109). Reflecting contemporary trends for athleisurewear in this age group many participants demonstrated an interest in casual dress with sports clothing, particularly trainers, and everyday casual fashion featuring dominantly in their individual narratives. Several participants chose to style themselves only in this type of leisurewear, including Mohammed who referenced Asian cultural dress in his interview, but brought with him three outfits based around blue jeans, sweatshirts and T-shirts (Figure 8). This casual dimension of dress is located partly in the private realm, including the prioritization of physical comfort whilst 'off-stage', or by clothes simply 'feeling right' (Woodward 2005).

> They're just generally clothes that I feel comfortable in. They're not very necessarily fashion swerved or towards any identity or culture. It's just something that I've either

> picked up or I've borrowed, or it's just become something that's been passed down that I find myself comfortable in. (Daniel, 15 years old)

> I think the reason why I wear some casual clothing […] it wasn't really planned but it's more the idea that it appeals to more people to a certain extent. So, I could communicate with more people. I could feel more friendly with them. (Sam, 16 years old)

Casual clothing can also provide 'comfort' in the public realm, as this type of dress is perceived to be appropriate in a broad range of contemporary contexts. Participants styled themselves with artefacts that represented hobbies and interests including a violin, a basketball, a bicycle, books and theatre tickets. These leisure, or 'play', dimensions of experience relate to Eicher and Miller's 'dressing for fun' category and cross both the private and public domains (1994). Sport, particularly, is frequently referenced in the narratives and is an important part of collective identity for some of these young people. Participants referred to the use of branded clothing and fashionable dress as a marker of belonging within peer groups. This more public display of dress is evidenced in the prominence of logos, brand names and dominant trends within casual clothing such as the camouflage print items worn by Rahim and Elijah (Figure 9). The deliberate visibility of brands as a sign of acceptance, belonging or status was not discussed by many in the interviews, but is evidenced in the garments and accessories chosen for the photo shoot. It is significant that all the male participants identified with this style of dress to some degree, as opposed to only two of the eight female participants. Maria Piacentini and Greig Mailer (2006) have investigated young people's choice of dress, focusing on consumption and the use of branded clothing. Their findings validate the observation in this study that young people use dress as a means to form friendship groups and identify common interests, and that clothes can support 'fitting in', particularly in relation to branded products.

This focus on young people as consumers has also been explored by Rosaleen Croghan et al. (2006) and Stephen Miles et al. (1998) and although in the WYI workshops to date specific reference to how or why clothes were purchased was not referenced, there is a potential for this to appear more prominently in studies with other youth groups, to be categorized within the 'playing' and 'communicating' dimensions of the DYI model.

Figure 8: Mohammed (18), 2017. Photography: Zoë Hitchen.

Figure 9: Rahim (16) and Elijah (16), 2017. Photography: Zoë Hitchen.

Displaying

A dominant theme in the participant's narratives during interview was the use of clothing for communication. Barnard describes how items of clothing can act as 'bridges' enabling individuals within a group to feel connected to each other, and that style of dress can just as easily create 'fences', where members of a group feel alienated by dress (2002: 40). While school uniform was not mentioned in the narratives, the passage through primary school to high school, and then on to college, and the changes in dress associated with this trajectory, had impacted on the participants' developing identity and personal style. Elijah referenced non-uniform days as the catalyst for his realization that dress can indicate inclusion or exclusion

from a group. While others, such as Eva (Figure 10), planned to use clothing positively to form friendship groups when starting at a new college.

> You see, automatically it would come back to primary school days where there would be those non-uniform days. It's like, that's pretty interesting because obviously every single person is going to have their own sense of fashion and identity, but I guess the harsh reality of it is some feel more accepted than others. (Elijah, 16 years old)

> In primary school, I didn't really have like a sense of style or anything like that. I kind of just went along with what everyone wore, which I think is what a lot of children do at that kind of age. Once I went to high school and I saw that like everyone's kind of different in what they wear, that's kind of when I changed my sense of style.

> I'm going to college in a few months. I plan to wear clothes that are really true to me so that people who are like me and think like me, they often dress the same. So, yes, I would adapt myself in the sense that I would wear clothes that are true to me so that I can find people who are similar to me. (Eva, 16 years old).

These young people understand that dress can signify status, belonging, background or class, and are adept at negotiating the diverse territories of their everyday life and adapting their dress accordingly. Most cite the communication of self as a primary motivator for their choice of dress, rather than dressing simply for societal acceptance. It is important to them that they are true to themselves, and they see this as an essential consideration when interacting with others.

I guess when I am in college, I use my clothes to tell people that in fact, yeah, he is cool and he is part of society and he can interact and he can, so it's almost like, I wear my clothes so that it's embedded in other people's head that, yes, he can integrate with and socialise with us. (Rahim, 16 years old)

'I guess if I were to go somewhere new for the first time then I would wear an outfit that's really true to me and something which I really like, because I feel like an outfit allows you to interact with other people without actually talking'. (Eva, 16 years old)

Figure 10: Eva (16), 2017. Photography: Zoë Hitchen.

While this positive display of dress supports the development of identity and social relationships in young people, the participants also recognized the potential that dress has to incite prejudice or negative connotations. They were conscious of the messages communicated through their appearance in relation to class, race, religion and social groups, and how acceptance of these elements of identity might vary in different situations or environments. This heightened awareness of the relationship between dressing and the need for social validation is part of their everyday experience.

> Personally, for me, nowadays in this culture or in this society, the first thing that people look at, is not only your outside shell and the way you look, but also, you're attire. You are judged based upon your attire. (Rahim, 16 years old)

> Because the way it works in society, especially when entering different communities or social groups is that there exists in each and every one of us this form of subliminal prejudice in terms of the things we see. Before we interact with them we kind of have that prejudgement of how we're going to interact. (Elijah, 16 years old)

Conforming

Linked to the need for acceptance and validation within communities or groups, half of the participants described identities of dress that related to formality, maturing or dressing for specific occasions. These episodes of dress are placed at the far end of the scale on the DYI model denoting the very public nature of this type of dressing and the assumption that the wearer will be in some way judged against perceived, or sometimes real, societal dress codes. In the interviews, participants were encouraged to consider whether they expected their identity to change in future, which led to some insightful views on how they see their choice of dress

changing as they get older. Rahim articulates this development of identity as 'maturing up', reflecting Stone's suggestion that 'growing up is dressing in' (1962: 114). Several participants referenced changes in hair style or length as a metaphor for this maturation process. At this point in their development, young people are starting to envisage themselves entering working life, and imagining an associated change in acceptable dress codes.

> In a job interview, you're going to think, 'I need to do my first impressions; I need to get a haircut; I need to put my hair up; I need to look smart; I need to look casual; I need to wear a shirt; look presentable […]' I do think that I will mature up. Mature up with the speech marks.
>
> So, as I grow older, I probably would adapt myself to be a bit, more, shirts and jeans maybe one day. Or, when I go to work, wear shirts and work trousers and so on and so forth, so, mature up. (Rahim, 16 years old)

Special occasions were referenced in this category, including social and cultural events such as a prom, Independence Day or church services where there is an expected code of dress. Vanessa referenced her choir uniform and the suit she wears to church, which she chose to style herself in to represent her identity. In Vanessa's case, the outfits she chose for the photo shoot – her Sunday suit, and two African printed dresses – are all in some way formal and reserved for more 'special' occasions within the scope of her everyday dress.

> During the week you're not going to see me in a suit or a nice dress, but on a Sunday, you probably would because […] church is part of my main identity because I'm always there. I sing there, so that's when you'd probably see me wearing a choir uniform or

> something like that. I brought a suit because I wear that to church on a Sunday. (Vanessa, 18 years old)

Each participants' narratives were analysed and mapped against the DYI model in relation to the six dimensions of dress, to assess patterns of dress behaviours in this group of young people (Figure 11). All were categorized in at least two dimensions, with only one participant's narrative mapping against all six dimensions of the model. There is a fairly balanced distribution across all the categories with a slightly heavier weighting around the centre right of the scale. This bias towards the public or social aspects of dressing aligns with the findings of Eicher et al. (1991) and Miller-Spillman et al. (2017). But the DYI model generates a wider reach across the spectrum of experience than studies with young people using PPSS, as the DYI categories were defined by the participants themselves, charting only the experiences they were comfortable performing or describing. The distribution of male and female participants is also noted in the summary (Figure 11), and while the numbers in this initial study are too small to draw solid conclusions from regarding gender differences, the evidence suggests areas of potential interest such as the marked difference in the number of males reporting 'displaying' behaviours (100 per cent) compared to the number of females (50 per cent).

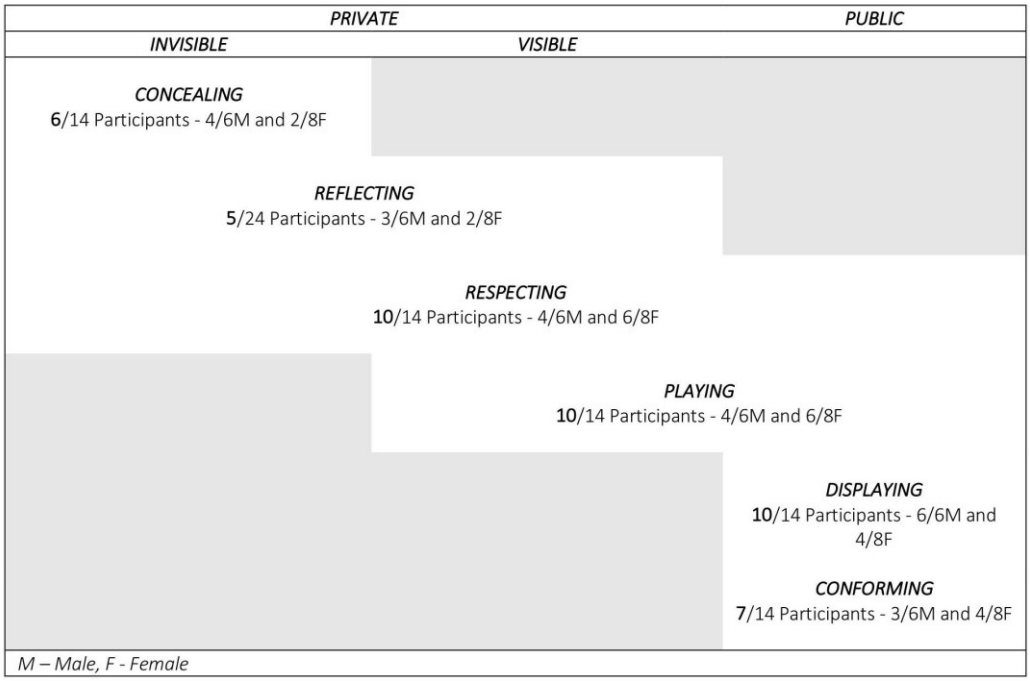

Figure 11: DYI – Distribution of findings from the Wear Your Identity workshops.

Fluidity of self in youth

The DYI model for analysis of identities of youth, as experienced through dress (Figure 2), and the discussion above are presented in a linear manner, from the intensely private behaviours of dress played out behind closed doors, to the public performance of identity aimed at specific audiences. However, it is essential to highlight that the individual participants did not articulate their narratives in this linear way, or fit neatly into the specific behaviour categories applied by the researcher. While this article presents a summary, and identifies commonalities and groupings for the purpose of the reader, each individual narrative retained a unique pattern of behaviours scattered across the axis of the model. The categories in the DYI model (Figure 2) and summary of results (Figure 11) should be read as fluid, overlapping elements of dressing, replicating the approach to dress employed by the young people interviewed. The categories are assigned as a tool for discussion, rather than as fixed or exclusive dimensions of dress, enabling interplay between multiple elements of identity. As Bennett has proposed, there is

scope for studies that examine the important facets of youth that moved post-subcultural theory on from fixed definitions to considerations of 'fluidity' 'multiplicity' and 'temporality' (2011: 503). This need is evidenced in our findings as the participants embrace diverse styles of dress that reflect the multiple aspects of their modern urban lifestyle.

Of the young people who took part in this study, many described or displayed multiple elements of identity through dress as categorized in the DYI model. While some individuals applied their experience to very few categories of dress behaviours, most spanned the range, moving between different dimensions of dress for specific situations or environments, or bringing different elements of identity together in one outfit. This complex styling of identity, reflecting multiple facets of experience and dress, is evidenced in Regina (Figure 12) and Hassan's (Figure 3) mixing of African culture with their love of sport in their portraits. Hassan's narratives of dress were scattered across all the private and public dimensions in the model with the only exception being the 'reflecting' category, while Regina's responses lay firmly towards to public side of the scale. In her interview she describes the traditional dress she is proud to wear in public but also the importance of 'smart things, like blazers and heels and, especially the heeled boots' for certain occasions. Valentine and Sporton (2009) suggest that while we define ourselves to some degree by where we come from, it is not always so straightforward. This is evidenced in the participants' narratives, many of which referred to complex biographies. Emmanuella's story traverses cultural and geographical environments, performed through the choice of the cultural artefacts she styled herself with, alongside casual jeans and trainers (Figure 13); crossing multiple dimensions of dress by reflecting, respecting, playing, communicating and conforming. Vanessa's use of African dress is important to the maintenance of her African identity (Figure 6), reflecting 'respecting' behaviours of dress, she also identifies with 'conforming' attitudes to dress, choosing to be photographed in the suit she wears for church, but describes a relaxed approach to dressing in her interview 'Wake up in

the morning, open your wardrobe, just pick whatever I fancy to wear' demonstrating a playful, casual side to her identity. Whilst multiple identities are often displayed alongside each other in these narratives, at other times they are kept separate, as a means to playing out different identities in diverse social, cultural or geographical situations as described by Hassan below.

> I guess for me, identity, it consists of many things. The first one being where I'm from and not just where my parents are from, but in terms of where I fit in in society as well. But this consists of both being working class and being young as well as the culture from my mum's side which is Caribbean, and my dad's side which is both Somali and Welsh. So, it's like, in that sense I'm basically a reflection of all those different identities. (Elijah, 16 years old)

> I have different identities I think because the way I see myself in one place, I might not see myself in the other place. So, say I'm in college the way I dress will be, say, different to when I go to Nigeria or something; it's completely different. So, I would say I have different identities and I'm made up of different identities. (Hassan, 19 years old)

Figure 12: Regina (16), 2017. Photography: Zoë Hitchen.

Figure 13: Emmanuella (19), 2017. Photography: Zoë Hitchen.

The relationship between ethnicity and identity in young people (aged 16–30) was explored by Tracey Reynolds (2006), as part of a larger project for the Families and Social Capital ESRC Research Group. In a series of in depth interviews participants cited transnational familial experiences, cross-ethnic social groups and fluid and mutable identities, supporting the hypothesis presented in this article that young peoples' identities cannot be constrained into fixed categories. Recognition of this plurality of experience is evident in youth studies literature, but less so in studies of dress. Claire Dwyer (1998) analysed dress codes within a group of young Muslim women whose narratives map onto the behaviours of dress identified in the DYI model. Like the conclusions reached in this research, Dwyer's findings defy the treatment of multiple elements of identity as isolated domains. Both studies provide evidence that young people understand their identity as fluid, and ever changing, reflecting the diverse

aspects of their daily experience and personal histories. This plurality of experience and identity is evidenced throughout the dimensions of dress presented in the DYI model; the concealment of one element of identity while another is played out publicly, the overlapping, and sometimes opposing, dress codes required or preferred in different situations or the use of one type of dress to respect a given culture while a very different type of dress is used to fit in with, or meet new peer groups.

Simple categorizations alone, while useful to provide a framework, are not the way to understand contemporary youth or the complexities of dressing in a modern urban society. The DYI model enables mapping of dress behaviours across the full spectrum of dress, from the very personal to very public displays of identity. The dimensions of private and public intersect and overlap, defying a simple linear model of identity. This model avoids the use of silos or stereotypes by focusing on the individual, rather than assuming commonality of experience or dress according to cultural or social groupings, 'tribes', or subcultures. Jayanthi Mistry and Jean Wu (2010: 5) claim cross-cultural navigation is a 'crucial component of the development of self and identity' in young people, a hypothesis validated by the complex identities articulated by participants in the WYI workshops. There is scope for further interrogation of multiple identities, in relation to cultural dress, but also in the overlapping identities of all young people as they use dress as a tool to navigate through daily life. These pluralities of identity are essential to the formation of self in the present, however, the negotiation of identity is always work in process, as is the manner in which young people choose to dress. 'Maturing up', as described by Rahim, is part of this continuation, an unpredictable multi-faceted, cross-temporal experience as opposed to a fixed trajectory from youth into post-youth identity.

Understanding youth, understanding dress: In conclusion

The development of the DYI model has been guided by the narratives of the young people that took part in this study, enabled by the participatory methods employed. It is hypothesized that the materially focused, creative, interactions with dress that were encouraged in that the WYI workshops have enabled further expansion into the personal and private realm. That the sensory experience of dressing and working with actual clothing provided a device through which personal narratives were more easily played out. Tseëlon (2012) has suggested that studies combining the wearer and viewer had not previously existed in dress theory, but in this research the narratives captured in the interviews and the analysis of the photographs are considered in tandem, allowing the voice of the participant and the observations of the viewer to work hand in hand. As Stone (1962: 92) concurs 'One's clothes impart value to the wearer, both in the wearer's own eyes and in the eyes of others'. Whilst the DYI model is conceived around the notion of public and private dress practices, it could be argued that WYI methodology renders all of the participants' experiences of dress public, even where intimate personal meaning is referenced, as outfits are styled or narratives articulated for the researcher, interviewer or photographer's view. Whilst there is scope to expand the methods further into the private domain using self-interviews by handing participants a camera (Mead and Ellerbrock 2018) or conducting wardrobe interviews (Woodward 2007), responses from participants suggest that the supportive, creative environment of the WYI workshops significantly enhanced the use of dress as a tool for reflection. The full-day session enabled plenty of time for exploration and testing of ideas with support from their peers and the research team. The clothing and artefacts proved invaluable as an access point for conversations with the participants about identity; and dressing up, or self-styling, was validated as a new methodological approach as participants noticeably articulated, and styled, their individual narratives with more confidence following the workshop activities.

> I think everything in my life has helped me shape my identity. From this conversation […] from this interview right now […] to the photo shoot today. Like coming here today, I realised that the clothes I wear would give me a further understanding of what my identity is like. (Sam, 16 years old)

While the focus of 'Portrait Youth' is currently located in urban Northwest England, there is potential for expansion, extending the impact of the project across broader cultural and transnational contexts. The findings corroborate Eicher's statement that 'Dress is significant in development of self, in identity, in self-image, and self-respect' (1981: 37). And it is hoped that the DYI model and WYI workshop methods will be adopted by researchers working with other youth groups to extend the positive impact of these creative interactions with styling and dress. Designed to be fluid and inclusive, and relevant to any group of young people, the model could be used to support groups for whom fashion, or dress, has not yet been considered in academic literature, including those in geographically remote, culturally specific or marginalized situations. The research findings and narratives presented by the participants from the Manchester Youth Council are nuanced by their ability to articulate their thoughts and opinions as active members of a politically and culturally astute peer group. It is expected that other youth groups will respond differently to the brief, and it is anticipated that as the project expands diverse interests, viewpoints, abilities, backgrounds and levels of interest in dress will be brought into the analysis. New categories may emerge in the DYI model and where there are omissions in the narratives to date, such as costume dressing, more extreme dress codes that eradicate choice in dress or the use of body modifications, such as tattoos; in a wider sample of contemporary urban youth we might expect the dimensions of dress to extend significantly to reflect the diversity of experience amongst young people. The article also invites international dialogue as the flexibility of the DYI dimensions of dress lend themselves

to global application. The participant behaviours set out in the conceptual model have been designed to translate across transnational and social boundaries, rather than being organized by types of dress specific to a geographical location. Eicher (1981) set out to ensure her PPSS model provided a 'cross-cultural dimension' pointing out that dress is significant to the development of self in every culture, an ideology that should be considered in any analysis of youth and identity in a multi-cultural world.

Writing on *Youth: Identities, transitions, cultures*, Paula Geldens et al. (2011) asked whether conceptual and methodological tools exist with which we can satisfactorily analyse the complexities of everyday life for young people. The results of the WYI workshops validate the use of dress as such a tool, and its' ability to expose how identity is formed, articulated and displayed in young people using a symbolic interactionist framework. There are limitations to this methodology as it assumes access to, and choice of, clothing, which may be inaccessible to some groups. But the methods are intended to be inclusive and can be adapted according to the needs of particular groups such as the autistic young people who took part in a more recent 'Portrait Youth' workshop. There is further potential for positive impact using the WYI methods and the DYI model to examine the experiences of other marginalized young people, or groups who are noticeably absent in dress research. The WYI interview questions could also be further extended to enable a deeper focus on identity formation and youth experience, as opposed to the heavy emphasis on dress afforded by this analysis. There is scope for impactful projects that bridge the social sciences, youth studies and dress theory as much can be learned about the broader experiences of youth through the analysis of dress from the wearer's perspective. The methods and DYI model could also be adapted for analysis and comparison with other cultural components, such as music or social media.

There is still plenty of work to be done in dress theory, acknowledging the complexities of contemporary youth and ensuring that the nuances of how young people chose to dress in

their formative years receives attention in its' own right. There is a need to tailor methodological and analytical processes to specific age groups to ensure the unique dress behaviours of youth are captured throughout the key stages of self-development. Miller-Spillman et al. (2017) proposed expanding the PPSS model to consider dress choices across a lifetime, allowing for comparative analysis across age groups. As dress can provide a lens through which the broader experiences of youth can be analysed, so too can youth act as a lens through which dress can be interpreted in new ways appropriate to emergent shifts in society and culture. The DYI model provides an opportunity to gain ground on our understanding of dress, as young people define why dress matters to them, and the broader issues their choice of dress represents, from their viewpoint, at this moment in time, and into the future. To this end, this is neither a conclusion, nor a static model to be used in its' current format indefinitely. This is a conceptual approach welcoming critique, adaptation, expansion and continual updating by the protagonists in these narratives – namely the young people themselves.

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