"S.W.A.G. = STYLE WITH A GOAL": EXPLORING FASHION/STYLE AS A CRITICAL
LITERACY OF BLACK YOUTH IN URBAN SCHOOLS

By

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ABSTRACT

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This study is a multi-method, qualitative project using Youth Participatory Action Research through ethnographic design to examine the uses of fashion/style by Black youth as a form of critical literacy. Taking place in the setting of an urban, public, Midwestern middle school, the work outlines the ways these students communicated through their fashion sense and thus made sense of their identities and the identities of others as messages critically coded and decoded daily. This work examines current texts/theories surrounding characteristics of uniform policy, critical literacy, and identity development through fashion/style. Ultimately, through this study's action-orientation, this work highlights how students participated in student-led development of a uniform/dress code policy that incorporated their own critical fashion literacies. *Critical Fashion Literacy*, a particular form of critical literacy this work seeks to contribute to literacy studies at large, is centered upon the notion of how we each possibly read and write messages and meanings through fashion/style daily. Essentially, this study works to center youth voices with a potential impact on possibilities for their future as change agents in education in their own right – moving beyond fashion statements to the statements they are making through fashion.

Dedicated to the SWAG School Design Team –
a team of five brilliant and committed young ladies who made U.S. history in more ways
than one; may your innovations shift education into a new day.
Stay Fly.

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If there is no struggle, there is no progress. – Frederick Douglass

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"…they [prisoners] wear uniforms, we wear uniforms, they have a certain time to eat, we have a certain time to eat…'cause like everyone is wearing the same thing like in prison…it's like we did something wrong, but we didn't do anything. Prisoners are there because they did something wrong. *We're just here to learn, we didn't do anything wrong, but it's like we're being punished.*"

- Derek (An urban student)
"Tuck in That Shirt!" Race, Class, Gender, and Discipline in an Urban School (Morris, 2005)

Black Lives Matter. #BlackLivesMatter. Black Lives Matter! This chant and hashtag, was the battle cry of many during the fall of 2014 after the earth-shattering non-indictments of the officers who killed Mike Brown and Eric Garner. July 17, 2014: Eric Garner was choked to death by an NYPD officer for illegally selling cigarettes – a punishment that surely did not fit the crime. August 9, 2014: Mike Brown was gunned down in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri by a white male officer for fitting the profile of the usual suspect, the profile Black folks all know so well. Eric Garner was big and Black and therefore a threat. Mike Brown was the usual suspect and therefore a threat. The police, the system, had to find ways to control their bodies and their very presence. June/July 2014: A group of students worked together to develop their own uniform/dress code policy for their middle school. This group of pre-teens/teens sandwiched in between two tragedies, uncovered new possibilities for something many school officials and society at large may consider trivial in the grand scheme of public education – the issue of control. Yet, control is something many Black youth begin dealing with early on, and for many their very first encounter is not on our nation's streets but it is in our nation's schools.

Statement of Problem

The surveillance and the governing of Black bodies is an integral thread to the system of racism in America. Black bodies have long been seen as a threat, and thus the effort has been to neutralize alleged offenses by placing Black bodies under control. Control here comes in many forms - from Blackness punishable by death to the very clothing Black students are allowed to wear and not allowed to wear in public, urban schools. Some may consider the connection between the two to be a jump from one issue to the next. However, acts of surveillance and governance shape Black lives in America early on, specifically with our youth in urban schools. Three forms of governance in particular prevail with regard to uniform/dress code policies in urban education – methods of miseducation, influence of the school-to-prison pipeline, and an opposition to Black bodies, which allows administrators to target and punish Black youth for various clothing practices more than any other population.

Miseducation

Boundaries are constructed via uniform/dress code policy development in schools with many of the policies based on assumptions of what urban children are (materialistic, gang-affiliated, etc.) vs. really getting to know the child beyond what is worn on his or her back (Morris, 2005). While cultural difference may be accepted at home and in the community, what occurs at home and what happens in school for Black students and other non-dominant populations remains an ever-widening gap mediated by both external (to secure power) and internal forces (to secure access) (Alim, 2005; Gutierrez, 2008; Paris, 2012).

The more pressing issue is the transition from external to internal and self-directed boundaries. In *The Miseducation of the Negro*, Carter G. Woodson (1933) grounds his work in this warning from the outset:

> When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary. (p. xiii)

Woodson's work is a chilling reminder that the external can easily become the internal all through a system of control. The highest suspension rates in urban schools are occurring with Black and Latino students, with a little-noticed undercurrent that the majority of these suspensions are due to uniform/dress code policy "violations" (Lewin, 2012). Our youth, in particular Black youth for the purposes of this study, suffer greatly from both external and internal boundaries, with internal boundaries being the most damaging because of their lasting, generational effects.

School-to-Prison Pipeline

The students I worked with, through their own eyes, sorted through their own experiences to produce their own uniform/dress code policy, and thus control over their own bodies. Their work stands on one end of the pipeline, the school-to-prison pipeline, in which particular messages and rules are used to mold Black, urban students into a negative mindset dictating their place and value in society. Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, argues the real work of constructing this pipeline is done much earlier on than the moment handcuffs are placed on Black wrists. She states, "Many offenders are tracked for prison at early

ages, labeled as criminals in their teen years, and shuttled from their decrepit, underfunded inner city schools to brand-new, high-tech prisons," (Alexander, p.32, 2012). Digging even deeper she continues later in her work to address the hidden curriculum students receive:

> Parents and schoolteachers counsel black children that, if they ever hope to escape this system and avoid prison time, they must be on their best behavior, raise their arms and spread their legs for the police without complaint, stay in failing schools, pull up their pants, and refuse all forms of illegal work and moneymaking activity, even if jobs in the legal economy are impossible to find. (Alexander, p.57, 2012)

Not only are young Black people working to push through the general requirements of school work and adolescence, they have an added layer of lessons they must learn in order to navigate their Black bodies through a white supremacist nation and all of the injustices that come as a result of this.

As outlined by Christopher Dunbar in "Urban School Leaders and the Implementation of Zero-Tolerance Policies: An Examination of Its Implications," (2002), urban districts nationwide are operating under strict "zero-tolerance" policies where Black students are disproportionately removed from school. This does nothing but contribute to the mentality that they are not worthy of a quality, just education, which increases the number of students pushed out of urban districts all together, either to alternative schools or worse, to the streets (Dunbar, 2001). Through this reality, they learn early on that there are things they cannot do that others can do, down to wearing a hoodie or not wearing a hoodie…sometimes that is the question. Pants up and hands up…many are yelling "Don't shoot."

Opposition Towards Black Bodies

From hanging pants to the cry that "Black Lives Matter" and the injustice that brought on this cry, many people have interlaced styles like sagging and clothing like hoodies in ways that attempt to simplify much bigger problems in the United States. "If Trayvon didn't have a hoodie on then he may not have been seen as a threat." -or- "If Mike wasn't sagging he may not have fit the description." It just is not that simple. It just is not just about the clothing a person chooses to wear, but the color of the skin under the clothing. What comes along with black skin under clothing is the aggressive deliberate opposition of the Black body itself.

Edward Morris' 2005 study, "Tuck in that Shirt!" Race, Class, Gender, and Discipline in an Urban School" illustrates the very issue of how Black bodies are seen as being in opposition of dominant power norms and supports the findings that will be discussed in the chapters to follow. Many students, both Black and Latino, were singled out more than white and Asian students for wearing "street styles" and were characterized by administration as being oppositional and resistant. However, Morris uncovered that the main objective of wearing untucked shirts and baggy clothing was not to oppose administration, but to wear styles from their own community and the fashion trends that were part of the fabric of what was worn outside of school walls. Without a say regarding what they could wear on their bodies, or at the very least a discussion of why their fashion/style choices were not considered acceptable, many students felt unheard. Morris (2005) explains:

> Because of its restrictions, the school inadvertently transformed the expression of youth identity, encompassing relatively innocuous stylistic rebelliousness, into a mode of subversive opposition. This, it appeared, only promoted more resistance from many students and did little to bond them to the school. (p. 43)

Here, and in many cases including in this study, resistance begets resistance. Resistance from administration in making dress code rules and uniform decisions without feedback from the very bodies who are asked to abide by these rules begets resistance from students. This is revealed in the ways they work around the dress code and wear what they choose to wear despite the rules and unfortunately the consequences of discipline and removal from school that follow.

Statement of Purpose

Intersections between fashion/style, critical literacy, and subsequent dispersal of messages have yet to be fully examined for the outcomes that arise when the areas converge, specifically as it relates to Black youth fashion/style in urban schools. While some argue that uniform and dress code policies in urban districts should include further restrictions (LaPoint et al, 2003) which lead to increased "violations" and suspensions for Black youth (Dunbar, 2001, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994; Lewin, 2012), students are still finding ways to express themselves and resist uniformity and surveillance (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Kirkland 2011; Morris, 2005; Paris 2012) through innovative methods in and out of classrooms.

So, how are they doing this? In particular, in what ways are Black youth persisting and insisting despite the threat of removal from school? What has the fashion/style timeline of Black culture laced with threads of resistance and various other strands possibly taught youth, directly and indirectly? What is missing from the literature in response to these intersections and more importantly, what is missing in policy and practice in urban education and education at large? These are not research

questions but questions swarming the above stated issues, and this study seeks to address these swarming issues plus more.

If educators and administrators consider fashion/style as not simply increasing tension in school hallways but account for its potential transformative power in developing pride and identity in ways that have been proven in literacy and critical literacy studies at large (Collins & Blot, 2003; Ferdman, 1990; Gutiurrez, 1993; Hill, 2009; Kinloch, 2010; Kirkland, 2009; Morrell, 2008) then strategies specific to this part of Black student life can be brought into the classroom and contribute to the school environment in more meaningful ways. There is potential transformative power in fashion/style because for many students in urban schools their choices of what they can wear on their bodies have been dismissed. From the entrance of the school, to their lockers, to their classes, in hallways between classes, and to the end of the school day, their bodies are governed by a code. This code is the explicit dress code on paper posted on school walls and mailed to students' homes before the start of the year and the implicit code of supposed tools for upward mobility and what it means to stay in line that shapes the words typed into the policy.

Essentially, this study asks, what happens when schools modify the objective of placing fashion/style under surveillance and begin to explore implications for connecting with students on deeper levels in ways that fit within their realities? How can we examine, through a plan that students design on their own, how they may challenge their own notions of fashion/style and adoption of possible societal codes?

Introducing a more accurate framing concerning the varied modes of expression through fashion as a form of literacy is one central goal of the work this study seeks to

uncover. This research project highlights possible intersections with existing critical literacy work and considers text as messages written through fashion and worn on bodies. These messages can potentially articulate specific connections associated with messages developed and analyzed by Black youth in urban schools. This study has the potential to contribute to scholarship, school policy, and our understandings of Black youth in ways that have not been fully explored to date.

Specifically, in the spirit of Critical Race Theory (CRT), this study calls for a closer look at how students are understanding the intersections of their identities, race, class, gender, etc., within a society where institutional racism is affecting almost every part of their daily life (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994). Furthermore, this work is inspired by work concerning the intersections of CRT and identity development in education. Dorinda Carter Andrew's concept of Critical Race Achievement Ideology (CRAI), suggests that Black students wrestle with their identities in an educational system that is generally not invested in creating a culturally affirming environment. Thus, the work Black students must do on their own to understand their identities and the messages that are placed upon them by society regarding their identities is just as critical to their academic achievement as their actual schoolwork, and arguably more integral to their success (Carter Andrews, 2008). Simply put, the stakes are high for Black students.

Scholarship, particularly in the areas of literacy and critical literacy, can be deepened by this study by contributing to understandings of text beyond the written word. The idea that students are possibly coding, decoding, and critically analyzing their own fashion/style and the styles of others just as one would read a book and interpret the information gained, is an idea that can be furthered examined by the

findings of this work. In addition, the intersections between critical literacy, fashion theory, and even material culture were uncovered in part through the students' experiences through this study. Fashion theorists have long understood the notion of fashion/style as a way for people to communicate various messages to others, particularly in Black culture (Ford, 2013; Tulloch, 2004). This notion married with the idea of considering fashion as form of text within the realm of critical literacy opens up new possibilities for both areas.

School policy has the potential for growth through this study's profit orientation with urban, Black students. For far too long, uniform policies in particular have been constructed through deficit perspectives of Black youth. Black students are seen as being prone to involvement with gangs, having an increased likelihood to steal, and being the perpetrators of violence in schools (Holloman et al, 1996; LaPoint et al, 2003). Thus, uniform policies in urban districts implement uniforms for these reasons, which are explicitly stated in policy documents. Yet, for many students who do not participate in these types of activities and do not see themselves through a deficit orientation, the message of control and discipline are still clear to them and potentially detrimental to their sense of self and personal growth. This study offers the flip side as a model for other school policy issues and it positions students as policy makers instead of policy breakers. The hope is that policy made through student voice and through a profit aspect will fit the actual realities Black students face in urban schools each day and can give them a seat at the decision-making table over their own lives.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter 1, *From Mothaland Swag to the School Bag,* offers a review of literature covering Black Fashion/Style over time, with a focus on how messages of resistance were transmitted through various fashion/style choices. Literature on literacy and critical literacy is also assessed to highlight the various ways youth and Black youth in particular have literacies beyond written book form. These literacies are rich and unique to their experiences but are not always considered as literacies within school spaces. These two areas are threaded with analysis of literature concerning coolness and performance, an essential component of Black Fashion/Style, and of Black culture at large.

Chapter 2, *Welcome to the New School,* outlines the methodological frameworks I pulled from to structure this study and the methods I used to conduct it. Critical Ethnography and Youth Participatory Action Research were integral in developing the structure of this study, and this chapter illustrates the influence these frameworks had on my research design. Tubman Academy, the site where this study was conducted, is discussed to highlight characteristics of the school, and the focal participants are introduced in this chapter via the participant profile section.

Chapter 3, *You Can Buy School, But You Can't Buy Class,* digs into the *Politics of the Black Body* by introducing findings from the study related to how students navigate various issues related to their identities. It highlights how students either disrupted various messages about themselves by not allowing their bodies to be governed in particular ways or how they accepted societal norms that have been passed down to them.

Chapter 4, *Gotta Stay Fly,* explores the *Politics of Adornment* and how the Black youth involved in this study began to develop their own uniform/dress code policy through their own experiences and the discussions and activities that took place as a result of the program curriculum. In this stage, the group began to navigate what their fashion/style choices would mean to the school and what their choices meant to each of them based upon various life experiences and their own understandings of the uses of fashion/style.

Chapter 5, *My School Bus is My Limo*, explores the *Politics of Choice*. In this chapter, the study outlines how the students worked together as a team to fine tune their uniform/dress code policy. The program culminated in a presentation to administration for approval of their plan at a later date. So, the students took this presentation very seriously and were careful yet unapologetic about many of the choices they presented to their school's leadership.

Chapter 6, *To Be Young, Fashionable, and Black,* discusses the implications this study has within the larger contexts of scholarship, school policy, and our understandings of Black youth. It highlights how discussions surrounding the Politics of Black Bodies, Adornment, and Choice are furthered by findings this study puts forth. This chapter begins with an introduction to Critical Fashion Literacy, a new theoretical framework birthed out of the idea of fashion as a form of text that can be critically coded and decoded. The introduction begins the dissertation in a state of turmoil, a state of punishment and death concerning the Black Body, but this chapter concludes the dissertation with a statement of solution and with tools gained from the study that we

can use to potentially solve just one of the many problems Black youth face in urban schools.

Conclusion

There is more at stake that meets the eye when considering the connections between how Black youth view themselves through the lens of fashion/style and how they are viewed by adults inside and outside of their community. Policies are generally drafted and shaped by those outside of their community. Yet, many times these policies are enforced by the very people who either physically share the same skin color or who do not but are still supposed to act in the best interests of the school as a community of its own. This study uncovers how Black youth at Tubman Academy possibly operate under a set of dominant gazes, potentially controlling their bodies as units instead of freethinking citizens. This study pinpoints a contribution to the field of fashion/style through the lens of adornment via analysis of the various ways Tubman students adorn themselves within a sphere of pushing-pulling energy, a sphere shaped by codes written upon them and codes they chose to right themselves. This study highlights a contribution to the field of critical literacy as a vehicle, a means of youth choice, to create positive change by gaining better understandings of how students are reading and writing daily through fashion/style as a form of text. Ultimately, the findings gained from this research study have the potential to expand the field of urban education by shaping school policy, not just uniform/dress code policy, but reform, and hopefully not just reform but revolution, through the hands of students being seen as part of the solution and not part of a so-called problem.

CHAPTER 1
"FROM MOTHALAND SWAG TO THE SCHOOL BAG":
Review of Literature

Zora Neale Hurston once said "the will to adorn' is one of the primary characteristics of African American expression,[1]" and this observation is a pillar upon which the leading research initiative on African American Fashion/Style, *The Will to Adorn*: *African American Diversity, Style, and Identity,* sets forth its foundational work. In the spirit of Hurston's words, this Smithsonian Institution initiative, led by Dr. Diana N'Diaye, serves as a rapidly growing, living archive of knowledge on the who, what, where, when, and why of what Black folks where and how they wear it. Centering this exploration around the idea of "will" or the push, the power, and the pride of Black people through adornment highlights what this review suggests as its defining characteristic. Essentially, when identifying the Black Fashion/Style Aesthetic, we must understand the various ways adornment is a response to oppression, yet a celebration of creative agency. Over centuries, African Americans have been reframing what it means to push forward as people of African-descent in America in many ways, and one method is through fashion/style. Though this method is so intricately woven into Black life, it has yet to be discussed or researched broadly in academic realms across disciplines, excluding select forward-thinking texts and popular culture outlets.

This review of literature will outline three areas of inquiry central to the foundation of this study – the Politics of the Black Body, the Politics of Adornment, and the Politics of Choice. For the purposes of this study, "politics" is used as a means of identifying each of these areas as sites of ever-present contention between one's cultural background and the ways their existence either aligns with or disrupts dominant

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[1] Reference: The Will to Adorn – Website: http://www.festival.si.edu/2013/Will_to_Adorn/

ideologies. Concerning the Black body, this review will discuss fashion/style through the lens of Gaze Theory meets Critical Thought as a means of outlining the various ways the Black body itself has been placed under surveillance according to dominant standards, and thus placing everything associated with it under potential watch as well. Concerning adornment, a Black Fashion/Style Aesthetic timeline and the various ways African Americans have used their will to adorn over time will pinpoint how Black youth historically fit within this timeline. Finally, this review will highlight the politics of choice through the lens of critical literacy studies and the potential for understanding fashion/style as a form of text. This will be coupled with an analysis of what is missing from this literature by including a review of the economic timeline of urban uniform implementation, select uniform/dress code policy research, and how present-day practices in urban schools may be restricting students' bodies and adornment choices in ways that are a potential detriment to their identity development.

The Politics of the Black Body: Gaze Theory meets Critical Black Thought

When we speak of "gaze" in relationship to power, generally Foucault's work in *Discipline and Punish* becomes the focus. Gaze Theory at large, is based on the notion that people experience a level of anxiety associated with an awareness of being viewed as an object. In relationship to Foucault (1977/1995), gaze takes on the form of surveillance in which power is used to regulate and discipline people in ways that will eventually lead them to self-regulate, such as prisons and schools, even in instances when there is not a visible form of surveillance in place. Foucault's work is rich and generally considered a staple with regard to this subject area. However, through the lens of African American and African Studies, it is important to note that Black scholars

began discussing the notion of gaze long before Foucault through various works in Critical Black Thought in ways that closely connect to the experiences Black people face daily.

In 1903, Du Bois proclaimed that the problem of the 20th Century would be the problem of the color line. He took it to another level, by reflecting on one profound question – "How does it feel to be a problem?" More specifically, he laid it out like this:

> Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or I fought at Mechanicsville; or Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. And yet, being a problem is a strange experience, - peculiar even for one who has never been anything else, save perhaps in babyhood and in Europe. It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were. (Du Bois, p. 2, 1903/2007)

Here, Du Bois' notion of the ever-present, unasked question is in fact a direct way of illustrating the feeling of gaze, of otherness, of power and of lack thereof. Soon after this excerpt, he goes into his own autobiographical narrative about the first time he realized that he was the "other". He was a "little thing" in his words, arguably the same age range my participants were the very first time they began to realize the eyes looking over them. For them, their "two-ness" as both Black and American in a society that still has a problem with the color line is evidenced by the need to "fix" their issues by fixing their clothes and countless other things.

Carter G. Woodson's focus on systems of education within the essential first four chapters of *The Miseducation of the Negro* (1933) indicate how the lives of African

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Americans in and out of the classroom are shaped as a means of boundary making. Boundary making is used to control students' minds, very much like the effect the gaze of DuBois' white classmates had on him early in his life. These boundaries have particular connections to Black youth fashion/style practices, particularly when considering these practices as forms of text. Essentially, many young people are externally blocked from identity and critical literacy development because of institutional gaze which potentially conditions youth to internally create their own boundaries and begin to block themselves (Alim, 2005; Mahiri, 2004).

The moment or moments in which someone begins to see themselves as an object under an external power, essentially viewing themselves as the "other" through the dominant gaze, is in many ways a coming of age with regard to body, image, and identity development. This laced with issues of regulation and potential self-regulation contributes can be jarring and traumatic, yet remains so normal in the Black experience. Frantz Fanon's pivotal work, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952/2008), continues in the tradition of Du Bois' challenge to white gaze and takes it one step further by illustrating the raw, rugged nature of experiencing oneself as an object:

> I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, […] Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man, who had no scruples about imprisoning me, I transported myself on that particular day far, very far, from myself, and gave myself up as an object. What did this mean to me? Peeling, stripping my skin, causing a hemorrhage that left congealed black blood all over my body. Yet this reconsideration of myself, this thematization, was not my idea. I wanted simply to be a man among men. (p. 92)

Fanon outlined the sheer trauma that dominant gaze can bring upon people of African descent. These experiences can lead many Black people to seek acceptance in wider

society at any cost, and one tool of doing so has traditionally been through the reading and writing of their bodies through adornment.

Issues of body and adornment are taken further when the layer of gender is added. A general use of gaze theory is within feminist theory, particularly when examining the idea of male gaze in media. The idea is that film and other forms of media are generally constructed with the notion of a heterosexual male onlooker, thus mediating the actions of the female subject according to what a heterosexual male finds desirable. However, feminist theory, in its many waves, has long been seen incongruent with Black life and Black women, and thus its intersection with gaze theory is incongruent with the relationships between the on-looked and the onlooker.

Black Feminist Thought, a body of theory contributed by Patricia Hill Collins (1999), is a much closer representation of gaze within the lives of Black women and the various ways women, young and old alike may mediate feelings of being viewed as a subject. It speaks beyond feminism's focus on the female object and calls for the necessity of understanding oppression not simply based on gender but as a hybrid of race, class, gender, and other identities as inextricably connected layers of one's life experience. Furthermore, Black Feminist Thought also calls for those who face oppression to begin to identify their own truth(s) and build change from their own core understandings instead of operating under flawed understandings of their existence built up by those who have not walked in their shoes. Organically, the final focal participants for this study were all young women, and many of our conversations were centered upon their experiences dealing with their interconnected identities. It was through their own experiences that they were able to bring about their own change.

The power of the image, particularly the photographic image, created a space for Black people to speak back against stereotypes and skewed representations of Black life. At the turn of the twentieth century, the concept of the "New Negro", a worldview that called for African Americans to be more outspoken about injustice and prepared to dispute negative depictions of the Black community, helped contest the gaze of dominant society through literature and imagery. Deborah Willis (2000), well-known historian of the Black Body and Black Photography explains:

> By exploring the New Negro through text and images, black Americans offered a new paradigm through which to explore the significance of the photographic image and further helped to transform the mythos projected on black communities by the larger society. (p. 36)

Here, the beginning use of the Black body's image for and by Black people helped the population to return to source of cultural pride that was once theirs in land(s) prior to the U.S. The photograph, the first widely accessible, mobile form of image production, not only created a space for image making but also meaning making. This helped to decrease the grip of gaze and its power over the non-dominant population.

Yet, the widespread use of negative images of Black bodies continues today, arguably with an even greater force than the New Negro movement had to fight against. This is not to say with the introduction of social media, specifically the wide mobile usage of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter by Black users, has not helped to place even more power over Black images into Black hands. However, social media and media at large have also been high-speed pathways for dissemination of images from the "hooded hoodlum" to the "welfare queen" and everything in between and beyond. This creates a demand for these images. In turn, dominant gaze is shaped and then has the weight to shift power to keep certain populations down, pit groups within the

community against each other, and above all else continue keeping power within the hands of the dominant, white grand narrators and architects of education and wealth in this country. Gaze and power in relationship to the Black body are cyclical in nature. Power shapes gaze and gaze can also shape power, all orbiting the potential, dominant ideal result of Black people regulating themselves.

However, there are many people who are taking back the reigns and continuing the tradition of pushing against the power of gaze and Black bodies being seen as objects that must remain under constant surveillance. Jamal Shabazz, a world-renowned street photographer, has been documenting positive images of Black and Latino communities through the lens of Hip Hop and fashion/style since before the destructive onset of crack cocaine until now. He breaks it down:

> As a photojournalist, I am duty-bound to document and share the real positivity that exists within my community and others…The nonstop stream of negative images projected daily in the media has created a false impression of our world, one that breeds misunderstanding and leads to prejudice. I am not ignorant to the real problems that do exist, but I also realize that there is a lot of good in the world that has not been properly represented.
>
> (Shabazz, p. 2, 2007)

Like Shabazz, we should all be "duty-bound" to this mission, those within the Black community and those who support the Black community. Without a continued push against the dominant narrative, the positive will continue to be trumped by the negative. This holds true down to the enforcement of uniform and dress code in urban schools. The dominant gaze has shaped a deficit orientation of non-dominant youth as prone to violence, theft, bullying, and other negative behaviors (Holloman et al, 1996). The students discussed issues that spoke against this dominant narrative in ways that will hopefully shed light on these issues and more importantly add weight to what students have to say about the ways their own bodies are being surveilled and governed.

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The Politics of Adornment: The Black Fashion/Style Aesthetic Timeline

Black Youth Fashion/Style fits within the scope of the Black Fashion/Style Aesthetic simply because most Black youth are raised within this aesthetic. For many Black youth, their lives are infused early on with this "will to adorn", and it comes from the various intersections of the world around them, both African American and American, a constant push-pull or double-consciousness of when what is considered acceptable by society meets "So, what…Imma do me."

Just as many aspects of the African American experience in the U.S. lead African Americans to be "doubly-conscious" (in the spirit of W.E.B. Dubois theory of Double Consciousness), fashion/style within the Black experience is no exception. Expression through dress and adornment is both a collective push against dominant society and the various structures in place to maintain inequality and a personal quest, or better yet demand for the right to express oneself in the creative manner in which he or she pleases for others to read (or not to read) as text (Crane, 2000; Eicher, 1995; McCollum, 2006; Miller, 2010; Tulloch, 2004, White & White, 1998). Coupled with this broader understanding of both the collective and individual is also research identifying particular elements of the Black Fashion/Style Aesthetic. Gwendolyn O' Neal's work "African – American Aesthetic of Dress: Current Manifestations" (1998), highlights four elements:

- The affinity for 'high affect' colors
- 'Style' or individual expression
- Improvisations
- The tendency to dress up

(O'Neal, 1998, p. 170)

From people wearing their Sunday's best as a method to make sure they did not look out of place in church or choosing bright oranges, reds, greens, and yellows as fabric choices to simply brighten their day, as far back as early civilization people of African descent have always been fashionable and have used fashion/style to express self-pride. These four elements and more along with the use of adornment as both expression and resistance are the running threads throughout the following periods of Black Fashion/style.

The Mothaland Swag – Coolness Since the Beginning of (Our) Time: Arguably, coolness is one of the oldest forms of adornment for people of African descent. As noted previously in the introduction, it is the "will to adorn" that is the distinct force within Black style making. It is not simply about the 'what' of what is worn, but the 'why and how.' In the midst of this is the presence of coolness, a factor and practice with connections back to Africa. Robert Ferris Thompson's extensive work on coolness has uncovered the existing rubric that exists within Black culture. The concept of cool, as researched with a particular focus on West African and African American cultural ties, is built upon an essence of control and balance supported by both individual composure and collective stability as a representative of a larger group (Thompson, 1973, 2011). According to Gola of Liberia, to be cool is "to be nonchalant at the right moment…in other words to act as though one's mind were in another world. It is particularly admirable to do difficult tasks with an air of ease..." (Thompson, 1973). From Nerfertiti to Nzinga, from the Ashanti to the Zulu, coolness thrived and is a lasting characteristic of the Black Fashion/Style aesthic for young people, as adornment but also as an armor against ever-present injustice (Majors and Billson, 1993).

Enslavement: Though clothing is seemingly the least important factor in the grand scheme of the terrors taking place during slavery, the documented deliberate nature of clothing choices pushed upon the enslaved is a key point on the aesthetic timeline. Dull, worn-down, uncomfortable, and ill-fitting clothing was given to those who were enslaved (Foster 1997). Yet, when available, many women and men incorporated brighter swatches of fabric into their clothing and another form of material culture, the patchwork quilt, became a great source of expression and pride as well (Foster 1997).

Post-Emancipation: From pin stripes to the potency of purple, from zigzag finger waves to zoot suits, the hybrid of African American adornment grew and widened in the post-emancipation era. Even with widespread racism and injustice, white America's secret fixation on African American culture began to show its face, and admiration for Black styles of dress was no exception (McCollum, 2006; Miller, 2010, White & White, 1998). Many styles soon began to enter dominant society, generally taken without giving credit to the source (Miller, 2002) as many forms of African American expression were taken.

The Civil Rights Movement: Many prioritized the need to be well-groomed during civil rights protests, not just because of the push to be taken seriously by those who viewed protests locally, but because some protests were nationally televised and captured by photographers – placing African Americans *and* their clothing on a national stage in a sweeping way for the first time. Being well "put-together," even if someone only owned one dress or one suit, was of particular importance. Eric Etheridge's (2008) book entitled *Breach of Peace: Portraits of the 1961 Mississippi Freedom Riders* highlights memories of several riders' experiences including reflections on being well

groomed. One rider states, "If I was going to go to jail, I was going to look like a Southern lady, which I did." The clothes were an undercurrent of the movement at large. The clothes had a message. The message was, "We are good, law-abiding, decent, orderly people. We are American…just like you. We want our rights because we are American, just like you." Freedom Riders, both Black and white, were majority college-age students, and this quote captures how representing themselves through fashion/style was infused into their lives.

The Black Power Movement: According to Jeffrey Ogbar's book *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (2005), the dashikis, natural hairstyles, African-inspired jewelry, and other items worn by cultural nationalists and worn by the Black masses were regarded by the Black Panther Party (BPP) as a miscalculated form of protest and political action. With the party gaining more momentum as the late 60's continued, they began to create their own distinct style of dress, their own Black Panther uniform consisting of "a Black leather jacket, powder blue shirt, Black pants and shoes, and a Black beret," (Ogbar, 2004, p. 118). The imprint of the Panther's "revolutionary chic" (Ogbar, 2004, p. 118) style on the Black population, particularly youth, was evident then, and continued in relevance in different waves for years to come. Jeffrey Ogbar (2004 p. 118) outlines the influence the party had on the development of a Black student union at a small college in Iowa, with members of the governing body posing with Black berets in their group photo.   Images of the Black Panther Party "looking both Black and powerful" were all over television. The party's *swag* was undeniable and connected first to their pride in their ancestry and then to their solidarity in commanding power. Black youth loved it, and were awakened to "new ways

of being," (Reed, 2005, p. 53). Young people in Oakland latched on to the "Panther Uniform" in both the more Afrocentric form and the full Black Power form influenced by the BPP so fiercely. The lines dividing who was actually a member of the party and who just wanted to express their militancy through their clothes or even just simply liked the look blurred, arguably creating a larger, but unrecorded following far beyond the party's already substantial membership log.

Shifts in Hair: In the 1970's, young people, both women and men, began to express their freedom through hairstyle choices. Those who had chosen to straighten their hair for years or keep a regular haircut under the watchful eyes of their parents began to don 'naturals' and in particular afros (McCollum, 2006; Willis, 2009). For many this was a form of embracing natural roots, literally and figuratively, but eventually it simply became the style. This tradition of expression through hair still lives on in different forms with many young men beginning to wear braids in the 90's and into the new millennium and the current, booming natural hair movement for Black women.

The Rise of Hip Hop: This is where connections to present day Black Youth Fashion/style, particularly youth fashion/style in urban areas, has central roots. Hip Hop is not the sole influence on youth fashion/style by any means, but it does have a notable presence as a culture (Kitwana, 2008). The 1980's gave rise to the era of Hip Hop, not simply as a new musical genre, but as a culture, one that was primarily Black and Latino, and one that was youth-driven. The early 1990's initiated a rise in pride in African ancestry and culture, similar to those who came before, yet re-asserted for the future. Nationwide, Black people were donning clothing made of kente with pride and other forms of fashion/style that said to the public *I am proud of who I am.*

There are several key artists to note throughout the Hip Hop world during this era - Public Enemy, Queen Latifah, Arrested Development, and De La Soul – just to name a few. Public Enemy set the stage with re-creations of the Black Power Movement for a new generation in newer, re-imagined forms (Romero, 2012). Public Enemy videos were modeled after BPP events and also included strands of Pan-Africanism. Wearing red, Black and green, and rocking medallions displaying Africa, the Pan-African Flag, or Egyptian pyramids voiced a connection to the Motherland. As Helen Bradley Griebel's work entitled "The West African Origin of the African-American Headwrap" (1995) argues, "Foremost among the outward, material emblems of renewed interest in ethnic ancestry were items of personal adornment. As is usually the case, young people often led the way in adopting these burgeoning fashion statements," (p. 212). Youth, as a driving force of Hip Hop, in turn was seen as a driving force of fashion.

Eventually, later in the 1990's Hip Hop fashion began to transition and lean into a more commercial thread of expression. Elena Romero's work *Free Stylin'- How Hip Hop Changed the Fashion/style Industry* (2012) is central to this discussion. According to her research, the appearance and emphasis on "the chain" – either gold or platinum and generally studded with diamonds, was a primary image and article of adornment. Along with it came what began to be termed as not just Hip Hop clothing but "urban wear" and companies began to mimic the style of clothing worn by youth in the streets – larger-sized jeans, jerseys and other sports paraphernalia, and basketball sneakers became key features.   This was followed by the rise of "urban brands" – *Ecko, FUBU, Phat Farm, Rocawear,* etc. - eager to replicate the fashion/style of the street and make as much money off of it as possible. Many of these companies had rappers as the face

of the brand and even some artists claiming part ownership. Yet the reality was/is Hip Hop Fashion/style, a product of Black Youth Fashion/style Culture, was now being mass-produced and sold for the world to consume on a level that had not been seen before along the timeline of Black Aesthetics. This high level of consumption, though shifted from large jeans to skinny jeans, remains today, a highly problematic reality. Black youth remain one of the leading fashion/style generators and the least likely to benefit from the mass appeal (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009).   This is a critical issue that has been explored further than other sections of the timeline because it is arguably one of the most influential forms of fashion/style that urban schools seek to address, and in many ways dilute, through uniform/dress code policies.

The Politics of Choice: Critical Literacy and Uniform/Dress Code Research

Literacy

Literacy is narrowly defined as the process of reading and writing. Yet, the study of literacy is grounded in the various ways people read and write. Literacy Studies have taken a turn in recent years with new scholarship questioning existing definitions of literacy and questioning the power of those who have defined literacy over time (Collins & Blot, 2003; Tatum, 2008). With this wave of exploration, a more inclusive manner in which literacy can and should be defined has surfaced. This is the core upon which this review and the future research connected to this review are built. Literacy is not simply just the process of reading and writing, but it is a multi-layered hybrid of interpretive skills built through cultural and social practices within various communities, which allow

people to encode and decode messages daily, far, far beyond just words on paper (Collins & Blot, 2003; Ferdman, 1990; Gutiurrez, 1993; Hill, 2009; Kinloch, 2010; Kirkland, 2009; Morrell, 2008).

Because literacy in this sense relies heavily upon one's social and cultural background, lived experiences, and daily realities, one's literacy is thus inextricable from one's identity. Considering Mikhail Bahktin's (1981/2010) work, identity is not only owned and operated by an individual, but through the individual's performance of identity it is viewed by all and subsequently part of a much broader shared experience than a person's single journey. Essentially, identities, and by association literacies, criss cross on a continuous basis. This happens in such a cyclical way that identities are exhibited through both uniqueness and arguably sameness, with both being fully actualized in a performative manner for others to view and read as text. We are actively engaged in our "hybrid identities" (Collins & Blot, 2003), where identities are not ascribed – or – chosen, but are ascribed – and – chosen. "Identities are built, constructed, with the discursive resources which are our birthright, our 'mother tongues,' but also with other, competing discourses of street, school, and workplace," (Collins & Blot, 2003, p. 119). The students who were involved in this study are both products of the world around them and at the same time active participants in choosing how they perceive the world around them to be and their identities within it. However, in the case of uniform/dress code policies in urban schools that are built upon deficit ideologies, these "competing" discourses may sometimes limit just how active students are in constructing their identities.

Another central layer to literacy is that it is also constructed by power. Considering the global histories of education and access to education, knowledge was and still is held and governed by members of dominant societies (Alim, 2005; Anyon, 1980; Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Delpit, 1988; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Fine, 1991). Thus, those in non-dominant groups with decreased educational access or no access at all in turn do not have access to the full standards of what is considered literacy by dominant groups. Nor do these groups consider the multitude of literacies within non-dominant groups as actual literacy practices. It is within this structure the dichotomy of literate and illiterate is created within a restricted, linear vacuum instead of the daily realities of meaning making produced as a result of the all histories and cultures within the world. Collins & Blot (2003) explain:

> It reminds us of the active influence of received categories, which lead us to equate illiteracy with passivity and ignorance, literacy with mental development and social equity; which lead us to take literacy and illiteracy as self-evident things in the world rather than historically changing and mutually defining categories of understanding through which we value and devalue groups, individuals, and practices. (p. 97)

Within this framework of literacy, constructed by both identity and power, as both chosen and ascribed, a public response and also a private choice, is the idea that there is a constant push and pull between these positions. Those participating in various literacies consciously and subconsciously move along the spectrum and within the hybrid. This runs parallel to the choices African Americans make with articles of adornment and the manner in which they choose to wear these items. This analysis of a constant negotiation that takes place between one's decision to dress as a form of resistance or as a means of self-expression or both is evident when paired with the

Black Fashion/Style Aesthetic Timeline outlined above. The hybrid of ascribed and chosen practices shaped by identity and power are throughout the eras of Black Fashion – particularly in the outlined instances of the deliberate "Sunday's Best" style motif of the Civil Rights Movement and the usefulness of the "Black Panther Uniform" as a cultural symbol and informal recruitment tool.

This hybrid seems to be amplified in the fashion/style literacies of Black youth because of the nature of coming of age experiences. As youth begin to grow and stake their claim in society by developing opinions and stances of their own, one method of expressing this can come through adolescent adornment choices. If and when the realization of living within an unequal society hits many Black youth, then finding ways of speaking back or at least questioning dominant structures becomes a necessary reality (Hill, 2009; Kinloch, 2010; Kirkland, 2009; Paris, 2009). At times, this realization may be met with a personal "will to adorn" and expression on a singular level. Yet, with complementary trends and constant communication of style choices through the literacy of fashion in school hallways, the individual response coupled with information from others has the potential to become a collective response, whether this was planned goal or an organic by-product (Cintron, 1998; Spivak, 1988). In particular, in urban schools with dress code/uniform policies, students may initially begin to do their own thing and find ways to work around the system of dress (Holloman et al, 1996; Morris, 2005; Skiba, 2000). Yet, some may eventually begin to build upon ideas from each other, revising and re-writing their fashion choices and re-presenting them as new texts creating co-authored pieces in response to existing polices.

Pushing for freedom through language and literacy in various forms like fashion is a central force in the quest for deeper, more inclusive forms of communication in schools. Szwed offers a critique of literacy in his piece, "The Ethnography of Literacy" (1981) by identifying the components of a so-called state of crisis – one in which both developed *and* underdeveloped nations are experiencing difficulties securing necessary levels of reading/writing proficiency for students. The simple fact, according to Szwed (1981), is standard, age-old methods of teaching are just that - old. Expanding our theories of literacy and forms of reading/writing will be integral to strengthening the possibilities of students worldwide. Essentially, Szwed (1981) questions or rather proclaims – "we do not fully know what literacy is," (p. 19). He argues that when defining reading and writing, we must be sure to include both the *social context* and *function* in addition to standard analysis of the reader and the text, creating space for broader realities of multiple forms of reading and writing for multiple readers and writers. In other words, literacy must be defined through the following five elements "text, context, function, participants, and motivation" (Szwed, 1981, p. 22). Szwed presents various forms of reading/writing that we may not consider literacy in day-to-day interactions such as commuter reading, lunch time reading, graffiti, and the list goes on – in ways that invite broader discussion and interpretations of our daily lives.

Although not explicitly mentioned, fashion as a form of literacy seems to fall directly in line with Szwed's issue of certain daily literacy practices being left of out of the frame. Despite the piece being originally published by Szwed in 1981, schools are still wrestling and/or resisting everyday literacies that students bring within them into classroom spaces. Considering dress/style as a form of reading and writing that can

deep methods of critically analyzing reading and writing for urban schools in particular may lead to more liberating forms of curriculum and instruction.

Critical Literacy

Moving from literacy to critical literacy means a critical component is added, but what does this really mean? Definitions of critical literacy vary slightly depending on the lens of education, but specific principles and foundations have been accepted by the field. When encountering and interpreting text, one critical literacy approach argues that readers must engage in four interpretive tasks (Freebody & Luke, 1990):

- Coding Competence: The ability to code/decode text(s)
- Semantic Competence: The ability to identify, create, and attach meanings to text(s)
- Pragmatic Competence: The ability to use the text(s) for specific purposes.
- Critical Competence: The ability to be a critic of the text(s)

The fourth component, and arguably the most important, is where literacy differs from critical literacy and generally where systems of education, and society at large, infuse power to monitor who can and cannot critique.

Yet, this structure needs to be deepened and has been deepened. First, the *intertextual* nature of literacy acknowledges that readers interpret and make meaning of the world around them based on the various and numerous ways in which they experience the world. Viewing literacy as intertextual also calls for acceptance of multiple mediums of literacy from print newspaper to digital social media and countless other forms (Morrell, 2008; New London Group, 1996; Paris, 2009 and 2011; Szwed, 2001). Critical literacy also calls for an understanding that the process of learning to

read in new forms happens on a continual basis (Freire, 2000). Finally, and most importantly, critical literacy is practiced and experienced in distinct ways by different communities (Heath, 1983).   In relation to this review, communities of color, communities of students, and communities of urban residents, interpret dress/style in unique ways, some of which converge while others diverge. Critical literacy seeks to identify the nuances of these differences and emphasize the key component of the role of the critic as a means of empowerment through these differences.

An important addition to this framework is the idea that critical literacy is developed through the process(es) of developing *critical cultural competencies* as argued by Kirkland &Jackson (2009). The critical, as discussed is an understanding of various symbols and messages within identified societal contexts. The added layer is competency, or the action/ability to display this understanding in some way to those within a particular community or even outside of it (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009).

Influential Theories Supporting Critical Literacy

Reframing notions and definitions of literacy and language cannot be discussed without the work of Paulo Freire in his classic work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000).   In relation to the systems of power and oppression inextricably connected to language, Freire highlights a central question: What does freedom look like in the hands of those who have the power to create it for themselves, step by step, even in the face of oppressive forces and conditions? According to Freire (2000):

> Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of

man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion." (p. 47)

In relation to the education system specifically, Freire argues institutions should reject the "banking" model, or depositing information into youth as you would a simple check. This centers and privileges the teacher as the holder and sole negotiator of power. In its place, Freire proposes the "problem posing" method which de-centers the teacher and creates an ever-present cipher, one in which everyone has a voice and contribution. Problem posing creates questions that may in fact lead to subsequent questioning, but more importantly creates within all learners the realization that within them a solution exists.

Critical literacy as a field is grounded in Freire's work. Yet, style and dress, particularly with regard to the underrepresented population of Black youth in urban schools, have yet to be fully uncovered as a liberation-seeking practice. Liberation-seeking in this sense is evident in the countless ways Black youth resist dress code/uniform policy. For instance, if the policy requires all girls to wear khaki skirts and girls wear patterned socks that bring colors into the school as a way of standing out, if the school consider these socks to be "disruptive" then the next step is for administration to ban colorful socks without a real interrogation of the deeper quest for self-expression. On a deeper level, Freire's (2000) work suggests that ultimately the quest for freedom is the quest for a complete sense of self as a human being. The surveillance of Black youth in urban schools and subsequent disciplinary actions and suspensions remove students from the learning process and result in the breakdown of this quest for freedom. This stunts opportunities for development.

Expanding the frame to include urban students' daily practices as critical literacy in schools falls directly in line with the need for more of a focus on culture and the intersections of culture within urban education. As a means of identifying one of an array of issues Black students in particular face in schools, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (1994) pinpoints a central issue – the need for culturally relevant teaching. Discussions of critical literacy are intricately connected to discussions surrounding culturally relevant teaching. Cultural relevance must include discussions of critical literacy practices in order to move towards this relevance. Ladson-Billings outlines successful and relevant teaching strategies that can also be used by majority teachers. These strategies include transforming the class into a community, reframing how knowledge is categorized and assessed, challenging cookie-cut curricular standards, clarifying student expectations, and immersion in students' lives outside of classes (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Ladson-Billings' work is a pivotal piece in teacher education and the field of education at large. In relation to this work, her focused attention on the specific needs of African American students creates room for further explorations of how culture is being defined by our students.

For instance, acknowledging that sub-cultures within African American culture do exist is a great starting point for pulling back the layers of the possibilities of relevance. Connecting to fashion as a critical literacy, culturally relevant teaching may include teachers using sneaker culture as a way of engaging some students. Sneaker culture intersects with hip-hop culture, African

American culture, fashion/dress culture, and other forms of culture. Immersion in students' lives outside of class, as suggested by Ladson-Billings, is one entry point that has the power to highlight dress/style as an integral part of Black students' day-to-day practices.

Current Critical Literacy Concepts

Current scholars have contributed to this work in very specific ways that have paved the way with regard to youth, their literacies, and the need to incorporate their actual lives outside of classroom spaces into school spaces. A space for discussions surrounding fashion/style is created by considering this means of expression and critical literacy as forms of *identity texts* (Paris, 2011), or the particular "youth space texts" (p. 126) that are inscribed on items worn, electronically delivered, or even rapped by youth as a means of expressing their identities. Almost all youth engage in this world of identity text coding and decoding while schools continue to disregard these texts as literacy practices. In considering the daily exchange of these identity texts from one student to the next, it is also important to consider Django Paris' (2012) stance of *culturally sustaining pedagogy* that extends Ladson-Billings work to create room for a broader inclusion and infusion of culture in a society with increasing intersections between multiple cultures and thus multiple literacies. With Black and Latino students as the primary population(s) of urban schools, understanding the exchanges between these groups and others is essential for literacy work. While the research connected to this review focuses on students in an urban

Midwestern school where the student population is 100% Black, this study could have been easily conducted in cities like New York or Los Angeles where reciprocal influences are ever-present and are important to this discussion as well.

Moving away from a deficit orientation of literacy is integral for shifting the institutions our students attend and creating positive change. Far too often, illiteracy is seen as the problem and those who are considered illiterate based upon dominant standards, are the problem. In urban schools, this problem is given a face and a color – Black and Latino youth – when in fact these students practice literacy daily in ways that surpass the scales of what is and is not literacy (Kirkland, 2009 and 2011). This is the real problem. Furthermore, in connection to this we need to move away from a deficit orientation with fashion, one that regards fashion as surface-level subject and categorizes our youth as materialistic and void of creativity and agency with regard to the messages they create and send through their clothing choices.

Kirkland & Jackson's ""Beyond the Silence: Instructional Approaches and Students' Attitudes" (2009) provides an entry point for discussions of language and clothing as parallel forms of communication. Select student drawings not only displayed African American Language (AAL) as a form of expression specific to African American culture, but also displayed particular forms of so-called urban, hip-hop clothing. These items, such as basketball jerseys and t-shirts with neighborhood names, act as forms of language and literacy for urban Black youth in some of the same ways as AAL. For the young Black males in

this study, these items and other comparable fashion statements are unique to Black, urban environments and relay specific messages. Deciphering these messages and expressions through clothing is not the focus of Kirkland & Jackson's work, but it provides a launching point for future research that can begin to address the power of urban, Black youth dress. This piece effectively highlights African American youth culture, expressed in part through dress *and* language and the potential for future research to highlight African American youth culture through dress *as* language.

In "Skins We ink: Conceptualizing Literacy as Human Practice" (2009), Kirkland questions the standard and engrained parameters of literacy as we know it. Kirkland conducts an ethnographic, interview/observation-based study over the span of one year following a young African American male, Derrick. Through the voice of Derrick, Kirkland illustrates how literacy manifests not through ink on paper, but the ink on his body. Derrick's careful attention to his tattoos, messages, meanings, and memorials are grounded in self-created belief systems. Behind his tattoos lies his agency in inscribing them permanently on his body and the desperate need for inclusion of not simply Black males, but also their distinct and unique forms of literacy they bring with them into deeper, more relevant pedagogical approaches.

For Black urban youth, their visibility on the streets is an everyday experience. The importance of style is at its peak for Black teenagers in particular. Kirkland (2009) argues "While human beings—poets and writers— have long written with 'an inexhaustible voice' and 'a soul, a spirit capable of

compassion and sacrifice and endurance,' today's youth are doing so in new and diverse ways—on computer screens and on the walls of buildings, on paper and on flesh," (p. 375). The same is true for those who speak through the clothing they place on their flesh. Public spaces, in and out of school set a stage to attach meanings to messages to clothing as text(s).

This work connects deeply to a timeline of scholarship that calls for consideration and more importantly the incorporation of "third spaces" (Gutierrez, 1993), where we can begin to truly acknowledge both the texts brought into schools by students in the same ways the texts required by schools are acknowledged, where notions of the former being informal and the latter being formal are wiped away or at least problematized. These "third spaces" that countless students in our country's schools have the ability to usher us into will have the power to shine light on new parameters for what is considered knowledge and who is considered knowledgeable.

The ever-important theories concerning re-contextualization of "mainstream" and dominant societal definitions of texts by those of non-dominant groups have a strong connection to this study as well. For instance, zooming in on how urban youth use dominant symbols, such as sports team paraphernalia to represent various affiliations with certain groups (Cintron, 1998) opens up new possibilities for research that suggests that not only are urban students developing a brand awareness that on the surface may seem to be a product of so-called materialism, but they are also possibly assigning new messages and

meanings to these brands and re-branding dominant symbols to create their own sense of belonging.

Cultural relevancy or cultural sustainment in urban schools also includes the need for educators to consider the power of popular culture in students' lives. In his work, *Critical Literacy and Urban Youth: Pedagogies of Access, Dissent, and Liberation* (2008), Morrell provides a view into how urban youth experience critical literacy and outlines theories that can be put into practice in ways that connect with students' lives, beyond the standardized measures currently employed. Morrell's (2008) strong stance is that urban student's out-of-school literacies, including but not limited to memorizing popular songs, video gaming, and text-messaging, should be brought into school in ways that honor and respect the students that use them, a framework that could also very well include fashion as a form of critical literacy, one that is ever-present and possibly a sub-layer of the areas highlighted by Morrell.

Also central to this review and the research it contributes to, is Morrell's inclusion of ideas that can be used to infuse critical literacy across subject areas. What would it look like for fashion as a form of critical literacy to contribute to social studies culture-to-culture units, textile analysis and testing within a science classroom, or calculated comparisons of generated revenue from uniform companies in a math classroom? Really, the opportunities are endless with fashion/style as text and other subjects as lenses. This valuable, but all too-often forgotten gesture that enriches research and takes scholarship beyond what is discussed into what can actually be done.

Uniform/Dress Code Policy Research

What is missing from the literature is a detailed analysis and response to the issue of dress code/uniform policy in urban schools, specifically as it relates to intersections with fashion/style and identity development of Black youth. While some argue that uniform and dress code polices in urban districts should include further restrictions (LaPoint et al, 2003), students are finding ways to express themselves and resist uniformity through innovative methods, and Black students are increasingly being targeted and suspended for going against the status quo (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lewin, 2012).

Economies of Adornment – A Review of Uniforms in Urban Schools

This section is critical to understanding the implementation of uniforms in urban schools. For many, it may seem that the transition in urban, public schools came by osmosis because of how subtle, yet fast the shift from free dress to strict policies swept the country. Uniform policies have been in place in education for centuries in U.S. private and parochial schools. Traditionally, uniforms have been viewed as a status symbol easily separating private/parochial students whose parents could generally afford to pay for school from public school students. However, in 1996 President Bill Clinton mentioned his endorsement of uniforms in urban schools as a means of promoting safer, more orderly students. This is when the deficit rhetoric concerning urban school students, which will be explained further later in this review, began to spread like wildfire. Yet, unfortunately, the majority of studies conducted on the effects of

urban uniform policy are just that – rhetoric – based on assumptions about what

uniforms can do to correct urban student behavior. The following timeline breaks

down the problematic history of uniform in urban schools.

Table 1: Uniform Implementation in Urban Schools – Timeline

Year	Uniform Implementation in Urban Schools – Timeline Points
1980's	Pre-dating Clinton's endorsement the following districts began implementing uniforms in select schools – Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Miami-Dade County, Bridgeport, CT., and Detroit.
1994	The Long Beach California Unified School District became the first to mandate a set uniform for elementary and middle school students district-wide. A VERY important little known fact, is that the largest school uniform company in the U.S., French Toast, assisted Long Beach in implementing their uniform policy/system. "Assistance" from French Toast most likely equated to some sort of financial benefit for the district. According to their company website, French Toast still "assists" other districts across the country in implementing uniform policies. The second major company producing school uniforms, Lands End, also "assists" in the uniform/policy implementation trend by conducting parent surveys with districts to assess the number of pro-uniform parents (White, 2000). Thus, these practices of so-called assistance have been easily transferred into climbing revenue for these companies and the countless stores (Rainbow, Mr. Alan's, Foreman Mills, etc.) that house their brands.
1996	President Clinton's endorsement of uniform in urban schools was inspired by Long Beach's supposed success, although there was no statistical data showing changes in the district; simply anecdotal was used. Clinton stated in his State of the Union speech, "If it means that the school rooms will be more orderly and more disciplined and that our young people will learn to evaluate themselves by what they are on the inside, instead of what they're wearing on the outside, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms," (White, 2000, para. 17).
1996– cont.	The Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the DC Safe and Drug Free Schools Program co-authored a nine-page "Manuel on School Uniforms" that was distributed to districts nationwide. It began on page one with a deficit orientation of urban youth as violent, undisciplined, hyper-brand conscious, gang-affiliated, and nonacademic students (U.S. Department of Education et al, 1996, p.

Table 1 (cont'd)

	1).
1998	One of the first and few research studies providing statistical data on the effects of uniforms was conducted by sociologists David L. Brunsma and Kerry A. Rockquemore. This study concluded that uniforms "have no direct effect on substance use, behavioral problems or attendance and actually have a negative effect on academic achievement" despite information provided by anecdote-based research. The scholars argued, "Instituting a school uniform policy can be viewed as analogous to cleaning and brightly painting a deteriorating building," they conclude. "On the one hand, it grabs our immediate attention. On the other hand, it is only a coat of paint," (Brunsma & Rockquemore, p. 60, 1998).
2012	While there is still a limited number of studies on uniform in urban schools, and very few studies with actual statistical information on its effects, experts say approximately 25% of all U.S. public elementary schools have instituted a uniform policy. Approximately, 12.5% of U.S. middle and high schools have also adopted uniform policies (Wilde, 2012). This number is climbing year by year.
2015	The Florida House of Representatives is currently considering a bill titled the "Students Attired for Education (SAFE) Act" to provide an incentive of $10 per child to Florida public school districts that implement a uniform policy as early as Fall 2015 if passed by state legislators (Florida House of Representatives, 2015). If pushed through, some districts could easily receive six to seven figure funding in just one academic year. Other districts across the country, and possibly the federal government may be convinced to blindly do the same.

This final point in the timeline is troubling to say the least because these decisions have been based primarily on dominant narratives instead of statistical data and are certainly void of student voice in what is placed on their bodies, a central call to action this study puts forth. In the spirit of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the counter-narratives of students this study uncovers provide a much richer source of data for the effects of uniform implementation in urban schools. More importantly, the hope is that this model will inspire more research including counter-narratives that push against white supremacy and racism as an institutional barrier to forward movement for non-dominant populations. Another

critical factor connected to CRT is the idea of "interest convergence" which essentially suggests that in order for non-dominant groups to gain access to particular rights or progress, there must be something valuable to the dominant population – something in it for them. Thus, considering the timeline above and the surface effort of French Toast, Land's End, and even the federal government pushing for uniform implementation as a plus for urban schools is ultimately laced with revenue being made by these companies and possible bonuses for government entities as well. It is through the lens of CRT that these faults are revealed.

Urban Uniform Policy Research

Moving into this more specific focus on dress code and uniform policy dating back to that wild year of 1996, "Dress-Related Behavioral Problems and Violence in the Public School Setting: Prevention, Intervention, and Policy - A Holistic Approach" (1996), Holloman et al provide an overview of the state of dress code and uniform policy for Black students and parents in urban, public schools. Published the same year as President Bill Clinton's executive endorsement of uniforms in public schools as a means of decreasing school health and safety issues, this article can be read as a brief road map charting at that time the largely unchartered territory of polices concerning student dress and the implications for effects on learning environments. The article seeks to pinpoint areas for future research that engage discussions surrounding uniform through a holistic approach, which in their analysis means identifying the areas in

which these policies are intricately connected to health, safety, and the supposed solutions these policies may bring to urban schools, specifically those populated with Black students.

The scholars provide a clear and useful breakdown of some of the key discussions surrounding uniform policy, dress code, and youth fashion/style. An overview of both sides of the uniform and dress code policy debate provide one solid starting point for the research this literature will inform (Holloman et al, 1996). Parents, teachers and administrators have weighed in on this issue over the years, and generally either voice that student expression through dress is important in identity development or that in order to ensure a non-hostile learning environment for all, dress code and uniform polices must be enforced as a means of leveling out supposed inequalities. Another battle that arises is whether schools have the right to determine restrictive dress policies and how this affects a student's personal rights of freedom of speech through clothing as well as the rights of the student's family to raise their children with values distinct to their cultural practices.

The work of a related research team was also included to highlight the increased student emphasis on clothing and identity through clothing as age increases (Holloman et al, 1996, LaPoint et al, 2003). The three identified areas are helpful in the sense of bringing this trend to the forefront, but the categorizations of students were outlined in a negative tone and framed students, and what they supposedly represented through their clothing, as having three key problems:

(1) distorted values and attitudes toward the self and others stemming from an overemphasis on appearance, dress, and other trappings of material culture; (2) involvement in antisocial and illegal behavior, ranging from shoplifting and stealing to violent and fatal acts against others, in the pursuit of certain articles of clothing; and (3) disruptive and inappropriate dress-related behavior in homes, schools, worksites, and other community settings. (Holloman et al, 1996, p. 269)

Yet, these are not the problems; framing all Black youth in urban schools this way is the problem. This in relation to the debate breakdown above leaves one major gap in the work, the students' voices, their own narrative which I argue would make this article and related work much more holistic in nature by acknowledging that the central people in this debate are largely unrepresented in the research surrounding it. Labeling Black students as the problem falls in line with a dominant, societal narrative, a story surrounding Black students that has put forth skewed representations of who they are, what they are about, and their possible threat to a so-called social order. In turn, these dominant narratives are used to shape the very dress code policies that are supposed to fight against these so-called shortcomings.

With negative framing such as the points discussed in this article, it seems as if policy makers and researchers are fighting and placing power over the students instead of taking an in-depth look at what lies under the surface of each of the three areas. What is also left of the frame is the racial and class-based structures that surround these three areas and an attempt to keep students in their place, creating resistance from them and the need to work around or against. The definition of holistic in this work being based in health and safety concerns does not bring forth an analytical approach genuinely inclusive enough to account for student voices. The scholars acknowledge that students' voices

should be heard, but do not seem to make a conscious effort to do so. This leads to a gaping hole and confirms the need for research that brings Black students out of the realm of the identification as the problem into being the solution, or carriers of knowledge that may. Black students face clothing surveillance and receive suspensions through these policies at some of the highest rates in the country (Lewin, 2012). Many of these districts shifted into uniforms within the past 15 years, with research showing that teachers/administrators and students have differing views on the impact of dress code (Skiba, 2000; Morris, 2005). Yet, a simple, dominant narrative surrounding is shaping more and more district policies in place of actual evidence.

If policy makers and administrators ask students about their identities through clothing instead of placing negative identities upon Black students then some of the very so-called issues of safety may truly begin to decrease. The research grounded by this review suggests that by honoring students' voices, reflecting on their counter-narratives, and even allowing them to act as change agents and developers of new policies, spaces can be created in which students can also make decisions about uniform policy and dress code and begin to take ownership of their educational experience. Moving away from the deficit framework that most Black students are expressing gang affiliation, overemphasizing material wealth, and a desire to break the law in order to achieve these things may reveal positive associations and areas for self-pride development and in-turn a truly holistic approach to bettering learning environments for Black students.

Educational research has consistently relied upon research that operates within a dominant narrative using methodological tools that also operate within this narrative, thus the outcomes generally reflect this (Scheurich & Young, 1997, Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In "Attitudes of Youth of Color on Student Dress and Uniforms: A Case of Commercialism in Schools" (2003), LaPoint et al, the team of researchers connected to the Hollomon et al article previously discussed, attempt to address the need for student voice on issues surrounding dress code and uniform policy they included as a point for further research seven years earlier, yet their attempt is based on yet another instance of a minority majoritarian force.

The study is based on surveys conducted with 213 students of color, 95% African American and 5% Latino, in an urban school. To date, this article is one of handful of research centered upon race and dress in schools analyzed through student voices, and the main source referred to for a collection of Black student voices in particular. The main agenda was to identify whether or not the students were aware of the positive effects uniform policy was possibly having on their decreasing issues related to dress. The questions included possible correlations between student dress and "tardiness, absenteeism, poor academic achievement, vagrancy (breaking the rules, and disruptive behavior" (LaPoint et al, 2003, p. 412). The findings revealed that younger students, sixth and seventh graders, were more likely to agree with the dominant teacher/administrator narrative that uniforms had a direct effect on creating a safer, healthier learning

environment. On the other hand, older students, the eighth graders, stood in opposition to this stance.

While it is important to respect the position of this research as the main source of data on uniform from the student of color perspective, specifically Black youth and the empirical nature of this study, it seems the research team did not make a genuine effort to answer their own call to action to incorporate student voice. With the central focus as whether or not students agreed with the dominant narrative supported by teachers and administrators as the main research question the findings really did not say much about students' thoughts, concerns, beliefs, and stances on race, racism, power, and the relationship of these structures to their dress. In addition to this shortcoming, the study did not address the how and why they choose to express themselves through clothing when certain restrictions are not in place as they were in their urban school leading to implications for possible changes to these policies that actually reflect student voices instead of attempt to align it with adult voices.

The negative tone of portions of the article, much like the breakdown of student motivations for stylish clothing in the team's previous article, was evident with regard to older students stating they may be "preoccupied with fashion/style trends" and are "more likely to disregard adult guidance and caution about dress and behavior," (LaPoint et al, 2003, p. 413). This clouds the potential for policies that truly reflect students, the positive aspects of their gravitation towards personal styles of dress, and how these cannot only be incorporated into uniform

policies as well as hold implications for curriculum development and pedagogical shifts in teacher to student perception.

The most useful work concerning the intersections of Black student life and dress is Edward W. Morris' "Tuck in That Shirt! Race, Class, Gender, and Discipline in an Urban School" (2005). In relation to the other discussed research, this article provides the closest and most balanced analysis of clothing policies in schools through the lens of race as well as class and gender. Morris (2005) identifies the need to interrogate schools' emphasis on deficiency in dress and the perceived direct correlations to deficiency in cultural capital. Essentially, his argument suggests that by controlling students' bodies, albeit with many intentions of helping students become socially mobile, teachers and administrators were contributing to the existing dominant system of power that looks down upon those who are deemed different. This micro-system in the school based on the macro-system outside of the school silences and dis-empowers students of non-dominant populations and leads to resistance and more detrimentally, them checking out of the learning process at large.

The article balances voices of both teachers and students. A veteran white teacher's point of view on sagging highlighted the generally used connection to the prison trend of wearing one's pants low, but the teacher then connected this trend not just to the prison system but directly to the Black community as a tactic "*they* use to defy authority" (Morris, 2005, p. 42). On the other hand, Black students and Latino students who also wore sagging pants described the act not rooted in opposition, but rooted in dressing like others in

their communities. Morris argues that this creates a disconnect in interpretation, and worse the denial of students' voices when attempting to explain something beyond the dominant narrative contributes to an environment of institutionalization, similar in many ways to prison. In fact, a Black male student, Derek, who generally wore Dickies pants and cornrows, both styles of dress categorized as socially deficient, explained this parallel to Morris (2005) while drafting an essay on the topic:

> "…they [prisoners] wear uniforms, we wear uniforms, they have a certain time to eat, we have a certain time to eat…'cause like everyone is wearing the same thing like in prison…it's like we did something wrong, but we didn't do anything.

> Prisoners are there because they did something wrong. We're just here to learn, we didn't do anything wrong, but it's like we're being punished." (p. 43)

What is viewed by a teacher or administrator as enforcing rules to remove prison-like behavior from schools can in fact create a prison-like environment in which students' bodies are surveillance and controlled without their input. This is also highlighted for African American female students with the focus of the need to be lady-like. Girls were not allowed to wear pants, only skirts, and were constantly reprimanded for sitting improperly. They were also labeled as aggressive in how they answered questions in class with a louder voice range than some of their peers. All of these details created an environment where Black students were consistently and disproportionately targeted and punished.

Conclusion

This review of literature highlights three central lenses through which this study concerning fashion/style choices of urban Black youth can contribute to the fields of gaze theory, fashion/style theory, and critical literacy in unique ways. This study also has the potential to help shape reform in urban education, as schools are the vessels in which many of these areas of inquiry intersect. These lenses together allowed me to analyze my findings using the following integrated framework.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The Politics of The Black Body

Gaze Theory

Fashion Style/Theory

Critical Literacy

The Politics of Adornment

The Politics of Choice
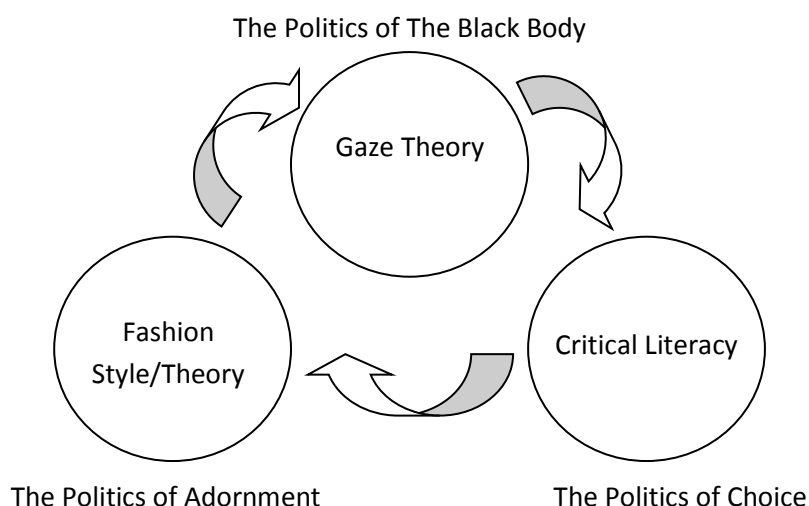
Despite this push for strict uniform policies and dress codes, Black students in urban schools are still finding ways to push back on the dominant gaze and rewrite their identities through adornment daily. These are the realities for Black youth in urban schools. There are intersections between these realities and students' connections to a broader timeline of Black fashion/style, one not simply about what is worn, but the systems in which what is worn is a response to something much bigger than an

individual quest. This review outlined the various ways these systems have been shaped through the analysis of Gaze Theory and the politics of the Black Body. Adornment politics, through review of the Black Fashion/Style Aesthetic timeline, also helps to set the foundation for understandings of how Black students operate within a larger tradition of fashion/style as text for resistance on one hand and acceptance on another.   Finally, this review covered the politics of choice by uncovering previous critical literacy work that set the standard for this study and the gap that needs to be filled in uniform/dress code policy development.

CHAPTER 2
"WELCOME TO THE NEW SCHOOL":
Methodology and Methods

This study operated along the spectrum of the world as it is to the world based on an innovation in an urban middle school with student participants leading the way to shape their own change. Two research approaches were used to bring forth data that addressed both prongs – Critical Ethnography (CE) and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). Ethnography at large allows researchers to observe and highlight particular features of a given culture – essentially writing culture as it is (Glesne, 2011). Critical Ethnography (CE) takes this one step further by helping to identify the world as it is while also identifying inequity and calling for changes that may help disrupt marginalization of the non-dominant by the dominant (Glesne, 2011). Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) offers a look at the world, or a small part of the world, based on an innovation. With YPAR, there lies the potential to take the very call(s) for change gained from research approaches like Critical Ethnography and actually place these calls in a moving vehicle for change, an action that moves research from theory to practice (Irrizary & Brown, 2014).

Critical Ethnography

To achieve the goals of this research study, a critical ethnographic analysis of Black youth culture in urban schools exploring their existing interactions related to fashion/style within their school setting was conducted. Critical Ethnography, in its essence, moves from "what is" to "what could be" through the lens of culture (Madison, 2005). Critical Ethnographic tools were employed as a way of moving beyond viewing

fashion on the surface and extending it to a form of Black literacy that students potentially used to re-frame oppressive and restrictive uniform polices. Though this study does not fall into the general time length considered standard for ethnographic work, it does use foundational data gained from a pilot study that carries over into the research presented in the chapters to follow. Thus, the term "tools" identifies the essence of the approach that remained central to this study. Critical ethnographic tools were essential to bridging and analyzing the data from the pilot study to this study and outlining the data gathered from this work as a whole.

Critical Ethnography was also used as a means of identifying components of culture to reveal the layered complexities and associations students have with fashion in relation to society and school as a microcosm of society. According to Kaiser & McCullough (2010) "Fashion theory, along with empirical studies of 'style–fashion–dress'…provides a particularly compelling nexus with diasporic theory, for here the material and discursive intersect and become literally enmeshed in the fabric of clothing," (p. 363). This work seeks to contribute to an emerging ethnographic lens connecting Black culture and fashion/style and the goal of identifying how students potentially navigate their own identities/culture while also operating within the culture of schooling.

Youth Participatory Action Research

To strengthen the possible effects this research may have on future practice and policy, this project also included the use of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) as a means of including students' ideas and strategies into solutions for issues in their

school environment. This study was grounded in what students chose to change in their school through their own voices. Students worked together to uncover specific components of their current dress code/uniform policy and used their existing knowledge bases to bring ideas of their choice to fruition. In accordance with the standards of general participatory action research (PAR) as outlined by Alice McIntyre (2000), the work was based upon the following principles:

- (a) The collective investigation of a problem;
- (b) The reliance on indigenous knowledge to better understand that problem;
- (c) The desire to take individual and/or collective action to deal with the stated problem. (p. 124)

Some scholars have gone much further to deepen understandings of the use of YPAR, particularly within the contexts of urban schools populated with students of non-dominant groups. The work of Jason Irizarry and Tara M. Brown (2014) does this in ways that grounded my approaches during this study. The goal of conducting "humanizing research in dehumanizing spaces" as the main title of their work sets up the central conundrum at the outset. Working with students to create positive change in a system that may not be built to support their best and full interests at large, let alone support change made by their own hands and through their own voices, can be an issue of unsteady, infertile ground to stay the least.

Irrizary and Brown (2014) identify "two realms of challenge – the pedagogical and the political" (p. 64) when conducting YPAR in urban contexts, particularly with non-dominant youth.   In terms of pedagogy, many urban schools are still operating off of the banking method to schooling, outlined by Freire (2000), and/or within a hidden curriculum that replicates social class and the various levels of capital associated with

each class (Anyon, 1980). YPAR, as a potentially liberating research approach, is built upon the opportunity for those directly affected by a particular issue to use their own knowledge to address and solve a problem. This runs counter to the concepts of banking and hidden curriculum which are used to keep certain groups as anything but active participants in their own lives. The second realm, the political, is built upon the understanding that schools as a microcosm of society operate using a hierarchy of power, one in which students are generally considered to be at the bottom of the totem pole in terms of having a say on decisions related to their education. YPAR flips this structure on its head. With students having the power, through research and action, to question the status quo, they are considered potential threats to the hierarchy of power.

While these pedagogical and political takeaways can be valuable to many students who participate in YPAR work, possibly as transferable experiences/skills needed post-graduation, it can all come at a cost of the stability of their educational experience when adults frame them as questioning authority or worse, remove the program from the school altogether. Even though my research site was generally supportive of the program and the students in the program from the outset, there were certainly periods of time that illustrated both pedagogical and political challenges. These instances will be discussed in the chapters to follow.

Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, *fashion/style* is defined as all components of one's appearance including but not limited to - clothing, tattoos, jewelry, and hair plus the methods of styling these components - and the trends that have the potential to

influence these methods of styling. The unified term fashion/style signifies the inextricable relationship between the two words – with one affecting the other in a cyclical manner. *Black* is an identifier used throughout the study, but *African American* is also used and should be accepted as synonymous for the purposes of this document.

Swag, the term used in the title, is a shortened version of the term swagger popular with Black urban youth. During the study, it was defined by the students who participated in the SWAG School program in their own words. Yet, for purposes of clarity, it generally connects to the traditions of "coolness" within a larger Black fashion/style aesthetic tradition. Essentially, swag is the essence behind someone's fashion choices; it is not the question of what they wear, but how they are wearing it. S.W.A.G. is also used in the title as an acronym for "Style With A Goal." This phrase was developed by a previous student workshop participant I worked with for a separate project and through his voice speaks to the essence of what this work uncovered.

Research Design

The design of this study was guided by my effort to both observe how students make sense of fashion/style within their school environment and then acting as a program facilitator/researcher, to see how they might work together to solve a set of self-identified issues related to their experiences with fashion/style in their school. The pilot study discussed in the introduction was conducted fall 2012 with male students from Tubman Academy who were involved in a mentoring program that I volunteered with as a mentor and graduate coordinator. The data gained from the pilot study helped shape the outline of this research study. Yet, this study went further to include a curricular

innovation and an extended period of time to conduct and analyze school observations, interviews, focus groups, and textual analysis of school policies and student work.

Research Questions

The goals of this study were shaped by the following research questions as a means of outlining the various targets for required data and the sources that this targeted data could possibly come from. These research questions (RQ) were:

- RQI: How do Black students use fashion/style as a way to negotiate, construct, and/or perform their identities?

- RQ2: How are these practices, their will to adorn, viewed as political acts? More specifically, how can they be viewed as critical literacy practices in schools where uniform/dress code policies are enforced?

- RQ3: How are students possibly operationalizing understandings of both body and adornment, particularly within the framework of Critical Literacy, if/when given the opportunity to make their own fashion/style choices in uniform/dress code policy?

In order to answer these questions through CE and YPAR I collected and analyzed data in the following ways.

Site Description

The research setting for this study was an urban, Midwestern school called Tubman Academy.[2]   The school is a K-8th grade, African-centered public school founded in 1992. "African-centered", according to the school's administration, means

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[2] Pseudonyms will be used for all names/locations to protect participant and school identities.

that the core focus of the school is to provide a culturally responsive school environment that builds students' self-pride and leadership potential. Images of African American figures, African symbols, and prominent placement of the colors of red, black, and green are displayed all around the school. Instead of calling teachers "Ms." or "Mr." and their surname, students call their teachers "Mama" or "Baba", such as Mama Jones or Baba Donaldson, another noticeable way of integrating African culture.

Tubman was displaced by a building fire at its original location in May 2011 and relocated to the former Trumpton Middle School, a smaller site than the original school on the city's Westside. Approximately 500 students attend Tubman from K-8, but this study focuses on middle school students in Grades 6-8. Students attend school from 8:30am-3:40pm Monday through Friday, and each class runs 60 minutes, which includes six class periods and one 40-minute lunch period, generally separated by grade.

Participant Selection

Participants were purposively selected from the group of students who volunteered to take part in the critical fashion literacy/student-developed dress code/uniform policy program – SWAG School. This was done after a period of observations which allowed me to get to know the students of the school and the school environment. Approaching the research in a purposive manner created a space for specific questions directed towards a pre-defined group. These pre-definitions included the following criteria for the participants who were involved in the program:

Each participant must have:

- o Attended the chosen urban middle school site

- o Identified as: Black and/or African American

- o Agreed to participate in the /student-developed dress code/uniform policy program

- o Agreed to participate in the research process

A research flyer was provided to potential participants, and each participant and parent/guardian signed a detailed consent form and retained a copy for their own personal records at the beginning of the study. Each student also signed a student assent form outlining the details of their involvement in the study/program using terminology that could be understood clearly for their grade levels.

The SWAG School program operated as a twelve-session initiative that was implemented over a five-week span during the summer school session at Tubman Academy. In total, there were nine curricular sessions and three additional sessions for presentation practice for the final dress code/uniform policy presentation to administration.

SWAG School took place summer 2014 with students transitioning from the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades into seventh, eighth, and ninth grades in the fall. Students self-selected to participate in the after-school program, which ran after their summer classes that ended at 1:15pm each day, followed by lunch, and then our program. Ten students total participated in SWAG School. However, due to attendance issues and unexpected transitions out of summer school I was only able to work closely with five students as focal participants, who happened to be all young women.

There was no extra credit or grade associated with the summer program. I provided snacks for each program session. In addition to this, through money provided via a research grant, I was able to support select school efforts related to fashion/style, such as Ancestors' Day, where students dress as historical Black figures instead of general Halloween costumes. I purchased costume accessories for the middle school students to align with the year's Harlem Renaissance theme.

Participant Profiles

Focusing on the five focal participants, the following descriptions provide profiles on each student:

Tiana: Tiana was a seventh grader rising to eighth grade in the fall, and her leadership amongst her peers was evident. She knew all of the other students in the program despite the different grades represented, and they each knew her. During my observation period, based on the number of students around her, I considered her someone her peers would consider "popular" or well-known at school. She seemed popular because of her leadership skills and her ability to get others excited about a subject or common goal, inside and outside of the program. She was the participant who brought the most students along with her to participate in the program over the summer, and she always did so with ease. Unfortunately, due to her mother moving to another part of the city, Tiana's last days at Tubman Academy were over the summer. She transferred to a new school in the fall, but was still available and willing to participate in SWAG School activities as needed in the fall.

Ashley: Ashley was a sixth grader rising to the seventh grade. She was soft-spoken in the beginning of the program and at the beginning of most group discussions. However, as the program continued session by session she became more comfortable with sharing her opinion and guiding the group on various topics. Her specialty on the student team was her attention to detail and to the various tasks at hand for each project step. During my observation period during the school year, Ashley's quiet demeanor was evident. However, when she took an active role in class she did exactly that, took an active, leadership role, and her opinion was clear and known by her peers. Ashley was the only student who was not enrolled in summer school and attended the program by coming from home each day to the school.

Rachelle: Rachelle was a seventh grader rising to the eighth grade. She was full of spirit for the program from day one. One role she took on herself was to make sure that other participants made it up from lunch to our session room, each day. Rachelle was attracted to the program because of her self-taught, fashion design skills. She drafted clothing designs as a hobby and re-designed some of her family members' clothing to make clothes for herself. She mentioned, often on her own, that she lost focus easily on particular tasks related to school and that her mind would wonder in her classes which affected her grades, but not in our program. Her summer school teachers noted this as well when they popped in before or after program sessions.

Dionna: Dionna was an eighth grader rising to the ninth grade, which unfortunately meant that she would be attending high school in the fall and would no longer be a Tubman Academy student. However, she remained open to help with the efforts after the formal ending of the program and she was excited about her role in

helping possibly shape the uniform policy of a school she had been attending for years. Her involvement as a veteran student proved invaluable, and she even recruited a fellow veteran to join her in the program. She was cool and calm, yet always willing and ready to offer her opinion. She had a specific knack for technology use when we switched our sessions to the computer lab which proved to be very useful. She even served as our informal DJ when we played music during different activities.

Valencia: Valencia was also an eighth grader rising to the ninth grade. She was close friends with Dionna and was recruited by her to participate in the program. She was dependable in many ways. In addition to offering her insight as a veteran Tubman Academy student, Valencia helped me make sure students remembered it was program time after lunch, she helped transport supplies from our regular session room to the computer lab on various days, and she even helped me set up for our final presentation. Vanessa's mom was very supportive of her involvement in the program and along with Vanessa even attended our fall report to the school covering what we accomplished over the summer. Vanessa, like Tiana, helped with this event despite no longer being at Tubman Academy, and remained available as the months progressed.

Curriculum Design

A detailed curriculum guide outline is provided in Chapter Four, and the central components are included below. The school serves students that I had worked with since fall 2011 in a separate mentoring program making this study semi-longitudinal, with a potential span of over 3.5 years upon completion. I designed this curriculum in the spirit of the following asset-based approaches to education and extended them by

adding this study's focus on fashion/style, a new lens through which these approaches can be furthered.

Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP): Grounded in the principles of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and African American Emancipatory Pedagogy (AAEP), Critical Race Pedagogy moves education forward by calling for practices that "unify existing critical explications of educational phenomena in education and provide more theoretical grounding and direction for educators who are concerned with issues of racial, ethnic, and gender inequality in the U.S. educational system," (Lynn, 1999, p. 622).

Third Space: This curriculum connected deeply with scholarship, such as Kris Gutierrez's that calls for consideration and more importantly the incorporation of "third spaces", where we can begin to truly acknowledge both the texts brought into schools by students in the same ways the texts required by schools are acknowledged (Gutierrez, 1993). In this spirit, notions of formal vs. informal are wiped away or at least problematized.

Funds of Knowledge: The core of work grounded in honoring a group's funds of knowledge is based on a clear understanding, "People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge," (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2013 p. ix). The curriculum was designed to keep the knowledge the students already brought with them at the center.

Curriculum Components

Component One: The program began with activities and interactive discussions surrounding fashion and what their fashion statements and the statements they make about fashion, in and out of school spaces. There was a specific focus on their personal histories with fashion and dress code/uniform policy. Discussions incorporating historical and current black fashion culture concepts, images, and documents were used to uncover possible connections between urban black youth culture and black culture at large.

Component Two: Students then began to identify the methods they used daily to code, decode, and critically analyze their own fashion, fashions of others, and messages and meanings put forth by the existing dress code/uniform policy.

Component Three: Grounded in their personal histories with fashion and dress/code policy along with knowledge of their current critical fashion literacies, students developed their own dress code/uniform policy.

Researcher's Role and Positionality

I have clear memories of issues related to dress/style growing up as a child attending urban schools in Cleveland, Ohio. First through third grade, I did not have to wear uniform. In fact, most schools in the district did not have a uniform policy.

Entering fourth grade, in the upper elementary school five minutes away from my old school, my classmates and I were met with a sharp shift in what we were allowed to wear and not wear in school.   It was 1996, and knowing what I know now in relation to my research, President Clinton had endorsed uniforms in his State of the Union address. This was soon followed up by a manual for urban public schools released by the U.S. Department of Education (DaCosta, 1996).   Almost overnight, we were required to go to stores once stocked with colorful back to school clothing of a child's choice that then only sold navy blue, black, white, and light blue clothes – navy blue and black pants/skirts, white and light blue collared shirts, and navy blue neckties for both girls and boys. We all looked like each other, a sea of blue, black, and white, in rooms of students without distinction. I wore the same exact uniform in 1996 that Tubman Academy students were wearing when I arrived.

With these experiences dotting my timeline, and many, many more, I cannot help but to know and feel the importance of dress/style in the lives of urban, black youth – firsthand. I am not an opponent of uniform policy/dress code by any means.   However, the central thought is simply to find out what students think about what they wear or what they cannot wear, and the various ways they are maneuvering around both realities. I am aware that not all urban schools are the same, and my experiences may not be the same experiences of my youth participants. I am aware that not all students desire to express self-identity and pride through clothing. I am aware that I may receive push back from some gatekeepers and other important leaders relevant to this study because this research may be seen as trivial in the grand scheme of urban education.

Yet, this awareness only added much-needed fuel to move forward with this research inquiry.

With my experiences as the passion behind this work, but with a clear and open mind ready to find out about the current state of affairs in an urban school in 2014, I was a participant-observer. Like the students, I identified as Black/African American, went to urban schools in the Midwest, and had to wear uniform for part of my childhood. Unlike my students, I was not from their specific city, I was no longer middle-school age, and I served in the role of facilitator for the program which by de-facto placed me in the adult figure category and not the peer realm. Because of our similarities, I found that the group felt they could relate to me and without the stakes of grades being connected to the program, there was an ease with which they expressed their opinions and ideas. They knew I was young enough to listen to the music they listened to and know the brands and trends they favored, but just old enough to be in graduate school and operate a summer program by myself.

Beyond my role as participant-observer, I had the opportunity to volunteer in various roles around the school, which also helped build rapport with students, faculty, staff, and parents. I helped organize book inventory for a new curriculum and distribute this inventory to classes. I assisted one of the lead parent volunteers with the schools ACE Store, which was a merit-based store in the school that rewarded students with prizes based on the ACE Bucks they earned. I served as a chaperone for a school dance. I also instructed sessions in Science, Math, and English/Language Arts classes. I called this component of my research "SWAG School Beta." After observing the school during the spring, presenting at faculty meetings, running SWAG School, and observing

in the fall, I realized there was an opportunity to volunteer as a speaker and instructor with some of the teachers and work with them to connect the topic/lesson plan of their choice to a lesson related to fashion/style. Serving the school in these ways was very important to me as a researcher because I wanted the school community to know that I was not just there to gather research and go. I was there to become part of their community and help, in the small ways I could, as they pushed toward achieving larger goals. My research goals were at the forefront, but my thread of service is what grounded me and helped create strong bonds with the key players at Tubman Academy.

Data Collection

This section outlines each data source used to conduct this study.

Observations: I conducted observations at Tubman Academy throughout the course of the study from March 2014 through November 2014. Participants were observed over a period of eight weeks prior to the SWAG School program and twelve weeks following the program to document interactions, exchanges, conversations, and behavior. From March 2014 to May 2014, I conducted observations one to two times per week, attending classes, lunch periods, recess, school picture sessions, school dances, and school programs. I also attended faculty/staff meetings to present the program's goals to the school's team of administrators and educators. This provided me with a chance to gauge the overall climate of the school through the eyes of the adults leading the school. Observations were recorded as field notes by hand and noted with the date, time, and location for each instance. Observations relied heavily on

my use of "thick description", an integral ethnographic tool that calls for immersion in the field and deep attention to detail (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Glesne, 2011). The use of thick description was integral to understanding my participants and their experiences while also taking into account the environment which was in many ways shaping many of their experiences.

Interviews: Prior to implementation of the program curriculum, I conducted one initial interview each with the school's principal, Dr. Richards, and the school's lead guidance counselor, Mama Dawson. I also conducted one post-program interview with Dr. Richards. With student participants, I intended to conduct interviews using the Three-Interview Series method (Seidman, 2012). Due to shifts in attendance or the need to address student needs during sessions which led to various time constraints, I was unable to conduct three interviews with each focal participant. However, I was able to conduct two interviews with three of my focal participants and one with two focal participants and one non-focal participant. I strengthened instances where I was unable to conduct a third interview with data gained from observations, focus groups, and student artifacts, each proving to be a rich data source. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol, which is outlined in the Appendix C, and included central questions but also created room for participants to discuss other topics that were triggered by our conversation. Keeping a conversational approach was also integral to the interviewing process, leaving room for points of discussion introduced by student participants (Glesne, 2011; Kirkland, 2014). Interviews were recorded and field notes were also taken as a supplemental record either during interviews or immediately

following depending on the perceived comfort of participants. Interviews were transcribed. Transcriptions and supplemental notes were used to ensure accuracy.

Focus Groups: Focus groups created a space for students to discuss the topic of study with each other and agree and/or counter various sub-topics brought up in the individual interviews by the researcher or by other participants. Focus groups proved to mesh well with the nature of YPAR because the participants spent considerable time working together as a team analyzing their current dress code/uniform policy and identifying how they would work together to draft a new plan. As Glesne (2011) states, "Interviewing more than one person at time sometimes proves very useful: Children often need company to be emboldened to talk and some topics are better discussed by a small group of people…" (p. 102). Focus groups were transcribed and field notes were taken after group sessions instead of during group sessions so that participants would see me as a natural observer and moderator of their discussion.

Researcher Memos: During observations, I wrote memos to myself in the margins of my field notes or sectioned off areas of a page. This allowed me to jot down ideas that would help tailor my curriculum to the needs of the students, identify how I felt personally about issues that I saw rise in the school setting and how I might have dealt with it when I was in middle school. It also helped me identify any struggles I was facing as a researcher, and even note additional school officials that may be helpful to work with and why. This data source allowed me to begin the analysis process early on, as I was in the field, because I was recording thoughts as they entered my mind in the moment. This method in turn allows the mind to be freed up to observe even more of what is going on in the field (Glesne, 2011).

Student/School Artifacts: Artifacts made by students enriched data gained from interviewing and focus groups by providing a look into information participants may have not wanted to share verbally or felt more inspired to share due to the creative nature of many of the activities. Artifacts were also useful in displaying and/or supporting information already expressed by participants. During the curriculum-based component of the study, students made collages, gallery-like listings of their opinions of fashion/style, options for school logos, t-shirts/cotton accessories, and of course their final dress/code uniform policy along with additional artifacts. This particular form of data allowed me to model my study after great work conducted by similar studies concerning the literacies of Black youth. This includes inspiration from the impact of student drawings in Kirkland & Jackson's (2009) "We Real Cool: Toward a Theory of Black Masculine Literacies" study which revealed distinct relationships between how students correlated African American Language with "urban/hip hop" fashion and Dominant American English with fashion/styles that were considered more professional by the student participants. I also conducted a textual analysis of the school's uniform policy separately and again with the student participants who developed the uniform/dress code policy as they worked to develop their proposal.

Data collection was integrated and segmented into the following timeline:

Table 2: Data Collection Stages

Research Stage	Length of Stage	Data Collected
1. **Pre-SWAG School Program Implementation**	8 Weeks	- Observations - Researcher Memos - Interviews/Meetings with administration
2. **SWAG School Implementation**	5 Weeks	- Interviews - Focus Groups - Student Artifacts - Researcher Memos

Table 2 (cont'd)

3. **Following SWAG School**	4 Weeks	[Continued analysis and prep for upcoming school year]
4. **Post-SWAG School**	12 Weeks (2014-15 School Year)	• Observations • Researcher Memos • Interviews • Focus Groups • Student Artifacts

Stage One: Pre-SWAG School, I observed classes, school lunch, recess, faculty/staff meetings, and time between classes in the hallways. I conducted observations one to two days per week over the course of eight weeks for approximately two to three hours per day. I conducted semi-structured interviews with Dr. Richards and Mama Dawson, the school's principal and lead guidance counselor respectively. I also logged researcher memos.

Stage Two: I ran SWAG School at Tubman Academy for five weeks during the summer school session, June 24 – July 31, 2014. The program was held every Tuesday and Wednesday from 1:15-2:45pm with two additional sessions added at the end of the program to provide more time for the student team members to complete their uniform policy recommendation plan. During this stage I collected student artifacts via session assignments, conducted interviews, conducted focus groups, and continued logging researcher memos.

Stage Three: Following SWAG School, I took four weeks to continue analyzing the data I collected up until that point. I also took time to reflect on my initial observations and the data gathered from the program. This created a chance for me to outline goals for the upcoming school year and tailor my original goals to fit the needs of my research and more importantly, the needs of the students I served.

Stage Four: At the beginning of the school year, September 2014, I continued observations one to two times every other week to document the transition from the old uniform policy to the new policy developed by the student team. I kept in touch with students who were apart of the SWAG School team by asking them to join me as co-presenters for SWAG School for Tubman Academy's Community Night.   I also implemented a SWAG School Beta Edition Program - a three-day intensive curriculum used to tailor various lessons plans in different subjects to include a fashion/style thread.

Data Analysis

I sorted through my data using the following units of analysis: the politics of the Black Body, the politics of adornment, and the politics of choice. Each of these units aligned with my organization of the existing literature I reviewed and more importantly with each of my research questions that guided this study.   Issues related to performances of and governance of the Black Body were pinpointed as a unit of analysis for RQ1. Body politics for RQ1 aligned with my review of gaze theory through the lens Blackness. Instances of the use of adornment or discussions of adornment raised by the participants along with issues related to the topics surrounding them were used as a unit of analysis for RQ2. The politics of adornment aligned with my review of literature concerning the aesthetics of Black fashion/style along with the background provided on uniform/dress code policies. Instances illustrating where students infused their own power of choice using fashion/style were used as a unit of analysis for RQ3. This unit used critical literacy as a form of choosing how they wanted to read and write their own worlds through fashion/style, not simply through the policy they developed, but

also how they did this in other ways. The following table outlines my research questions

in relationship to the data sources used, how it was collected, and then the type of data

analysis conducted.

Table 3: Methods – Analytical Protocol

Questions	Data Source	Data Collection	Analytical Protocol
RQ1	- Field Notes - Individual Perspectives - Group Perspectives - School Artifacts	- Observations - Interviews - Focus Groups - Existing uniform/dress code policy	- Thematic Analysis - Critical Discourse Analysis - Textual Analysis
RQ2	- Field Notes - Individual Perspectives - Group Perspectives - Student/School Artifacts	- Observations - Interviews - Focus Groups - Student Artifacts	- Thematic Analysis - Critical Discourse Analysis
RQ3	- Field Notes - Individual Perspectives - Group Perspectives - Student Artifacts	- Observations - Focus Groups - Student Artifacts - Drafts/Final Student Uniform Policy	- Grounded Theory

Data Analysis Procedures

Stage One - Preliminary Organization of Data: I organized my field notes into

three phases pre-SWAG School, SWAG School, and post-SWAG School. This fell

along the lines of the stages outlined above. I also organized my other data sources,

including audio recordings and artifacts, in this manner.   I transcribed the audio

recordings myself as a means of beginning the initial stage of coding and reduction of

the data that highlighted instances where students were dealing with issues related to

fashion/style at large and pinpointing what these experiences were in relation to their

racial, gender, class and school identities. I also pinpointed these instances in my field notes and in student artifacts.

Stage Two – Initial Finding Areas: My initial review of each data set coupled with my understanding of the research questions I set out to answer helped me identify three preliminary areas:

1. Students were aware of rules in place related to their fashion/style choices in school

2. Students abided by these rules and seemed to understand the need for these rules

3. Students found ways to work around these rules through their fashion/style choices

Stage Three – Data Reduction and Round One of Coding: Keeping my research questions as an analytical tool I highlighted instances in my transcriptions and field notes where students' experiences revealed connections to issues related to control of their bodies by themselves or by others for RQ1. These instances were also identified in student artifacts. For RQ2, I highlighted instances in each data set where students used chosen forms of adornment or discussed adornment as a tool of expression and identity and noted these instances in student artifacts. For RQ3, I highlighted instances where students were possibly using body/adornment as a tool for reading and writing their own choices and opinions on what their uniform policy should be.   The uniform/dress code policy process in particular was a central data set for this question. Each of the research questions also allowed me to code these three highlighted areas as politics of the body, politics of adornment, and politics of choice.

Stage Three – Round Two of Coding and Emerging Themes: Once the data was organized into the three areas above, I reviewed the data sets again for instances where students seemed to be embodying experiences and opinions related to the

system around them, the choices they were making on their own, or a combination of both. Three central themes emerged from the data in relation to how fashion/style was being used at Tubman Academy and the choices the students were making along with the messages they were sending:

Reproduction and The Hidden Curriculum of Fashion/Style [RHC-F/S]: This theme is grounded in Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), a means of transmitting ideas of class to youth early on through education coupled with the general understanding of the "hidden curriculum" or the dispersal of hegemonic societal norms and beliefs through schooling (Giroux & Penna, 1983). Many understandings of what is needed to rise from one class to the next and/or fit within a particular set of norms are based on a system of maintaining various social inequalities. Yet, a dominant narrative surrounding the set of rules for normative behavior and acceptance many young people hear and learn throughout their schooling process is laced in part with discussions of "acceptable" fashion/style, or simply put "what's needed to make it." These messages were reproduced in the beliefs of the participants in this study and were revealed in part through their discussions and choices of what they wear and why they wear it.

Stylistic Push-Pull [SPP]: This theme was deeply inspired by Smitherman's (2006) concept of "linguistic push-pull". Grounded in DuBois' theory of double consciousness, linguistic push-pull is "Black folk loving, embracing, using Black Talk, while simultaneously rejecting and hatin on it – the linguistic contradiction is manifest in both Black and White America" (p. 6). The findings revealed that the students involved in this study exhibited a similar relationship with their fashion/style. This theme helped

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identify when students were accepting their own ways of dressing with pride yet pulling back from various modes of style that might not fit within a dominant American framework.

We Want What We Want [5W]: Lastly, this theme rests on the core idea that young people, at any given time are very clear about what they want and how they choose to represent their various identities, including using fashion/style as one tool of many. There were several instances that despite popular opinion, societal markers, and even sometimes the opinions of their own peers; participants took a strong stance on what they wanted. Youth, especially teenagers, are considered to be knowledgeable readers of fashion as a form of text (Brumberg, 2010). So, many times, it could not get clearer than when a student said…" We want what we want," in one way or another.

Step Four – Data Display: Once my emerging codes were identified, I used data display tools to help me make further sense of the information. I used a frequency distribution chart to note issues related to the initial codes of the politics of the body, adornment, and choice discussed by participants.   I used a thematic display format using one circle to represent each of the themes above – RHC-F/S, SPP, and 5W. These circles intersected, so that I could list which data fell solely in each area, and which data sets fell into intersecting areas, possibly holding characteristics of two or all three of the themes. I found the use of taxonomic data display to be useful as way to categorize specific responses from participants and correlating them with them with my initial understandings of the themes.

Step Five – Focused Analysis:

Thematic Analysis: A central framework in qualitative work, thematic analysis calls for the grouping together of data based upon emerging themes and patterns (Glesne, 2011). Each round of coding helped further identify the various information the data was bringing forth. The themes that emerged above came as a result of this framework.

Grounded Theory: Grounded Theory, a type of thematic analysis, was used to identify themes found in participant data instead of based on pre-existing theoretical themes (Glesne, 2011). Existing theoretical themes gained from present research and this project's literature review was used to formulate structure. Yet, the focus was the end-result of focusing on themes that emerged from the data. This analytical approach proved especially useful when analyzing student artifacts.

Textual Analysis: This analytical framework allowed me to decode school documents as texts possibly holding various meanings and understandings of the world based on the stances expressed by the person or institution that created them (Glense, 2011). This tool allowed me to analyze the actual messages that were being communicated by the school and through its written policies.

Critical Discourse Analysis: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to analyze uniform policy research and wider popular opinion on the uniform/dress code issue and more importantly the fashion/style choices of Black Youth at large. I pinpointed recurring patterns and underlying themes, specifically with regard to rhetoric and the repetition of particular values associated with Black youth and particular values associated with the supposed need for/success of uniform in urban schools. I leaned

upon Fairclough & Wodak's (1997) introduction to critical discourse analysis because of the interdisciplinary, critical nature of my work. I also found Gee's (2011) *How to Do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit* to be helpful on a broader level with organizing my data. In the spirit of YPAR, my students conducted CDA and textual analyses of their own school uniform/dress code policy and the messages they were receiving from others in and out of school about their fashion/style choices.

Step Six - Interpretation Checks: My interpretations of the data were enforced in two ways – triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was used to ensure themes carried across the various data sets. This proved helpful with uncovering running threads between observations, interviews, focus groups, and student/school artifacts. Member checking proved to be an essential tool as well. I checked in with participants throughout the uniform/policy development process to make sure I was interpreting their choices and opinions correctly. I also conducted interviews at the end of SWAG School to further solidify connections to themes.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methodology used to conduct this study. The use of the chosen qualitative methods and analytical frameworks proved to be essential to exploring how students at Tubman Academy understood their identities in relationship to the politics of body, adornment, and choice. Each stage of the research timeline from pre-program observations to implementation of SWAG School to post-program re-assessments and observations delivered data sets along this particular thread. Using observations, interviews, focus groups, student/school artifacts, and my

own research memos helped provide rich information for analysis. From thematic analysis to grounded coding to textual analysis, the data revealed particular themes, and it is through these themes that I developed my findings chapters according to my original research questions. The politics of the body, adornment, and choice uncovered in this study will be discussed in Chapters Three, Four, and Five respectively with instances of students operating under the themes of RHC-F/S, SPP, and 5W integrated into these chapters.

CHAPTER 3
"YOU CAN BUY SCHOOL, BUT YOU CAN'T BUY CLASS":
The Politics of the Black Body

What's wrong with having shirts tucked in? It just looks neater, professional, more about business to me.

- Mama Dawson, Lead Guidance Counselor – Tubman Academy

Clothing black bodies and black lives in angelic respectability will not save them from those who see their very skin as a sin.

– Melissa Harris Perry

Students filed into the doors of Tubman Academy on a brisk spring day, some running, some walking, and almost everyone abuzz. Coats went into lockers as the mini-fashion show began. For some it was their shoes that stood out, maybe a brighter color than the standard black or military-style boots instead of snow boots. For some it was the hairstyle they chose for the day that caught attention; comments flew around complimenting a crisp mohawk or new braids. For some there was even a set of new school supplies, a striped folder or a notebook with Spiderman or Superman flying across the cover. Even teachers had a strut to their walk as they said their morning hellos, smiled, and began to give early to-do's and reminders. This was all in a matter of ten minutes as coats went into lockers, but not identities.

Then all of a sudden, the Black National Anthem began to play from the school's intercom system. Soon, the halls were hushed and everyone, including me, stood still. As the lyrics of "Lift Every Voice" flowed through the hallways coupled with the naming of great Black leaders in between each line, I could not help but to be warmed by the school's effort to ground the day in Black history and culture from the start and requiring

this moment of stillness. Yet, as the song ended, I noticed just how normal this start to the day was for the middle schoolers. Soon, the halls were abuzz again. This time as minutes dwindled quickly toward the start of the day, hellos and smiles were replaced with directives like "put that hoodie back in your locker" and "make sure you come in this class with your pants up."

In one swoop, threads of pride from fashion/style, Black pride through history, and dress code enforcement were all woven together, seamlessly. The students, their bodies, physically stood still, taking a moment to pause as directed by the school's leadership. Then shortly after, students were directed to make other moves with their bodies. The halls of Tubman Academy represented what this chapter will outline, The Politics of The Black Body, as it relates to observations I made during fieldwork of instances of an ever-present hidden curriculum of fashion/style and so-called proper/acceptable representations of the Black body. This chapter will discuss the various ways students engaged or disengaged with experiences related to their bodies and their actual existence as Black youth operating in a culturally affirming, yet publicly funded and dominantly structured urban school district.

The Black Body - Under the Threads

On the Daily – The UnTucked Shirt Issue

"Put your shirt in sir. I'm not going to tell you that every day," Dr. Shaw reminded a student in her sixth grade class. "Every gentleman in here must have their shirt in their pants," she says as the third point on this very issue in just a 40-minute period. Each time, she was met with groans and rolled eyes, and it did not seem fully clear if

the reactions were due to the boys not wanting to tuck their shirts in or due to the constant reminders. Dr. Shaw too seemed tired of reminding the young men. It was evident that untucked shirts and the monitoring of untucked shirts was a daily issue that took time to address, not just in her class, but in the hallways as soon as students entered the school in the morning, were on their way to lunch, to the office, or their next class.

Figure 2: 2013-2014 Tubman Academy Uniform
(Blue pants, blue straight ties or cross ties for girls, and white shirts – featuring one student's shirt untucked)

It was such a normal part of the day that Dr. Shaw simply rolled past each of the three times she had to remind the young men in her class to tuck in their shirts and continued moving forward with what was a generally and refreshingly democratic classroom space. Students were working in groups, coming to consensus on their answers, and on this particular observation day, even came back together to vote on which day the unit test should be. Yet, for some reason the ever-present untucked shirt stood out as an area of no negotiation, so common that it came without responses back

from the young men, except that of visible correction and the shift to a tucked shirt, which fit within the dress code policy, then eventually was untucked again later in the school day.

The uniform policy recommendations drafted by the student design team, to be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, explicitly included the recommendation to not require that shirts be tucked in. Even though the design team was comprised of all girls, each of them clearly stated that the constant reminders from teachers and staff to boys signaled that boys just did not like to wear their shirts tucked in, so why should they? If at some point during the day, somehow, some way shirts would come out, then maybe there was space in their uniform plan to just let it be what it is. The lead guidance counselor, Mama Dawson, pushed back against this when it was presented to her just a few minutes before it was presented to Dr. Richards who was running behind for the presentation. "Dr. Richards is not going to go for this ladies. What's wrong with having shirts tucked in? It just looks neater, professional, more about business to me. If you're coming to school you should have your shirt tucked in, but if you're just going outside, hanging with your friends your shirt doesn't have to be tucked in."

The question then becomes, "neater" to whom? What if the students have a different idea or standard for what is neat or are more concerned about their appearance in other ways that are more relevant to their current realities? What makes the tucked shirt such a necessity for a young person who is not in the professional world? The tucked shirt here epitomizes issues surrounding the politics of respectability. What makes the tucked shirt a necessity is a tradition of conflating the desire to be *respected* with the desire to be *protected.* Michael Dawson, a political scientist and

director of the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture at the University of Chicago spoke to this issue clearly in a recent article discussing Mike Brown, Ferguson, and respectability:

> Respectability, in essence, is about policing the behavior in your community to make sure people are behaving "properly," so as to not attract unwelcome attention from whites — with 'properly' being a normatively white middle class presentation. (Loffe, 2014, para. 6)

This desire comes from a long timeline of injustice, and for Tubman Academy that has a strong emphasis on making sure students understand the struggles of Black History and culture; one can possibly see why administrators would want to "protect" their students by monitoring and correcting how they choose to adorn their bodies.   Yet, somehow because the issue arose on a daily basis in Dr. Shaw's class and many others and it came up again in the uniform policy plan, there seemed to be some friction between students and school leaders as to why there was so much emphasis on this one particular action of wearing their shirts untucked.   It is helpful to put the politics of respectability into conversation with Critical Race Theory, and specifically the understanding of white supremacy. What is considered to be proper is regulated by the white dominant population as a means of keeping order and regulating what is acceptable behavior. For Tubman students, this system seemed to be transferred to them as a means of preparing them for the so-called real world outside of school.

The girls pushed back on this and responded by simply stating that if untucked shirts are not allowed it will continue to be the same daily issue of reminding boys to fix their clothing and reminding them to do it over and over and over again. Furthermore, with the new inclusion of polo style shirts instead of dress style collared shirts, students would still look "neat" even if their shirts are untucked because of the difference in

fabric. For the girls, in an effort to keep the momentum of getting an initial understanding of most of their other recommendations, they let discussion of this particular recommendation lapse until the end of the presentation. To them there were bigger fish to fry, and in the end they felt with more proof on the other side after students shifted to polo-style shirts, they could return to this particular recommendation on the back end. Essentially, they yielded in many ways to the issue of respectability but at the same time still put forth their own understandings of the day-to-day tug of the tucked shirt.

The Hooded Black Body

On any day, students can be seen wearing hoodies, both girls and boys, even though the uniform policy explicitly states that hoodies are not allowed. To be clear, the hoodie, though an article of adornment similar to those that will be discussed in the next chapter is not just about hoodie, it is about the body that is under the hoodie. Since the murder of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year old young Black man in Florida, the hoodie has been reignited as a symbol of not simply Hip Hop or so-called urban fashion, but of defiance. A Black body, specifically a Black male body, under a hoodie is generally read by society as: a hoodie = a hoodlum. In the wake of Trayvon's death, various media pundits began to discuss the possibility of Trayvon not getting shot if he had not had a hoodie on, equating the hoodie to particular negative images of Black youth and thus negative behaviors.

Despite both adults and students at Tubman Academy knowing the swirling rhetoric concerning Trayvon and other victims of more recent racially unjust crimes - Jordan Davis, Renisha McBride, Mike Brown, and many, many others - students still

wore hoodies to Tubman Academy, every, single day, unapologetically. Even though hoodies were not allowed according to the school's policy, students re-wrote the policy and wore them anyway, in a few distinct ways that I noted during observations:

- Wearing lightweight, non-bulky hoodies under uniform shirts

- Wearing hoodies over uniform shirts before school begins and/or during recess and continuing to wear these hoodies until a teacher/administrator asks for them to be removed, if this is asked

- Wearing hoodies during free dress, of any color, freely, without restriction as long as the hood remains off during school hours

In many ways, wearing hoodies, though seemingly just a garment when swaying from a hanger in a store, is a much bigger symbol in day-to-day life, especially for Black youth. Over a series of weeks of observation, hoodies seemed to be the norm, so normative that many Tubman Academy students seemed to not think twice about the respectability politics they were dueling with each day when asked to not wear them. They were asked not to wear them in written form through the policy and verbally by adults in the school every morning upon entrance and every afternoon coming from recess.

The ever-important theories concerning re-contextualization of "mainstream" and dominant societal definitions of texts by those of non-dominant groups have a strong connection to understandings of the hoodie as a symbol. For instance, zooming in on how urban youth use dominant symbols, such as sports team paraphernalia, to represent various affiliations with certain groups opens up new possibilities for research.

Urban youth in particular are assigning new messages and meanings to these articles of clothing and are re-branding dominant symbols in relationship to these items being read as part of a text connected to their bodies. In *Angels Town: Chero Ways, Gang Life, and the Rhetorics of Everyday* (1998), Ralph Cintron identifies an article of clothing as simple as a baseball cap with a specific team's logo on it that may have nothing to do with an affinity for the team at all but does to a group of youth. The emblem is generally re-assigned a new meaning by the group of young people wearing it and sometimes even creates a sense of belonging unique to a particular group that can only be coded and decoded by that group. By being placed on their bodies, it is read as a different text than when placed on the average baseball fan. This depends on the body wearing the emblem and even the environment or neighborhood the text is being read and by whom.

For instance, as a mentor and graduate coordinator serving Tubman Academy students through critical literacy/Black culture-based program from 2011-2013, I observed hoodies being one of the top items of clothing worn by students for the Saturday program, both boys and girls. In the setting of the college campus where the program operated, hoodies were commonplace in one sense because of the casual dress of college students. Yet, we had to be sure that students transitioned from one place to the next with a mentor at all times, in case as young Black men, let alone a young Black man with a hoodie, they were viewed as a potential threat or at least surely someone who was out of place.

Figure 3: Illustrations of student understandings of the hoodie as a symbol

We discussed the Trayvon Martin case and similar profiling cases in detail with the students, and I even coordinated one full day photo shoot and photo editing session with the boys' group and the girls' group along with an additional Black History Month session and photo shoot for the boys. The students were asked to honor Trayvon's legacy in their own way, and what surfaced when analyzing their work was not only their clear understanding of the weight of Black bodies as text but also the simplicity of just having an affinity for hoodies. It was a popular style for their communities and their own youth culture.

Politics of the (Gendered) Black Body

Picture Day and Performance of Gender

One of the free dress days I had a chance to observe was Picture Day. I must note that only students who were participating in Picture Day were allowed to participate in free dress; all other students were in uniform. From morning into the afternoon, students from all grades carried their fee-filled envelopes into the designated classroom turned photo studio. A parent volunteer, Ms. Wilson, helped transition the students smoothly from the payment table to the photographer, Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones began with each student or pair (some students were allowed to take photos with their siblings) by asking them were they ready. A table holding a mirror, lotion, lip balm, and wipes was near Ms. Wilson after students paid in case students wanted to double check and/or do last-minute fix-ups. Once students were good to go, Ms. Wilson enthusiastically invited them to position themselves near the backdrop and gave them a few seconds to pose themselves any way they chose to. If they did not pose themselves, he posed them himself.

One of the first students I observed came in with his payment and a note from his mom to the photographer that Mr. Jones read aloud: "Let him pose how he wants, no girly poses please." This struck me immediately, for two reasons – the photos were supposed to be self-posed and more importantly, this student's mother wanted to be positive that her son did not cross any supposed societal gender lines, yet she was open to him making any other choices to represent himself beyond that. Also, because it was read aloud by Mr. Jones, her directions then became public in that space for others to judge or wonder what the source of the mother's emphasis was. Could she

have been trying to mute some of the messages her son may have made through his expressions in the past? Was she instead writing directly to the photographer because past photographers posed her son in a "girly" way? The reasons and questions abound, but what I extracted from this seemingly brief moment in time were the young man's non-verbal responses. He immediately looked embarrassed and then tried to shrug it off as he posed on his own and Mr. Jones approved and took his shot.

The bigger picture is this: The moment illustrated that on a day so exciting for most students as picture day, many students' images – from what they wore to how they posed – were being mediated not only by adults but by larger constructions of gender pushed in micro-aggressive ways as a means of shaping or maybe possibly constricting a young person's true self. Schools have long been considered by researchers as sites of reproduction in which race, class, and gender in this case are shaped by generally accepted societal norms. As early as preschool, some children are exposed to restriction or changes to their movements so that they are aware early on of what is acceptable in relation to gender-specific mannerisms (Martin, 1998; Thorne, 1993).

Mr. Jones operated student by student in the same way, with a smile gladly giving them the opportunity to make their own moves, but stepping in within seconds if a pose was not chosen. This resulted in further gender framing. Suggestions to girls were to pose with their head tilted to the side, fingers clasped underneath their chin, while standing on their tippy toes – one, two, or all three of these as separate options or in combination. Suggestions to boys were posing shoulder to shoulder, back to back, with arms crossed, also separately or combined. Girls came in for photos in bright pink,

purple, animal print outfits with glittered accessories. Boys came in wearing shirts and ties with jeans, collared polo style shirts, and a hoodie here and there that some did not want to remove but had to because it was clear parents sent them to school with an outfit in mind for picture day that did not include their hood.

A brother/sister pair came in and Mr. Jones asked, "How do you guys want to take it?" They gave each other a half hug, both still facing forward. "Back to back maybe?" said Mr. Wilson asking them to try another route, but the route was the same as the others before them – the brother's arms were crossed and the sister's hands were clasped under her chin as they posed back to back. They did not smile right away, so Mr. Jones joked "My camera breaks if you aren't smiling. Mom's going to be mad at me." Then they smiled.

There were three girls I noted throughout the day who broke the mold and came in ready for their shot, their own way. Each one was visibly excited about what they were wearing for picture day. The first girl chose to pose with her hands crossed in front of her, exactly like Mr. Jones directed many of the boys to shoot. Another girl had her hands on her hips and took her first shot with a serious face to match. Mr. Jones asked the last young woman I noted if she wanted to wear her purse in her photo, and she responded with a strong yes. It was clear that her personal styling included her purse for the day because it was the same color scheme as her outfit. Even though purses are not allowed at Tubman Academy, she made her style move anyway, unapologetically. Mr. Jones was just as supportive of these girls as he was of the students he directed more heavily.

What Black Girls Rock – Skirts and Shorts Issue

In a conversation about girls' clothing rules, Rachelle the lively rising seventh grader in the study's participant group stated:

"Kids are hyper when they are little kids. They jump up and down and don't leave their skirts down. You can't do what you wanna do in skirts. What's the point of wearing skirts, and then we hear on the speaker "don't show no skin we ain't already seen" but when we wearin' skirts you can see our legs, so why can't we wear shorts?"

Rachelle's first comment was referring to younger girls in grades K-5 at Tubman Academy. This stance in particular, "You can't do what you wanna do in skirts," and her last comment noting a common phrase used during school announcements warning girls to not show too much skin mirror broader notions generally enforced on girls, specifically Black girls, of what actions are considered to be "ladylike."   These notions parallel and further strengthen research done in urban schools, such as Edward W. Morris' "Tuck in that Shirt!" Race, Class, Gender, and Discipline in an Urban School" (2005) which outlines that to the detriment of countless Black girls, many are considered by their educators as "inadequately feminine", and this message can in turn be absorbed by students (p.44).

Here, we can see how Black girls are taught the hidden curriculum of what it means to be a so-called lady early on, particularly in urban public schools where restrictions on clothing are enforced with a much stronger set of measures than in suburban schools. The skirt/shorts issue for girls also places the girls under an intersectional gaze, a white gaze, a male gaze, and an upper class gaze. This falls

under a long tradition of the politics of the Black Female Body from Saartjie Baartman to the women of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee who chose denim over skirts (Ford, 2013; Willis, 2010). The team wrestled with this intersectional identity that is considered a reality Black girls begin to face early in their identity development. Yet, expectations of what is considered acceptable for school should include voices of the very students who represent these intersections. This should be done considered through the lens of Black Feminist Thought which calls for change to come from those affected by particular standards instead of the dominant forces that generally shape these standards (Collins, 1999). Rachelle's stance and her questions illustrated a clear tension that the team expressed in group discussions and later in their uniform policy.

The call for a closer look at the school's policy on not allowing girls to wear shorts came up again during the negotiation period after the student team presented their policy, to be discussed in detail in Chapter Five. The team decided that shorts would be allowed on uniform and free dress days in their plan as long as the shorts came to the knee. This was their way of working this request into their plan in a manner that would possibly still be accepted. Even with the "to-the-knee" understanding, Dr. Richards posed this particular concern by arguing, "When we say shorts on dress down days, we still have girls that come in wearing tight shorts. We still have girls that come in with them above the knee, and when we let one do it then the whole thing falls apart." By the "whole thing", Dr. Richard's went on to explain to the team that there needed to be some way of monitoring this particular issue and disciplining young ladies who do not follow the rules. Shorts are an issue because they are considered a possible distraction in the learning environment and considered inappropriate for school. Essentially, a

sense of control must be in place in order to maintain order at large. Yet, what would "order" look like in the hands of youth who design their own policies and come up with systems to hold each other accountable? This is what the student-designed uniform/dress code policy was grounded in.

Order and Control

Free Dress Meets Recess

Perceptions of free dress day from teachers and administrators seemed to vary. After lunch, on days with decent weather, I joined one of the administration leaders, Mama Houston, to monitor recess. We discussed what I was researching, and she was excited about my work. She also discussed her own programming and grant writing that she was working on for Tubman Academy related to alternative, indoor activities for recess during cold weather. This particular day was a free dress day, and once I mentioned my research area, she shared her opinion on free dress in particular. "Free dress days are the most rowdy days for the kids, and don't let the weather be nice too. It's just something about it." I humbly asked her why she thought this, and she mentioned that students possibly needed more outlets, which is when she transitioned into her grant-writing/alternative recess work. As we looked on to the school's recess area I began to try and decipher Mama Houston's statement. She was viewing the issue of "increased rowdiness" from her role as administrator and was looking at ways to address the issue, and as a researcher focused on fashion/style I immediately thought maybe the restricted opportunities for self-expression create an overflow of energy when these few opportunities do come, thus the perceived rowdy behavior.

Conclusion

This chapter outlines how Tubman Academy students navigated under various dominant gazes in relation to a larger context of the Black Body as a political space. I approached the organization of this data through a thematic analysis that uncovered a marriage between gaze theory and the hidden curriculum that possibly teaches the school's youth to operate a certain way. As illustrated, many students operate within the framework of the school's written dress code policy daily, and they also operate under just as many codes, if not more, that are unwritten. These codes have been shaped without consent of the very bodies, the very young minds they affect directly. Many school leaders seemed genuinely committed to what I considered a *protect through respect* ideology. They simply saw themselves as preparing students for a tougher world outside of school walls. Yet, in many ways, traditions based upon a long timeline of controlled Black bodies were replicated and became potentially detrimental to how the students saw themselves when they decoded these messages, either in the moment or as a seed of self-doubt/self-questioning that may blossom in the years to come. This shapes the notion of politics of respectability we see in urban schools, where "neatness" is equated to professionalism and thus forward movement and anything else, particularly on young, Black bodies, is uncivilized. Young, Black bodies are seen as problem, very much in the same way DuBois questioned his own existence under a dominant gaze over a century ago.

CHAPTER 4
"GOTTA STAY FLY":
The Politics of Adornment

But they act like we some hoodrats.

– Tiana, 7th Grade – Tubman Academy

You cannot have our cool-ass Black style…Black style is indestructible, baby, and abuse and oppression only make it fresher…Black style is not information or a combination of articles or labels – it is a feeling, like soul is a feeling…Black cool is an intelligence of the soul.

- Michaela (a)ngela Davis
Black Cool: One Thousand Streams of Blackness (2012 - Ed. Rebecca Walker)

The last three to four weeks of school at Tubman Academy were filled with opportunities to participate in Free Dress, generally more than other months. Free Dress is a day where students do not have to wear uniform to school. Generally, Free Dress days are reserved for days when there is a school dance or another type of celebration. As the year began to come to an end, there was a School Spirit Week with fashion/style themes each day, class shirt days for eighth graders to wear their class t-shirts, field day, and more casual field trips. For the most part, students must pay $1.00 to participate in Free Dress, and the money goes toward a fundraiser that may be running at the time, such as for field trips. Some Free Dress Days do not cost $1.00 but are reserved for ACE Students, young people that are rewarded by teachers for performing well academically and/or being social leaders in their classes.

On free dress days I began to see how students adorned themselves outside of the frame of their school's uniform/dress code policy. It also helped me to be more

keenly aware of how many of these choices were still worked into their fashions/styles on uniform days as a way of getting around the code. This chapter continues to reveal what I learned during observations and transitions into the findings uncovered during SWAG School, but this time through what I consider evidence of a "stylistic push-pull." Inspired by Smitherman's (2006) concept of "linguistic push-pull" as discussed in the Chapter Two, stylistic push-pull was my way of identifying and analyzing when students unapologetically made their own fashion/style moves and at other times carefully navigated dominant concepts, sometimes accepting frameworks that were not of their own design.

Levels to This: Free Dress vs. The Freedom to Dress

I had an opportunity to observe four separate Free Dress days over the course of my observation period. My goal on each day was to observe what students were choosing to wear when the standard uniform was not required. There was generally a sea of bright colors for both boys and girls – pinks and purples for the girls and bright greens, oranges, and blues for the boys. Gender specific coloring was prevalent in this way. Yet, what stood out was the lean toward bright colors, and more specifically the matching of these colors with alternate patterns; such as leopard with stripes or polka dots with checkered material. These fashion/style practices fell within the various components of style identified by O'Neal (1998) specifically including "affinity for 'high affect' colors" and "improvisations" (p.170).

School Dances

O'Neal's outlining of "improvisation" as a distinct component of African American style came to life when I observed one of Tubman Academy's spring school dances. It was held on May 30, 2014 making it one of the last dances for the school year and one of the last times the eighth grade class would get a chance to have fun as a group before transitioning out of middle school into high school. All school dances are held in the gym with a real DJ. Refreshments, like pizza and soda, are sold by students to students with the money gained from dance entrance, food sales and participation in free dress all earmarked for fundraising.

On this particular day, Mama Dawson asked me to act as her stand-in chaperone for the dance. Mama Dawson wore many hats as the school's guidance counselor, and that particular day the task of preparing school paperwork by a specific deadline and being one of the dance chaperones collided. So, I happily accepted the opportunity to volunteer and help out. In this role, using my notebook to document field notes as I had for class or lunch observations would have made me stand out, so I opted to take notes after the dance and focus on my main role as chaperone.

In comparison to other free dress days, the school dance was the most creative day by far in terms of self-styling. The eighth graders had just received their class shirts, and many young ladies decided to re-design their shirts in different ways. Some cut off their sleeves. Some took their shirts in to make them a smaller fit. Some shredded the bottom half of their shirts to create a tassel effect, which seemed to be the most popular design. To make sure they were in line with the "no mid-drift shirts allowed" dress code rule they wore t-shirts or tank tops under their class shirts if the

shirts were cut above a certain point. This was a way I saw girls work around this rule on previous free dress days. For the boys, there was not much of a departure from their normal free dress fashions of hoodies, jeans, basketball shorts, gym shoes, and fluorescent t-shirts. However, like the girls, hairstyles were freshly done – for boys, mohawks, flat tops, and standard fade haircuts were worn, and for girls, braids, braids, and more braids in various styles.

It seemed that free dress days for dances were the most high-impact in terms of style creativity and attention to detail for participating students. I attribute this to the added factors of performance and coolness that are much more central to the dance experience than a regular free dress day. For Black students in particular, any site can transform into an opportunity to perform coolness, as a reminder to those around that at any given time the room can become a stage in which the coolest holds the attention of the space (Rose, 1991 and 1994). Many students had a swag about them that was different than the average day – they were speaking through their style, their attitude, their poses - all based on their decisions (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). During the dance, I only counted five students in uniform vs. the range of 15-30 students who wore uniform on regular, non-dance free dress days. Instead of the five-minute break between classes in the hallways or a forty-minute lunch period being the main sites of visual exchange and free time, dance days opened up 60-90 minutes of not just free time to show their best moves, but a fashion show to display their favorite styles.

"Fee Dress Not Free Dress" - Student Critiques of Free Dress

During a focus group on free dress in the SWAG School program, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, the concept of free dress itself was a hot topic. I simply opened up the session by saying, "Okay, one goal for today is for us to talk about free dress," and I was met with an immediate "You mean 'fee dress' not free dress," from Valencia, one of my outspoken, veteran eighth graders rising to the ninth grade. The responses from Rachelle, the bubbly seventh grader, and Dionna, my other veteran eighth grader, soon followed. Rachelle hit Valencia with a "Preach girl." Dionna took it one step further questioning the payment structure by saying "I wonder what they do with the money, cause they shole ain't payin for no books."

Valencia explained further, "First of all, if it's free dress and we are paying our money we should be allowed to wear whatever we want." Rachelle followed up with an itemized list of additional costs, "You gotta pay for free dress, then pay for the dance, then pay for refreshments," with nods from the rest of the group it all circled back to their stance that free dress isn't "free" in more ways than one. Even though during my observations and pilot study students generally favored and looked forward to free dress, this came with heavy critiques of what is required to participate and questions about the need for and use of the money raised. In their words, "Free dress should be *free*."

Here, the girls identified a loophole and flaw in free dress. Free dress, in a sense came at a cost. For the five students I noted in uniform at the school dance discussed above and the average of 15-30 students in uniform on other free dress days, according to Valencia there was a strong possibility they could not participate in free dress

because they could not pay the fee. This in effect contributed to the very socio-economic fault lines uniform/dress code policies in urban schools are supposed to level out (Holloman et al, 1996; La Pointe, et al, 2003). Even for those students who could afford to pay the $1.00 fee, the major question posed by these three young co-researchers was why? Especially when as Dionna pointed out in such a sophisticated way, there seemed to be real issues that their $1.00 was not fixing – like larger systemic issues their school faced down to the very books on their desk, or rather the lack thereof, on uniform days and free dress days alike.

Loren Siegal, Director of the Public Education Department of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) stance on this issue supports Dionna's position directly. In an ACLU policy document on the subject of uniform policies in urban schools, Siegal frames the larger problems:

> The debate over uniforms is a diversion," Siegal writes in an ACLU policy paper on the subject. "Attractive, modern and safe school buildings, small class sizes, schools with well-stocked libraries, new computers and an array of elective courses like music, drama and art--those are the kinds of changes that would produce long-lasting and dramatic improvements in student deportment and achievement." (White, 2000, para. 35)

Distractions from real issues of falling paint, low-tech rooms, and decreased extra-curricular activities abound in urban schools, and were certainly present in Tubman Academy. By operating under the "fee dress" model, not only are some students placed on the margins, but the potential message to many students is that fundraising by them is required to access to better tools and other needs for their school. While sometimes

the funds were used for grade activities, many times the students expressed they had no idea where the funds were going. This communication disconnect alone between students and faculty/staff is one that can be strengthened to help bring about collective change with students and adults as co-stakeholders instead of struggling along the hierarchy of power and the politics of adornment choices and beyond.

SWAG School

Just less than one month after the last school dance, the regular school year ended and summer school began. SWAG School ran at Tubman Academy for five weeks during the summer school session, June 24 – July 31, 2014. The program was held every Tuesday and Wednesday from 1:15-2:45pm with two additional days added at the end of the program to provide more time for the student team members to finish up their uniform policy recommendation plan and practice their presentation to deliver to the school's principal and lead guidance counselor.

The program was based on the following curriculum schedule:

Table 4: SWAG School Curriculum Schedule

Session 1	*Introduction to the Program*
	In Session One - students will:
	  o Identify their own goals for the program and incorporate these goals into the outlined objectives of the program
	  o Decide and agree upon their role and responsibilities in the program as well as how the existing format for the sessions will progress
	  o Work on developing stronger bonds as teammates through teambuilding exercises
	  o Get to know the program coordinator

Session 2	*Introduction to Fashion as a Form of Literacy*
	In Session Two – students will:
	  o Discuss literacy, what it means to be critical, and connections to fashion
	  o Uncover the key elements of fashion as a form of critical literacy

Table 4 (cont'd)

Session 3	*What's my SWAG? – Fashion as a Form of Literacy Part 2*
	 In Session Three – students will:
	     o Develop a firmer grasp of fashion/style as a literacy
	     o Gain a firmer sense of fashion in relation to black culture over time
	     o Identify their own fashion senses – past and present
	     o Overview useful soft skills for future program goals

Session 4	*What's the code? Current Views on Dress Code & Uniform Policy*
	 In Session 4 – students will:
	     o Learn S.W.A.G. Critical Analysis Strategy
	     o Analyze articles concerning dress code/uniform policy using S.W.A.G.
	     o Participate in a debate using issues discussed

Session 5	*What's our school's SWAG? Student Dress Code Development – Part 1*
	 In Session 5 – students will:
	     o Review their school and district's existing dress code/uniform policy
	     o Discuss possible strategies and ideas for their student-developed policy
	     o Create a work plan as a team to outline next steps to accomplish their goals

Session 6	*Make it Happen! Student Dress Code Development – Part 2*
	 In Session 6 – students will:
	     o Be introduced to various tools and skills that will be useful in making their goals happen
	     o Work, work, work to begin plugging in information into a strategic plan template

Session 7	*Now that's fly! Student Dress Code Development – Part 3*
	 In Session 7 – students will:
	     o Continue working on the student-designed dress code/uniform policy plan
	     o Begin the editing process

Session 8	*Turn our SWAG on! Student Dress Code – Presentation Prep*
	 In Session 8 – students will:
	     o Make final edits to the plan by peer editing
	     o Practice presenting the plan presentation

Session 9	*Wrap it up! Wrap-Up Session*
	 In Session 9 – students will:
	     o Use extra practice time to tie up loose ends for the presentation
	     o Discuss experiences in the program, closing thoughts, and takeaways

It is necessary to note that while these were the curriculum goals planned for the student team in advance, it was also very important to adjust various objectives and plans and remain open to the ideas, opinions, and needs of the students. Some of

these shifts included more time in the computer lab instead of a traditional classroom space to develop new uniform ideas suggested by the students.   It also involved switching debate activities from a traditional affirmative/negative model to more of a group discussion and/or open conversation to fit the group size on any particular day.

Beginning Sessions

The first two sessions of SWAG School began with icebreaking and teambuilding activities to help build comradery between both the students and myself as the program facilitator.   From the beginning, I made sure to emphasize that group would be operating as a planning team. I described the student team as comparable to a team of experts that were hired to develop a specific strategy to address a particular issue, because this was in fact what they were doing, offering a plan as experts of what was going on in their own school with regard to fashion/style and uniform.

In an early activity in Session One, after teambuilding, I asked the students to define what "swag" means to them. I did this for a few reasons. One reason is because "swag" as discussed in Chapter Two is a pop culture/Black culture/youth culture term, and like many terms it may be relevant to the students' lives today and then be replaced by another word tomorrow. Thus, if they decided "swag" was outdated then they had the power, as a team, to change the title of the program in Session One to include more relevant language. I also wanted to be sure to have their input on how they define "swag" in their own words without getting too far into the program with elements that might shift their original definition(s). The group agreed that "swag" was still a relevant term and did not want to change the name of the program. However, to school me, they

also offered another term used to describe fashionable/stylish – "crispy" as in "That outfit he wearin' is crispy."   When asked in a group discussion to define "swag," I recorded their responses to the prompt "Someone who has swag is…" on the board:

- Stylin
- Fly
- Stylin n' Profilin
- Fashionable
- Swagged Out
- Crispy

Each of these words were used by the group to describe and define "swag" and also proved useful for me to know moving forward as a means of identifying the usage of these terms in relation to our discussions of fashion/style along with usage in their interviews program activities/artifacts. Their definitions also highlighted how "swag" and the will to adorn themselves on uniform and free dress days was beyond just the brands and trends they soon identified in a later activity. The group emphasized that swag and the other synonyms for swag that they offered was more so about the arrangement of various items, especially as a means of standing out on one hand but also building community and making the same choices as their peers on the other hand. Michaela (a)ngela Davis's quote included in this chapter's epigraph speaks to this very point. The well-known image activist states, "Black style is not information or a combination of articles or labels – it is a feeling, like soul is a feeling…Black cool is an intelligence of the soul," (Davis, p. 46, 2012). Part of this "intelligence of the soul" was evident in just how fluid the conversation was between the program participants agreed upon definitions of swag and what it meant to be "crispy" and "fly" and "stylin".

Black English and Black Style

It is also important to note that each of the words used as synonyms of "swag" were evidence of the students' use of African American Language (AAL), sometimes referred to as Ebonics or Black English. Students used AAL as their primary language of choice throughout the program. As previous studies have shown, students generally have an understanding of when and where AAL usage is acceptable based upon schooling traditions of teaching students that AAL is improper English (Alim, 2005; Kirkland, 2011; Kirkland & Jackson 2008, 2009; Paris, 2011; Smitherman, 2006). However, because SWAG School was an after school program they seemed to feel more comfortable speaking AAL freely. Beyond this though, their use of AAL when defining "swag" signaled something else, something much more connected to Davis' quote above about Black style being a feeling, something that comes natural. The students chose words that not only used the rules of AAL but also aligned with the tradition of creating new words with meanings only understood by those in their language community. This seemed to signal that for them Black fashion/style is best described with Black English/AAL. Essentially, what better way to describe their own style than by using their own language? It just worked best.

Key Concepts – Fashion/Style as Text

Session Two and Session Three's major focus rested on further discussions of fashion/style in relationship to literacy and critical literacy. Having attended the school's "Literacy Night" event in April early on during my observation period, I had a general idea of how the school defined literacy as the ability to read and write, with a specific

focus on reading books necessary for grasping Common Core concepts and preparing for annual standardized testing. So, when I asked my SWAG School group "Can anyone tell me what literacy means?" the answers were similar. Jason, a non-focal but active participant before leaving summer school for attendance reasons, responded with "It means to read and write." From there the group agreed with Jason, and I began to push further:

Hayes:	…to read and write what?
Jason:	To read books and write paragraphs I guess.
Hayes:	Okay, okay, cool. Can we read and write anything else y'all?
Rachelle:	Huh? Whatchu mean?
Hayes:	When we read and write, we use language to read and write, right?
Group:	Right. (some nods)
Hayes:	So, can our fashion or style be a language? Does what we wear possibly send a message to others?
Tiana:	Um, yeah maybe.
Hayes:	Like what? Can anyone give me example?
Jason:	Like, if you have a suit on that means you professional.
Rachelle:	Or, wearing uniform means you in school.

I affirmed their examples, and then we continued on through other concepts, outlining "fashion" as the actual components or trends a person puts together from clothing to hair to piercings and "style" as the arrangement of these components chosen by the wearer. I then discussed with the group what it means to be "critical." The general understanding from the students at first was that to be critical meant to have a negative opinion about someone or something. However, we took time to discuss and broaden this as a group to mean taking time to consider different causes and effects surrounding a particular subject, what our knowledge and opinions may be, and how we can challenge what is considered a standard within a larger system.

Discussing what it means to be "critical" was in fact critical. According to Common Core Standards, the call for critical thinking is generally associated with English Language Arts, or at the very least associated with state-mandated testing, which calls for extraction of facts from a particular text (CoreStandards.Org, 2010). However, students think critically on a daily basis, and it was important to discuss the power of being critical as a vehicle or set of glasses that can help them identify the ways they look at the world differently from others. I wanted to be sure to get their feedback on the exercises to come by uncovering early on how each student was already taking a critical stance on what they wore and why they wore it or what they were being told to wear and how they felt, plus more.

What I See and What They See – i-collage Activity

During Session Three, I asked the group to participate in an activity I called "i-Collage." For this activity I asked students to choose any images or words of their choice from magazines I brought in. Each student was given a large sheet of construction paper and asked to draw a line down the center. On one side of the paper, they were asked to place images and words they felt represent their own fashion and what messages they hope to communicate with their fashion/style. On the other side of the paper, they placed images and words that expressed how they feel teachers, administrators, and society at large may read their fashion/style and how they feel they may be judged – good or bad.

Two collages, Tiana's and Rachelle's, exhibited similar and also different takes on the activity, yet both seemed to clearly illustrate their thoughts on the project's topic.

For Tiana, the right side of her collage displayed images and words connected to how she views herself. A photo of Kelly Rowland bedazzled with sequins and wearing a fur vest and chunky necklace would seemingly stand out the most as one of Tiana's focal points along with the other choices of clothing she chose to include. However, what really stood out is the way she framed these elements with the following words she cut from the magazines: *Special Effects, Beauty, Inspired, Lone Star,* and *Make Your Voice Heard.* Each of these were separate elements, but combined together, especially with how Tiana framed the words "Subtle Racism: How You Can Fight Back" above by "Beauty" and below by "Inspired," really painted a portrait together. Through her word choice(s), Tiana identified a fashion/style as a tool for expression, one that in her eyes was unique and may set her apart, but she was okay with that because it was/is a way to speak and possibly push against other messages and meanings that others may have been placing upon her.

Figure 4: Tiana's i-collage

The other half of Tiana's collage made this message loud and clear. An image of a young woman with a white shirt and black skirt, similar to Tubman Academy's existing

uniform excluding the green tights, was framed by the words "your hair, your style, your way" and "stop the profiling." In a separate interview, Tiana explained she chose "stop the profiling" because "people judge you by your style, some people judge you by your style not the way you act. So, they need to stop the profiling." She also discussed that she paired this with "your hair, your style, your way" because fashion/style should be a personal decision. By connecting it with the need to stop categorizing and judging one another, Tiana wanted to speak against possible ways she may have been profiled in the past or may be profiled in the future for just being herself.

Through grounded coding analysis of Tiana's collage, I found that she was entering into a clear conversation against the dominant narrative concerning adornment politics, specifically as it relates to her experiences with her fashion/style in an urban school. Very much in the spirit of Critical Race Theory's concept of counter-narrative, her collage spoke back to the deficit theories urban uniform policies are based on. In her words the very profiles that categorized her and her peers as violent, gang-associated, prone to thievery, and likely to bully others for not having certain clothing brands (Holloman et al, 1996; LaPoint, 2003) were flawed. Her collage said see me for who I am, not who you think I am.

Rachelle mentioned early on during the activity that the side illustrating her style, titled "THIS IS ME", would be focused more on hair than clothing. She included four clothing images, but the majority of the images featured hairstyles from bright pink highlights placed front and center to short haircuts to a smaller collage of four distinct hairstyle options for Black women. Unlike Tiana, Rachelle decided to not include wording from the magazines to tell her fashion/style story, yet the story was still very

clear. It was clear because as a standalone, Rachelle's "THIS IS ME" side may not send the full message she was trying to convey, but Rachelle's pairing with the handwritten theme "Dress for Success" quickly said so much in just three words.

Figure 5: Rachelle's i-collage

While I observed the group working during this activity, Rachelle explained to me that she wanted to focus on the message that her teachers and other adults told her and her peers regularly. This message was in that "In order to succeed one must dress the part." In Rachelle's eyes, Janelle Monae, displayed three times on her collage, embodied "dress for success" because her professional black and white style motif and pinned up hair were considered classic and put together. Janelle Monae and another fashion image also featured a black tie and blazer. Monae's formal clothing plus the image of a woman standing in front of a computer (even though she breaks the black and white, strict color scheme with an orange dress and an afro) topped off Rachelle's illustrated understanding of what she feels adults consider the fashion/style choices

needed to make it in life. The more formal nature of Rachelle's "dress for success" side would be accepted in the hallways of Tubman Academy before the pink hair highlights shown on her "THIS IS ME" side according to the school's dress code. However, Rachelle did not seem to have a problem with having to operate in both fashion/style modes. She expressed that the school is "just tryin' to prepare us for our future…yeah the uniform is borin' but maybe cause its so serious people will take us more serious."

Like Tiana, Rachelle made a critical, valid point except it was on the other end of the spectrum. It was important for me to express to the students early on that SWAG School was not an anti-uniform program. It was a pro-student choice program designed to create changes that could come through their own hands. Rachelle's collage spoke to a politics of adornment that honored a person's own personal style but also understood that for the students of Tubman Academy, this freedom can sometimes come at a cost. She understood the circumstances her and her peers were placed under with a uniform policy developed by well-intentioned adults. These adults, like most generations prior, categorized what they considered appropriate fashion/style as tools of adornment for forward movement. Rachelle's collage was in direct conversation with age old tensions such as the adornment politics of Sunday's best of the Civil Rights Movement to the all-black everything of the Black Panther Party, each making distinct moves to send a distinct message (Ford, 2013; Ogbar, 2004). Her collage continued in a timeline of the stylistic push-pull of it all.

So, while on one hand Tiana's collage was trying to push back on judgments placed upon her and requests, or better yet demands, that profiling stop, specifically adults profiling youth, Rachelle's collage also addressed adults but in a different way,

still very much a counter-narrative in its own right as well. Her message in some ways understood profiling but in a different way - as a means of dressing the part on the path to success. More specifically, it fit within the idea that if people judge you in a positive way based on your fashion/style they would consider you to be qualified academically, professionally, or in whatever area they are using to connect what one is donning to what one can do.

Uniform Policy Analysis – Existing Policy

The central component of Session Five was creating an opportunity for the student team to review their school's existing uniform policy. Each student received one copy of the policy below, and they were asked to underline and/or highlight sections of the document that they disagreed with, felt should not be included in their new policy, or felt they found a way to maneuver around in the current policy. They analyzed the policy using Critical Discourse Analysis, pinpointing what the document was saying beyond the words simply printed on the page.

Figure 6: Tubman Academy's 2013-2014 Uniform/Dress Code Policy

Dear Parent/Guardian:

On January 9, 1990, the _____ Board of Education approved a resolution to establish a Dress Code procedure at every school. Each school has its own dress code policy that has been established by the staff, parent/guardians and students. The following guidelines have been established at _____ insure proper dress procedures are followed. Please read the following guidelines and discuss with your child(ren) today.

-] _____ Academy's dress code still remains **WHITE BLOUSE OR SHIRT, NAVY BLUE PANTS, SKIRTS, JUMPER, NAVY BLUE TIES, BLACK LEATHER SHOES (WITH HARD SOLES), AND NAVY SWEATERS ARE ACCEPTABLE FOR STUDENTS TO WEAR WITH UNIFORMS. GIRLS IN LOWER GRADES (PK-8) MAY NOT WEAR PANTS.**
- Dress students properly for the weather. Weather permitting; students will go outside daily at lunch.
- Children should wear shoes and socks instead of slides or mules because we go on the playground during lunch and gym when weather permits. In addition, shoes such as slides and flip-flops can be dangerous on the stairs. Girls may wear tights or stockings.
- Skirts and jumpers should be worn at or below the knee only.
- Tank tops, halter-tops and blouses that expose the stomach or waist are not acceptable.
- Belts are to be worn on pants. Sagging pants without a belt are not acceptable.
- Hats are not to be worn while inside the building. Hats, scarves, and wave caps may not be worn in the building.
- Coats are not to be worn while inside the building.
- Gang related clothing is not acceptable.
- Children should not bring cell phones and/or electronic devices, any type of cards, lipstick, perfume', make-up, purses, etc.
- Clean net hairstyles. Children may not wear gold jewelry. Earrings may be worn by girls only! No large hoop earrings for safety reasons.

Any student found in violation of these guidelines will be sent to the Office to notify parents immediately. Students wearing the proper uniform will be sent home to change and/or be suspended, and the student will not be allowed to return to school until he/she is in compliance with the _____ uniform policy. Your support and cooperation is greatly appreciated in this matter. If you have any questions or concerns, please cal

Educationally Yours,
                    Principal

Figure 7: Tubman Academy's 2013-2014 Uniform/Dress Code Policy – cont.

STUDENT UNIFORM DRESS POLICY

Girls
- Navy Blue Skirt or Jumper
- Navy Blue Pants *(Grades 6th-8th ONLY)*
- White Oxford Button-Down Blouse *(must be tucked in)*
- Navy Blue Cross Tie *(worn properly at the neck)*
- Black Leather Shoes *(Hard Soles)*
- No Large Hanging Jewelry or Earrings *(1-inch hoops or smaller)*
- Navy Blue Uniform Sweaters or Vest *(no hooded sweaters or sweatshirts)*

Boys
- Navy Blue Pants
- White Oxford Button-Down Shirt *(must be tucked in)*
- Solid Navy Blue Tie *(worn properly at the neck)*
- Black Leather Shoes *(Hard Soles)*
- No Earrings or Jewelry
- Belts **MUST** be visibly worn and seen *(no sagging pants)*

NOTE:
- Students are allowed to wear short sleeved oxford shirts and/or blouses
- Students are not allowed to wear shorts, skorts or tank tops
- Students are not allowed to wear brown or other colored shoes
- Students are not allowed to wear blue jeans or other colored jeans
- Students are not allowed to wear other colored clothing, i.e., orange, yellow, purple, etc.
- Students are not allowed to wear gym shoes unless they are in gym class
- Students are not allowed to wear boots during school; they must change into regulation school shoes after arriving to school

NO EXCEPTIONS!!!
Violators will be reprimanded accordingly.

Figure 8: 2013-2014 Tubman Academy Uniform

I engaged the team in a focus group analysis surrounding what they underlined/highlighted, and the following conversation took place. The discussion primarily covered their opinions of and experiences with the uniform policy as it stood. This began with the skirt requirement for K-5th grade and continued through other areas which led to a question from me: "Do you feel there are more rules for girls?" Valencia responded immediately – "Yeah, they more strict on us. Why do our shirts have to be tucked in? We ain't boys." This gender layer was discussed in Chapter Three as the call for Black girls to be "ladylike." Yet, later in the program the boys and girls agreed that there was a general balance between the number of restrictions girls faced vs. boys.

After looking over the earring rules for both boys and girls, the discussion heightened even more.

Valencia:	First of all, if they mother get they ears pierced then they should be able to wear what they want to wear.
Dionna:	Who wears one-inch hoops? [regarding earring rules for girls]
Hayes:	What about the area listing no large hoops due to safety reasons?
Tiana:	But they act like we some hoodrats.
Rachelle:	When you fight you supposed to take out yo' earrings out. Everybody say wait a minute let me take my earrings out and put my hair in a bun. You take off anything that can get pulled or get you hurt.
Valencia:	I think it's the teachers, they like "Well it happened to me back in the day, so we should say this."
Rachelle:	We have more common sense, and its common sense to get ready before you fight.
Tiana:	Not all people have common sense.

This portion of the discussion touches on a few key areas. First, Valencia offered the opinion that schools should consider the wishes of parents/guardians when it comes to boys having their ears pierced. This is a sensitive subject indeed, because of the influence of Hip Hop fashion/style it is not uncommon to see boys with their ears adorned with earrings as early as elementary school. For Valencia, this came down to

parent's/student's choice and not the school's choice over what students were allowed to wear permanently on their bodies.

Dionna shifted the topic to the earring rules for girls and this leads to another issue which I asked the group about – safety. The girls quickly addressed fighting and Tiana pushed back by separating herself and her schoolmates from what she felt the adults in the school may categorize them as "hoodrats" at times by enforcing this rule. This pushes back again on the deficit orientation, particularly racist/classist orientation, society has with Black youth in urban areas. Rachelle then provided a play by play of what is supposed to happen if a girl is about to fight someone to protect themselves. Removing one's earrings is common sense to the girls signaling a community understanding. Valencia suggested that overall, it seems the rules that make up the school's policies are a result of experiences educators may have had before. This was a critical suggestion because in fact, generally urban district uniform policies are reactive in nature and based upon a hybrid of templates used by other schools along with regular shifts to directly address specific issues (Holloman et al, 1996; LaPointe et al, 2003; Skiba, 2000). It seems that the group in this discussion and in other instances picked up on this pattern based upon their own experiences. Yet, Tiana countered Rachelle's point on common sense by stating that common sense, particularly in the context of a physical fight, is not a given for all students. Thus, while she did not agree with the policy against certain types of earrings she made sure to note that there is room for error when it comes to safety.

The final portion of the group discussion became the building blocks for the new uniform policy the students began to work on in the sessions to follow:

Tiana:	They shouldn't worry about our clothes; they should worry about what they teaching.
Valencia:	Talking about they have a dress code too, but they don't.
Tiffany:	I don't understand why we need uniforms.
Rachelle:	Cause we need to look like we are one. We can't look like we just all over the place.
Tiana:	But we not.
Rachelle:	Cause we not gon' look like a school if we just wear what we want to wear.
Tiana:	It shouldn't matter if we look like a school, as long as they teaching us.
Rachelle:	It should that's the point of a school. It's a uniform school.
Valencia:	White people don't wear uniforms. Ooooooh I did not just say that. [grins]
Dionna:	White people *don't* have to wear uniform. You should be able to keep an eye on your students regardless of the fact, so you should be able to see us.
Rachelle:	She [Tiffany] sayin' we should be able to wear whatever we want, but I understand why we a uniform school, so we can be united in a way. I understand I agree with her, but we should still look like a school at least.

The girls took clear stances in this section of the discussion. Tiana suggested the main focus of school should be teaching, not what students were choosing to wear on their bodies. Valencia followed up by offering dissatisfaction in the fact that teachers have mentioned to students that they have a dress code policy too, but she is not buying it.

Some U.S. schools have implemented uniforms for teachers similar to what their students are required to wear, such as the Kearney Elementary School did in the Philadelphia Public School System, and a handful of other schools across the country, as a means of creating a sense of community and likeness with their students (Melendez, 2002). However, many teacher unions have voted down teacher uniforms, rolling along the thought lines of one San Francisco public school educator who stated "I didn't wear blue plaid as a student, and I don't intend to begin now," as her school voted down a teacher uniform proposal (Melendez, 2002, para.14). This point seemed to

resonate with the rest of the group as a statement from teachers to students often, that students are not the only ones abiding by fashion/style rules possibly as means of letting students know that it is simply a necessary part of the school's structure or ties into the message of "Dress for Success" as Rachelle previously illustrated on her collage. To them, there was a clear difference between the expectations teachers were asked to abide by when it came to adornment and the mandates students were required to follow or else possibly face punishment.

The "dress for success" mantra could be considered a message that countless Black students hear and adopt as part of their own critical race achievement ideologies, an integral part of their educational process (Carter Andrews, 2008). Like Rachelle, students are taught to associates a person's level of success with their attire early on, and though pride in clothing is not a negative quality, this simple binary without a critical look into its relationship with the perceived forward movement of Black people, or lack thereof, is problematic. It is especially problematic in the face of white dominant standards of what is considered respectable clothing and the various consequences for not falling in line with this system of power and control.

Tiana and Rachelle, fitting almost exactly into the messages of their collages, began to debate the topic again but this time through a vibrant dialogue with their peers. Tiana stood by her point that teaching is central to school, not what students wear, and Rachelle offered understanding for the need for uniform as a means of exhibiting unity and the need to "look like a school." Here, even though Rachelle agreed with Tiana in the end on the point of the desire to wear anything, it does not negate her stance on the function of uniform in the school.

Valencia and Dionna brought race directly into the discussion for the first time in the program. Although, their dialogue was brief, it brought up a deeper issue of the experiences of white students vs. Black students. Excluding parochial and some private schools, uniforms are much more largely enforced in urban school districts, particularly in predominantly Black and Latino schools with the largest shift into strict uniform policy beginning in 1996 after the release of the U.S. Department of Education's manual on policy implementation. The manual highly recommends uniforms as "one positive and creative way to reduce discipline problems and increase school safety" (U.S. Department of Education, 1996, p.1). Yet, "problems" and "safety" seem to be issues based upon a deficit orientation of Black and Latino students (DaCosta, 2006; Holloman et al, 1996; LaPointe et al, 2003). Valencia and Dionna recognized that there are differences between their schooling experience when it comes to the choices they make of what is worn on their bodies that white students in other schools may not have to face. Their definitive stance may not represent the number of white students in parochial and private schools that do have to wear uniform, but the passion of the conversation represented that they were standing strong in their own feelings of difference within a larger societal institution and framework.

Conclusion

Overall, the dialogue above and the findings that preceded it exhibit what may be a surprise to some educators and researchers, that there are varied student opinions on uniforms, specifically with Tiana and Rachelle's stances as examples. This stylistic push-pull as evidenced within the team also seemed to be revealed as something each participant wrestled with at some point during the summer program, and arguably as

part of life in general. Deliberate moves with adornment are being made by students from the point of getting dressed in the morning to walking into the school doors until they leave those same doors and wake up to do it all again the next day. The thematic analysis of student responses helped identify their personal stances on their own politics of adornment. The textual analysis of their artifacts helped provide a look into how some personal stances on fashion/style as text may have been constructed by the students and the students alone, while others may have been shaped by a larger, more dominant narrative concerning what is appropriate for school. What resulted from this push-pull was the participants' layered approach to brainstorming options for the uniform policy as the group began to lay out their plan in the sessions that followed.

CHAPTER 5
"MY SCHOOL BUS IS MY LIMO":
The Politics of Choice

Nowadays everybody on the same swag
But in the school, they make you wear the same thing
But they ain't got no flavor, they like some celery
But swag ain't what you wear, swag is a mentality
So I don't care what I'm wearing, no matter what my swagger right
I could come to school in my long johns and my swag would still be tight…

- Fly Guy Carter (NSJ Crew) – Khaki Pants

Chapter Three outlined the influence of gaze on the politics of the Black body and how it may contribute to a hidden curriculum on fashion/style being taught to Black students. Chapter Four revealed instances where students at Tubman Academy showed points of "stylistic-push pull" when it came to their own politics of adornment - possibly meshing their own personal stances with those of adults and a dominant narrative at large, knowingly and unknowingly. This chapter breaks down the choices students made on their own when it came to the development of their own uniform/dress code policy. It pinpoints the politics of these choices within the structure of their school's existing environment, one that was not immediately conducive to the changes they so desired. Yet, it concludes with the understanding that choice, through the lens of the power that critical literacy brings with students being able to construct and deconstruct the reading and writing of their own lives, that choice and the process of choosing is sometimes just as rewarding as the implementation of the freedom these choices provide. This holds true in spaces that are traditionally void of student thought, action, and change.

How Students Rewrote the Uniform Policy

It is important to outline the various ways students rewrote the existing uniform policy as a way of understanding the decisions they made for their own policy which will be discussed later in this chapter. Beyond wearing untucked shirts, hoodies, and finding ways to wear mid-drift shirts as previously outlined in Chapters Three and Four, there were many different ways that students worked around the policy on a daily basis.

Table 5: Student Rewrites of Uniform/Dress Code Policy

Uniform Policy Rule	Student Rewrite (via daily fashion/style choices)
Girls may wear tights or stockings.	Since the color of tights/stockings is not specified, girls used this as a loophole to wear bright colored and/or patterned tights/stockings.
Skirts and jumpers should be worn at or below the knee only.	Simply put, while most girls abided by this rule on uniform days, it was not always followed on free-dress days, and I did not see any reprimands related to this rule.
Belts are to be worn on pants.	Both boys and girls used this requirement to their advantage by wearing different colored or patterned belts.
Hats are not to be worn inside the building. Hats, scarves, and wave caps may not be worn in the building.	On free dress days and uniform days, boys would carry their caps with them to lunch and put them on as soon as recess began. Even though the time was limited, being able to wear hats in front of their peers seemed to be important. For girls, even though wearing hats indoors was not allowed, on free dress days I observed some girls wearing hats without being told to remove them by school officials, unlike boys who were always asked to take their hats off. Scarves were even less restricted, especially when worn by girls as a headband or bow as a means of disguising that the fabric could be a full scarf.
Coats are not to be worn while inside the	Coats were needed after lunch to participate in recess, so the procedure was students brought their coats with them to lunch. Many times, students began wearing their coats and/or hoodies during lunch, as a way of adding to their attire for the day. Because recess

Table 5 (cont'd)

building.	immediately followed lunch, there were few requests by school officials asking students to take off their coats while inside of the building.
Gang related clothing is not acceptable.	Bandanas, in any color, were considered as the main form of gang paraphernalia. However, many girls easily went through the day undetected wearing bandanas folded and worn as headbands, especially if they were not the traditional gang-related colors, such as pink, purple, or powder blue.
Children should not bring cell phones and/or electronic devices, any types of cards, lipstick, perfume, make-up, purses, etc.	I observed students with each of these items (except for cards.) Cell phones, tablets, netbooks, were all part of the lunch experience. I observed one specific exchange between eighth grade girls. Girl A: Let me see your phone. Girl B: You gon' like all my pictures? So, not only did these students and many others have phones, this exchange and my regular observations over a period of months showed that phones were a regular part of the student experience, and that social media was part of their actual social life during lunch. For students that did not have an electronic device, they looked on with their friends. At times, school officials would remind students to "get off those phones," but I never observed these devices being confiscated. Make-up was generally limited to lip-gloss and was carried easily in pockets and purses without restriction. Purses were prevalent for girls, specifically cross-body, one-strap bags no larger than an 8.5x11 sheet of paper.

Virtually, each of these areas went undetected and un-objected by school officials. In many ways what I was observing and documenting was the students' sub-uniform policy, the unwritten but heavily understood way of re-working the rules to fit their needs. They already had a plan in place, a policy in motion, and it was alive and well. Yet, because the students were so creative and distinct in the various findings discussed, I imagined that the opportunities to channel this energy into a plan of their own may also work in their favor.

Early Stages of Plan Development

SWAG School shifted to a plan development focus from Session Five onward. The group was encouraged to remember that they were operating as a team, and as a team they would present a final uniform policy recommendation plan to Tubman Academy's administration. I wanted to be sure to continue to set the tone that their opinions and ideas mattered and that there was no better group of consultants on their school's uniform policy than the very students wearing it.

With this in mind, the first activity directly related to plan development was called "Stick with It Brainstorming." Each student was given their own set of colored sticky notes and a pencil. The bulletin boards in our classroom were divided into sections based on a particular heading. Students were asked to record any and everything that came to mind and place them under the following sections: My Fashion, Favorite Trends, What I Like About the Uniform, What I Dislike About the Uniform, and Uniform Ideas.

Figure 9: Stick with It Brainstorming Activity – Student Responses

This activity helped the team inventory their opinions and ideas in a way that also allowed them to view and discuss their teammates thoughts. The responses in each area below helped frame the beginning components of their plan. It is important to note that although the five focal participants were young ladies, there were young men involved in the beginning brainstorming activities, including this session.

Table 6: Student Inventory of Responses to Fashion/Style Topics

Area Heading	Responses
My Fashion	Glasses, old fashion style, rainbow [colors], bangs, Jordans, Shorts, high wasted shorts, acid wash jeans, Coach Purses, one earring, cute belts, hats, shorts with gum shoes, boots with jeans, "dope" shirts *popular word for fashionable*, side purses, mismatching earrings, navy
Favorite Trends	Baby Phat, Levi's, True Religion, Jordans, Hello Kitty, Necklaces, Skinny Jeans, Rocawear, Adidas, Nike, graffiti shirts, Converse Allstars, "anything"
What I like about the uniform	Free Dress (recorded three separate times)
What I don't like about the uniform	Shirts, tie, uniform (all together), the plan, colors, shoes, ugly color pants
Uniform Ideas	any bandana, black, red, or white jeans or leggings, any shoes, all colored shirts with a collar, polo shirts, black jeans, any jewelry, any types of hats, different suspenders, no ties, blue jeans, bows, glasses

Two things stood out from their responses. Findings from my 2012 pilot study conducted with young men from Tubman Academy revealed overwhelmingly that "free dress" was the central component of the existing school policies that the students favored. The same holds true for students expressing their views two years later. Also, students disliked the ties, shirts, and pants they were required to wear. Another linked finding is the repeat emergence of "True Religion" jeans and polo style as favored

clothing. With the pilot study group being all male, and the brainstorming group for SWAG School being predominantly female, this helped connect the dots between both groups and reveal that the pulse of the school was still understood and agreed upon by the students in attendance two full academic years later and across gender.

Another key finding I noted was the passion and excitement the team had when participating in this activity. The room was abuzz and the sticky note model allowed students to get up and move around the room, see other responses, discuss, and most importantly voice their opinions on a topic central to their lives. The activity was a clear illustration of one of the central problems facing uniform policy implementation across the U.S., one that many administrators and districts are steamrolling past – students are not involved in this part of their educational experience at all:

> The Department of Education manual focuses on the positive aspects of school uniforms with regard to safety and places strong emphasis on getting parents on board with the plan to adopt a uniform policy, from creation to implementation. The message is to include parents in order to promote cooperation with the policy and to ensure a smooth transition…The same standard does not seem to hold true for students. Officials have tended to omit youths from decision-making, as if the latter were walls idly waiting to be decorated. (DaCosta, 2006, p. 50)

One of the central research questions of this study was "How are students possibly operating understandings of both body and adornment, particularly within the framework of Critical Literacy, if/when given the opportunity to make their own fashion/style choices in uniform/dress code policy?" When given the opportunity to explore their own choices, the opportunity to fill a wide gap that is void of student input in policy is also opened. As the students decorated the walls with their responses, they provided clear evidence that this is a topic they wanted to engage in and one they wanted to shift. It was a topic they

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previously had not an opportunity to even discuss when administrators and select parents were/are traditionally the only parties asked to enter the dialogue.

Uniform Ideas

In Session Six, the team began to fine tune their list of uniform ideas from their brainstorming session into an assortment of options to consider and eventually choose from. As the students began to consolidate their thoughts, I recorded each possible route they were considering:

Table 7: Initial Uniform Ideas

Idea	Description
1	Any colored collared/polo style shirts, black/navy blue/khaki pants, and any colored shoes
2	A Tubman Academy logo designed by the team to get on patches and place on jackets and/or hoodies, white collared/polo style shirts, black/navy blue/khaki pants, and any colored shoes
3	A Tubman Academy logo designed by the team to put on accessories students can add to their existing uniform – logo bandanas, lanyards, drawstring bags, scarves, hats, belts, etc. and any colored shoes
4	Black/navy blue/white/light blue/or red collared/polo style shirts, black/navy blue/khaki pants, and any colored shoes
5	Free Dress – everyday

After the options were recorded, the intense discussions began. Each option was offered by either one team member or suggested by a pair. So, the conversation quickly became more of a healthy debate, in which each person had to state their case as to why they felt their option was the best. This proved to be a healthy, useful way to hash out what could be added to one option or removed from another. When the team got down to debating the free dress option, teasing became a hot topic.

Hayes:	So, let me ask y'all this…is teasing an issue?
Ashley:	Yep.
Dionna:	Yes.
Hayes:	So, you have free dress everyday as an option. Do people get teased when they have their uniform on too though?
Dionna:	Yes.
Ashley:	Which is stupid.
Hayes:	So, if you have free dress every day what may be a solution to that problem?
Tiana:	Ummm, I mean people gon' get teased regardless, no matter what they wear.
Ashley:	That's very true.
Hayes:	Is there any way to stop it?
Rachelle:	You can't stop it! You can't stop people from teasing you, but to tease somebody cause they have the same exact thing as you on, that's stupid.
Tiana:	But, they tease people when we wear uniform cause it's dirty.
Ashley:	Well, we can take they clothes to the laundromat and wash them for them if they dirty.
Tiana:	I don't care about that stuff.
Hayes:	What about the people that do? Cause it may hurt someone.
Tiana:	It hurt people, but… [trails off and stops her sentence]
Rachelle:	You can't really say it don't hurt unless you experience it.
Tiana:	No, I never experienced it.

The team brought up one of the most pressing issues proponents of uniform policy use to promote implementation. Since its inception in urban schools, uniform policies have been viewed as a solution to many issues, including leveling socio-economic differences existing in many student bodies across the country, effectively cutting down on possible reasons students may tease one another (DaCosta, 2006; Holloman et al, 1996; LaPointe et al, 2003; Skiba, 2000). However, where the few studies conducted on uniform policy in urban schools stop is the suggestion that if everyone looks the same there is nothing to tease about when it comes to dress. In their dialogue, the team wrestles with this very issue and comes to the conclusion that teasing happens when students wear uniform too, particularly for students who may not have the means to clean their uniform clothes as often as other students.

Tiana and Ashley went further to suggest that no matter what people wear, teasing will continue to be an issue. Rachelle challenges Tiana by highlighting that the experience of being teased is what provides insight into how it feels, and Tiana admits that she has not experienced it. Overall, the group wrestled with the issue and unofficially at that point removed free dress as an option, but still had not come up with an idea for how teasing would be addressed even with a uniform.

Steps to the Final Decision

In order to reach a final decision, our sessions shifted to the school's computer lab. Here, the team was able to use technology to visually explore the options they had been discussing and/or develop their own mock-ups of what they had in mind. Specifically, the lab proved useful in helping the group create "look books" via a service called *Polyvore.* Polyvore is essentially an online fashion/style collage service where users can type in the article of clothing they are looking for to assemble outfits from head to toe. The group was also introduced to logo and product design services, such as *Logo Garden* and *Custom Ink*. Simple *Google Image* searches were also used to find items that could not be found on these services.

The group began to organize their options much like Ashley's work below. Pictured here, Ashley chose to display elements of Options 2, 4, and 5 listed above. By visually pulling and arranging items and designing logos they felt fit their school the most, the ideas seemed to become more tangible for the group.

Figure 10: Ashley's Look Book Collage of Uniform Ideas

The sample logos included on the next page were featured in the team's final presentation to administration. The opportunity to infuse their own creativity into designs connected to their school proved to be an engaging activity. There were a few instances where I had to remind the girls our session time was almost up. This seemed to be a signal that they were really invested in the design process and bringing their ideas from their minds onto their computer screens.

The desire to create style exhibited by the team aligns with studies of African American Fashion and Identity conducted by *The Smithsonian's Will to Adorn* (WTA) initiative, which identifies members of the Black community who create fashion/style items as "artisans of style" (Will to Adorn, para. 2). Rachelle, in particular was very committed to the logo design component of SWAG School because of her expressed interest and talent in fashion design. Early into the program, Rachelle shared her clothing design portfolio with the entire group and showed how she learned the actual technical side of design from fashion design library books. She also shared that she regularly deconstructed and re-structured clothing from family members' closets which

continues a historic Black fashion tradition of making something new out of little to nothing. This early experience as a rising artisan of style helped her lead the team during logo design.

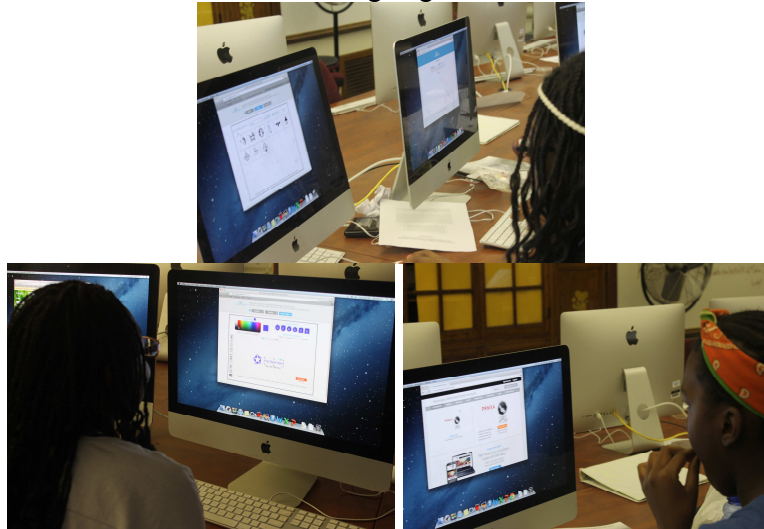Figure 11: Student team members creating logos

Figure 12: Logos created by student team members

According to the *National Endowment for the Arts* (2012), youth from schools that are considered to have students with lower socio-economic status yet have opportunities to participate in art programming, such as the visual design component the girls engaged in, tend to be stronger in academics, have more career opportunities post-graduation, and are more connected to civic behavior and efforts. Each young person participating in SWAG School, except for Ashley, was enrolled in summer

school. I did not have access to their grades, but I did note that attendance for the focal participants, specifically on session days, was steady and the team was engaged. Also, the team always seemed to be aware that what they were doing was bigger than just themselves, and they took their role seriously. For instance, even though boys were not members of the final team, the girls made sure to include their input and their knowledge of the boys' experiences gained from school overall.

As artisans in their own right, within the logo design component the students had the freedom to represent their school through their eyes. One particular finding revealed that even though Tubman Academy is considered to be an African-centered school, the SWAG School students did not necessarily want to include African-centered colors and/or symbols in their school logo designs. In fact, only one logo included the schools regularly used Black nationalist colors of red, black, and green. Instead, the team leaned toward using the school's mascot (the eagle) or the schools official colors (blue and white), or something completely beyond. The team expressed openly that even though the school was African-centered they felt at times they did not feel as connected to all of the colors and symbols used by the school and chose to express themselves in different ways. This finding signals that the students were identifying themselves beyond what the school defined as "Black" and sometimes did not necessarily attach to their school's symbolism because they were defining their identities on their own terms. This speaks to the understanding that "Black" is not a monolith, and that even though the school in many ways was a homogeneous space in terms of the messages and lessons it used to build students up, there were still individual, heterogenous identities shaping within the school walls.

Uniform Decision and Final Plan Development

After careful thought, visual mock-ups, opinions from one of my pilot study participant with advice from his own experiences, and a straight forward vote, the team decided on Option 4 as the core of their uniform policy recommendations. This option was chosen by the group for the following reasons:

Table 8: Student Reasons for Final Uniform Style Decision

Reason	Description
1.	It would be the easiest transition from their current uniform in terms of the colors chosen because students could wear their existing uniform and still fit within the color scheme.
2.	Polo-style shirts, as previously discussed, are a popular trend for both boys and girls. They mentioned specifically that they like the "preppy look."
3.	Even with a chosen set of colors for shirt and pant options, there was still room for students to alternate between colors more often and mix and match. Also, students could choose their own shoes and accessories as ways of expressing their own style too.

While the reasons above were provided by the team and deliberately pragmatic as a means to make room for ease of approval by administration, I also noted through analsysis of previous observations that there was another possible reason the team may have chosen this option. The polo-style shirt and khaki/black/blue pants model is now the most-widely used uniform style in urban schools, particularly high schools. I observed instances when Tubman Academy alumni came back to visit their younger friends or favorite former teachers, and they generally would be coming from their own new school back to Tubman and would be clothed in their new polo/khaki uniform. Thus, the team, potentially looking up to their former schoolmates saw this style of uniform as more progressive, the next step up from their blue and white, and simply put was much "flyer" because that was what the older kids were wearing. According to *The*

Smithsonian's Will to Adorn (WTA) initiative, this yearning can be attributed to the desire to transition from one community of style to another community of style or at the least mirror another community's swag. "Communities of style are groups that share a common style of dress shaped by similar experiences, knowledge, dress practices, values, and ideas about what is pleasing, appropriate, and beautiful," (Will to Adorn, para. 1). Tubman Academy students represented a community of style, and so did some of the very benchmarks they based their plan on.

Sessions 7-9 were completely devoted to plan development and presentation practice. The team was aware early on in the program that culminating session for the program would be the presentation of their plan to to the school's principal, Dr. Richards, and the lead guidance counselor, Mama Dawson. The group used PowerPoint to assemble their presentation. The first central task was to illustrate the components of their new uniform recommendations, and Ashley took the lead in developing the look options for girls, while Tiana took the lead in finding examples to represent the boys.

Figure 13: Student Recommendations – Parts of Uniform

Figure 14: Student Recommendations – Samples for Girls and Boys

Dionna and Valencia took the lead on outlining the additional components of their policy which detailed shifts to current rules and shifts in accessories. Renee focused on organizing the school logos the team created and how student design could be helpful in ordering school event and class shirts. The team then chose to present on the sections they each worked to prepare, and the group did run-throughs and peer edits of their presentation from Sessions 7-9.

After the team had the first solid draft of their plan complete, I asked the group to continue practicing over the days that we did not meet and to discuss their choices with their friends and family, just to get their thoughts on their plan. Ashley came back with feedback from her mom; "She thinks the uniform is do-able, but she said that bandana part is not going to fly." The part Ashley was referring to is the team's request that girls be allowed to wear bandanas as headbands. At this point, I mentioned to them that my own mom said the bandana request jumped out to her too, and that the feedback was helpful because this part of their plan and a couple other parts in particular could potentially raise a red flag for Dr. Richards and Mama Dawson. "All you can do is be prepared to debate and back up the reason for making the decisions you made in your plan," I encouraged them. Valencia responded, "We ready." Ashley followed up with, "I want to be a lawyer anyway, so I like to debate." This exchange highlights the politics of choice and how Ashley and her peers were reading and writing the use of the bandana one way and her mom and potentially her school administrators would decode its use another way. I considered the bandana to be a unit of identity text (Paris, 2011) that held a particular symbolic literacy value for parents of being gang-related, yet held a pragmatic value for the girls of simply keeping their hair in place, as noted by the girls. Soon enough, presentation day came, and this text was discussed and much, much more.

Final Plan Presentation

The team presented to Dr. Richards and Mama Dawson on July 31, 2014. Unfortunately, Renee's aunt would not let her stay after school for the presentation and

Dionna had to attend a last minute event at her new high school, so Ashley, Tiana, and Valencia filled in the gaps and presented their parts and the sections on behalf of their teammates. I surprised the team with their own badges and lanyards which displayed their name and title "Design Team Member" as a reminder that they were the experts in the room when it came to their ideas and opinions on next steps for Tubman Academy. With the projector set, badges on, and presentation folders in hand, they set the tone from that point forward and carried out their agenda: Opening Activity → Highlights of SWAG School → Background Research → Uniform Policy Recommendations→ Discussion.

For the opening activity, the team decided to have a quick interview with Dr. Richards and Mama Dawson. Tiana simply asked, "What type of uniform did you wear in middle school?" To the team's surprise, both Dr. Richards and Mama Dawson both responded and said they did not have to wear uniform while they were growing up, at all. Dr. Richards explained further:

> It wasn't an issue. When I was in school uniforms were not an issue, so we never wore them. We wore what we wanted to wear as long as it wasn't…I mean it never became an issue. This really wasn't an issue when I was in elementary or middle school.

It was a moment of pause and arguably the first moment of tension for the girls and the administrators. For the girls growing up in a school system at an age where uniforms had been part of their schooling experience since elementary, it seemed to be a bit of a jolt that this system had not always been in place, particularly with the very people that were enforcing the policy in their school. For the administrators, this question seemed

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to allow them to take a moment to think about their own schooling in relationship to the differences they were facing as graduates of the same school system they were once part of. Yet, Dr. Richards framed the environment Tubman Academy students were in as different from the one he grew up in, in the same district. Essentially, even though he was allowed to express his own level of choice as an adolescent, it did not seem to fit the realities of the students he was facing because of the "issues" that were just different.

The group went on to outline some of the highlights of SWAG School before presenting their uniform plan, from learning how to build consensus to critically analyzing journal articles. By listing these highlights, it helped the administrators understand what the team had been up to during the program and what they experienced beyond developing the plan. The rest of the presentation below followed.

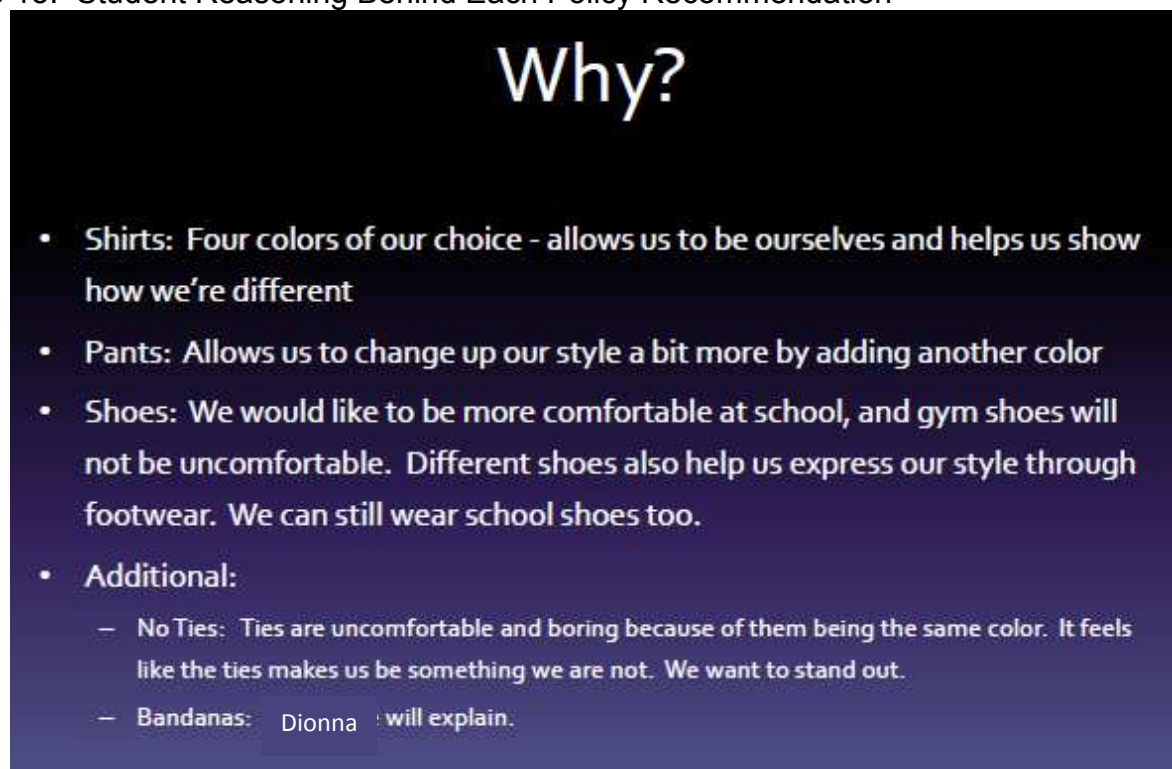Figure 15: Student Reasoning Behind Each Policy Recommendation

Figure 16: Design Program Idea for School Logo Needs

Figure 17: Supporting Background Research for Select Recommendations

The group ended the presentation "We appreciate your time and support. Now, let's discuss business." On that note, Dr. Richards and Mama Dawson commended the group for their dedication to the program, their professionalism in developing the plan, and simply how proud they were of them and how what they had learned over the summer would go a long way, no matter the outcome of what was decided. Then dialogue and debating began.

Initial Plan Feedback from School Administrators

Both Dr. Richards and Mama Dawson agreed that the general components of the uniform they presented could work for Tubman Academy, from the polo style shirts to the addition of khaki pants. Dr. Richards did not promise a decision on the uniform that day without speaking to his full leadership team first later in the summer, but he did suggest that a possible transition plan could be a compromise in which students would be allowed to wear the new uniform everyday except Wednesdays. Wednesdays would be reserved for the old uniform and called "Formal Wednesdays."

As discussed in part in Chapter Three, Mama Dawson warned the team that their "tucked in shirts – not mandatory" rule would be one thing Dr. Richards would notice and speak on for sure, even with the team's decision to explicitly state that sagging would not be allowed, a choice the boys and girls made early on during brainstorming. The team explained to Mama Dawson that polo-style shirts can be worn in or out and still have the same "neat" effect that the school desired with its current uniform. However, the girls countered with the argument that what it would remove is the constant reminders and requests from faculty and staff to students, particularly male

students. Adding no sagging, was the team's way of showing that they agreed with the school's officials on this rule, even the non-focal, male participants agreed on this. This component was also a way to buffer the shirt request. Dr. Richard's first critique of the plan was actually the request for bandanas.

Figure 18: Student Recommendations - Additional Parts of Uniform
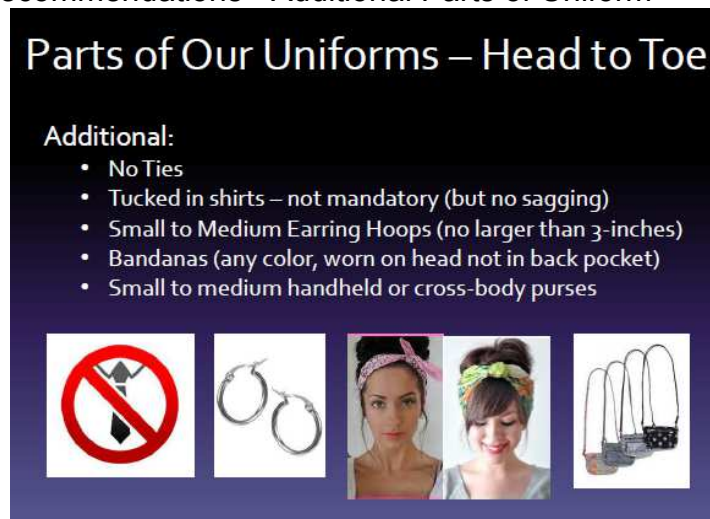
Tiana, Valencia, and Ashley took both topics on directly by referring back to their background research slide. The team included their takeaways from two articles I had introduced to them over the summer. Ashley used the Morris article to highlight that the constant requests for boys to tuck in their shirts was much bigger than just Tubman Academy:

> Okay, so I had an article called "Tuck in that Shirt", and it was about this boy named Derek. He wanted to change the uniform because he felt like a prisoner because when the prisoners go to jail they lose their freedom. They all have to wear the same uniform and the same shoes and all this – you know, everything the same. So, he was talking about, we're not prisoners so why do we have to be like everyone else when we all have our own personalities?

Valencia reminded Dr. Richards of the African-centered component of the Rebeccai article. If Black women were restricted by law in the 1800's New Orleans from wearing their hair and headwraps a certain way and with certain colors, then what was the difference between the Black girls at Tubman from expressing themselves through their headbands in 2014? Tiana added that they understood bandanas could be considered gang paraphernalia, but not with colors like pink and purple. Plus, she offered the practical reason for girls of wearing headbands/wraps – a bad hair day. Here, the team expressed their readings of two specific body and adornment texts using their own critical analysis of existing research.

Dr. Richards nodded with understanding, no promises, but understanding, on these points. He appreciated the team's background support, especially because it fit in with what Tubman Academy stands for at large: young people knowing their culture and the many issues surrounding their history and culture. However, there was an instance in particular where the choices the team so passionately highlighted came to a screeching holt with Dr. Richard's commentary that the plan did not include a necessary section on discipline/punishment along with the other issues listed below.

Table 9: Hierarchy of Power – Dr. Richard's Responses to Student Plan

Topic	Hierarchy of Power meets Student Choice – Dr. Richard's Responses
Punishment for violations	See, my hesitancy with modifying the uniform policy is because it is nothing that we have that we can distribute in how we punish, and because there is not a direct ability to punish then we also don't have anything to enforce the parameters or guidelines.
Increased student freedom	I'm wondering if you all couldn't handle it with just blue and white, and those being the only colors you could wear. What is to make me think that students can handle it when I open up the range of colors that you can wear?

Table 9 (cont'd)

Uniformity views of district leadership	Okay, see my job is for the school to be in uniform. That means when they walk in, not just the people downtown (referring to the school district leadership) but anyone walks in, they need to be able to see a uniform way all my students are dressed, and that's important. When I don't have that, we have to have a rule for what happens.

The tone of these responses alone seemed to take the wind out of the team's sails, especially Ashley's. Despite the team practicing and understanding the various parts of their plan that might receive pushback, in this moment I felt that I had not adequately prepared them for the issue of hierarchy of power previously outlined as a challenge of Youth Participatory Action Research. The politics of choices, the very ways they were choosing to read and write their worlds through this plan became a threat to an established order (Irrizary and Brown, 2014). Specifically, Dr. Robinson's mention of school district leaders needing to see uniformity when visiting the school signals an issue of interest convergence, as defined in Chapter Three. Essentially, if students are not uniformed in a way that is approved by the district, the school may lose particular rights and possibly funding. So, in order to keep hold of what they have and also secure any other school needs, Dr. Robinson seemed to hang in the balance between the students' desires but ultimately have a general lean towards what district officials require.

Unfortanately, more often than not, public school officials operate under dominant government standards and control money/power in ways that limit Black, urban school students more than liberate them. Thus, the very freedom to design this policy, that was in fact was enthusiastically requested by Dr. Richards over one year prior to my implementation, was then seen as just a little too much of a rattling of what was already in place.

Even with this tension and without decisions being made that day, which was ultimately understood by the team, the ending climate of the room was that of a job well-done. I had a chance to discuss the plan with Dr. Richards following the presentation, and he expressed overall that he was proud of what the team accomplished in such a short amount of time.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated how this Tubman team was very persistent about their power of choice even in the face of a political hierarchy in their urban school. This was exhibited by my thematic analysis of the various ways they rewrote the existing policy through their own fashion/style choices and a grounded analysis of their own uniform policy plan. In the end, the SWAG School team was intentional about their choices, and despite the approaching outcome, the battle in many ways was won. The journey from identifying a problem, developing a critical plan to address the problem, and negotiating their stance even when facing the hierarchal, political structure of their school and society at large is a transferable experience. Though administration was ultimately supportive of the team's recommendations, what each stakeholder, students and administrators alike, took away was an appreciation for what power looks like in the hands of those who are traditionally disempowered. In the end, it was not about if the plan would be approved. It was about how the team of students had spoken back and pushed back on large, far-reaching, societal flaws – a major, sophisticated feat for middle schoolers that many adults cannot even accomplish.

CHAPTER 6
"TO BE YOUNG, FASHIONABLE, AND BLACK":
Conclusion - Discussion and Implications

Introduction to Critical Fashion Literacy (CFL)

With the voices of the youth involved in this study centered and their realities navigating the politics of their bodies, adornment, and choices, this study contributes to the field of critical literacy, and literacy studies at large, by introducing *Critical Fashion Literacy* (CFL). As an outgrowth of current critical literacy theories as well as influential frameworks including Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Pedagogy, Critical Fashion Literacy is built upon the following factors:

- The understanding that fashion is a system of culturally-influenced symbols and associated meanings prescribed by individuals and also by communities;

- Use of a CFL encompasses one's ability to code/decode (construct/deconstruct) these symbols within fashion as text and the various meanings and messages created by individuals and assigned by society;

- Added to this is a developed awareness of fashion as a purposeful means of transmitting messages/meaning;

- And becoming critically conscious of possible inequalities, notions of status, power norms, and other issues layered within fashion in society at large.

Black youth in urban schools are wrestling with messages and restrictions that limit not only their cultural uses of fashion/style but also fashion/style as a form of critical literacy that many are experts of reading and writing with daily. This is where CFL becomes integral to re-shaping how our students' experiences are viewed and more

importantly, integrated into their educational process. Their actual bodies are being placed under a dominant gaze which says that their existance is only relative and important in relation to a higher system of power. Their adornment practices are seen as antithetical to the education process. Their choices, the ways they choose to critically code and decode their identites, are seen as a threat to the hierarchy of power within urban schools. Yet, they persist, they rewrite, they have continued a cultural, generational tradition of holding on to a "will to adorn." Because of this, they are already operating within the concept of Critical Fashion Literacy.

This focused study serves as a foundation for future research in what I view as the potential transformative and communicative power of fashion/style as both a form of critical literacy, but also a means for students to develop their own student-designed, uniform policy to address the very issues discussed in this work and beyond. Essentially, if students are allowed to come to the table and potentially construct, design, and simply have a say in the ways policies are constructed, numerous positive outcomes may arise. In urban education, for black students specifically, opportunities for success are low and the chances of "pushout" (not dropout) are high. Moving forward, it will be important to truly place our students' real-life experiences in the center when developing new approaches to urban education. Creating spaces in which students feel they can take ownership of their own journey will ensure a new day not just for them, but for society at large.

The purpose of this study was to reveal the various ways issues related to fashion/style were evident in the daily lives of Tubman Academy students. From this, five students took part in the study further through a curricular innovation, SWAG

School. This program was Youth Participator Action Research based and created a space for the student team to identify problems related to their existing understandings of fashion/style in their school and use these to develop a uniform/dress code policy that was tailored to their needs as the very bodies and minds this policy would directly effect. This shifted the power to change from a reactive approach to uniform/dress code policy development found in most urban school districts to a proactive approach where Tubman Academy students were involved in the process from the outset.

The data gained from this program and the observations that preceded and followed it revealed the following findings concerning the students and their experiences: [1] they were aware of and even resisted some of the restrictions placed on their bodies in relation to their fashion/style practies, while other restrictions surfaced as part of a hidden curriculum they may have not been aware of [2] they used adornment practices to construct their identities in ways that underscored existance of "stylistic push-pull", or their navigation between their thoughts on fashion/style and those placed upon them by their school and/or society [3] they acknowledged in the end that they hold the power of choice within them to rewrite their fashion/style practices even in the face of an existing uniform/dress code policy and the hierachy of power that produced it. This concluding chapter will begin first with details on the outcome of the student policy followed by a discussion of each finding, implications for future research, and limitations of this study.

Outcomes of Student-Designed Uniform/Dress Code Policy

Plan Implementation

The last week of August, I was able to reach Dr. Richards after he had a chance to meet with his leadership team and discuss the uniform policy recommendations. Despite his initial pushback, he informed me with great enthusiasm that the majority of the uniform policy was approved by his team. In particular, the polo-style shirts in the chosen colors and the addition of khakis as options for pants would be allowed immediately when fall semester began in September. The "tucked shirt" rule was not required any longer if students were wearing polos. Bandanas were not allowed still according to the school's policies, but I noted during fall observations that depending on the color if girls wore them as headbands teachers and staff let them slide. Also, Dr. Richard's "Formal Wednesdays" idea where students wear the classic uniform was set in place as a means of transition.

Tubman Academy hosted a "Community Night" in September to provide an opportunity for students and parents to gain an overview of each of the extra-curricular activities the school would offer for the year. The room was set up similar to a science fair with some activities having tables to display their past work and future plans. There was also a program component led by Dr. Richards welcoming everyone and inviting each program coordinator to speak about their work. I had the chance to invite SWAG School students to speak with me, and Tiana and Valencia came back to Tubman that night to join me as co-presenters. We passed out copies of the plan they developed

over the summer and they talked about their experiences in the program. We all were really excited about the transition of the uniform from one stage to the next.

Yet, the reality of how the transition would or would not occur hit me in the coming weeks during my observations. In the hallways, I was able to speak with Ashley after school. I asked her how she felt the transition was going, and she said "I'm in khakis. Look." She was also wearing a white polo-style shirt and shoes of her choice instead of a white "oxford" shirt and black shoes. Her response was short and to the point, but it was her way of informing me that there were shifts taking place, just not at the speed that they had initially hoped for. However, I realized that the timing of the school's release of the new uniform changes may not have given parents enough of a window to shift from their knowledge of last year's uniform to this year's. Also, Dr. Richard's reminded me that with over 90% of Tubman Academy students below the poverty line, the shift might be even slower than expected. This was completely understandable, and in the grand scheme of the SWAG School Program while implementation was of major value, the journey of developing a plan that was made by students for students proved to be just as valuable.

Next Steps: The ACE Store and SWAG School Beta

With these two factors in mind along with my observations I began to consider next steps. I did not want the team's work to be in vain because there was not as much of a visual shift in the uniform as one would hope. However, they knew probably better than me, that in the context of urban education, most change occurs at a slow pace.

Two steps came to mind. During a group discussion that summer, the team came up with the idea of stocking the school's ACE Store, a classroom for students to buy prizes to using ACE Bucks that were awarded based on merit, with fashion items connected to the new uniform and a few items for free dress. This way, if the transition was being slowed due to the policy being cost-prohibitive for some students, these students could purchase clothing in the ACE Store based on their performance and citizenship in class. This was also a way of addressing the important issue of bullying discussed by the team that summer. If students are allowed to shop in a store based on merit and make their own clothing choices, then both the bullying due soiled uniform items and lack of free dress clothing could possibly be decreased.

The second idea was to implement "SWAG School Beta" – an initiative in which I served as a guest instructor in select classes to connect a teacher's existing lesson plan for the day to a fashion/style theme. This was inspired by interactions I had with teachers during faculty meetings and observations and more importantly by the how engaged the team was with logo design over the summer. To date, stocking the ACE Store with new uniform items is on hold due to research funding, and I would like to have a team of students join me in making the fashion buying decisions. However, I was able to implement SWAG School Beta in two Math classes, one Science class, and two English Language Arts Class. The math class students worked in teams to answer a set of algebra questions and competed to design fabric/make clothing displaying the write answers. The Science class students moved through the steps of the Scientific Method by testing which solvents would turn permanent marker into tie dye on their shirts the best. The English Language Arts Class split into two teams to debate the U.S.

Military's former policy on not allowing soldiers to wear locks/dreadlocks, which disproportionately affected African American military personnel, specifically African American women. Each activity was well-received by each class. Students were out of their seats, working together in pairs and teams, and coming up with creative ideas to finish the tasks at hand. Each teacher provided me with positive feedback and mentioned that it is always a good sign that a lesson went well when the students do not want to leave the room when the bell rings. In addition to each class, a team of eighth graders designed their own class shirt, and Dr. Richards approved the design. This was the first student-designed class shirt in the school's history.

Figure 19:   SWAG School Beta Program

Discussion

The Politics of the Black Body

The first central finding of this study is that students at Tubman Academy were aware of and even resisted some of the restrictions placed on their bodies in relation to their fashion/style practies, while other restrictions surfaced as part of a more hidden curriculum they may have been unware of. One set of evidence was found in the restriction of their bodies in relationship to wearing untucked shirts and hoodies. Both fashion/style choices symbolized much more than mere threading or color choice. An untucked shirt for school officials was read as disorderly, and if students' shirts remained tucked, specifically boys, they would be read by school leaders and ultimately society as "neater", "more professional" and "about business." The untucked shirt for students was a point of resistance. Girls felt that they did not need to tuck their shirts simply because they were girls, and I never witnessed a faculty/staff member asking them to do so. Thus, they went around the school policy. For boys, the constant reminders, for many multiple times a day, was an annoyance. Yet, they continued to wear their shirts untucked because they did not want to adopt the business-like requirement. They wanted to be "crispy" and show their own swag.

The hoodie represented a similar reading and writing disconnect between students and adults. Because of recent injustices connected to Black men, in particular related to the image of the Black Body itself as a threat, the hoodie on top of a Black body has been read as: hoodie = hoodlum. Thus, it was written in to Tubman's policy that "hooded sweatshirts" were not allowed, and students were reminded of this daily almost as soon as they stepped foot onto school property. Yet, students continued to

find ways to push back on this policy and wear hoodies anyway, many escaping punishment, and ultimately not ascribing to how adults were coding and decoding the hoodie/Black body symbol as one of defiance.

On the other hand, Tubman students seemed to be unaware or indifferent, to messages about their bodies passed on to them by what I found to be a hidden curriculum on fashion/style and body politics. These instances arose during picture day when the photographer, parent volunteer, and even a personal note from a mother brought in by a student, encourged students to subscribe to specific gender norms. Intead of having the freedom to pose their own bodies, most – not all – but most students were molded into posing in "girl" or "boy" poses. Another instance of a hidden curriculum was on free dress days when girls were told over the school intercom system days prior "don't show no skin we ain't already seen" which fell into politics of respectability and the "ladylike narrative" traditionally placed upon young, Black female bodies. Finally, on free dress days, one administrator noted that students were more "rowdy" when they did not have to wear uniform, particularly during recess. In this sense, running, active, un-uniformed bodies were seen as disruptive and the need for uniforms was supported further by adults while students read free dress day as an opportunity to release pinned-up expression.

From this finding, it can be concluded that students are receiving explicit and implicit messages about their bodies daily in urban schools. Tubman students exhibited either resistance to these messages and read their bodies in ways that were different from adults. Or, they seemed to be unaware or indifferent, or at more of detriment, they adopted the hidden curriculum of control without question. If school is supposed to

teach young people to be free, critical thinkers, then why are banking methods related to body control and other forms of control in use with Black students in urban schools?

The Politics of Adornment

A second central finding pinpointed how students used adornment practices to construct their identities in ways that underscored existance of a "stylistic push-pull". This study identified stylistic push-pull as a navigation between one's thoughts on fashion/style and those placed upon them by their school and/or society. I found instances of the push-pull factor in the unapolgetic freedom students displayed on free dress days when it came to their use of bright colors, mismatching patterns, unique hairstyles, and just their overall swag. However, in relation to free dress, the study participants argued that they did not simply or blindly accept free dress in its current model. Free dress according to them was actually "fee dress" and it possibly further marginalized students who could not afford to participate and keep up with the added costs of dance entrance, refreshments, or field trips on various days.

Stylistic push-pull was also evident in the participants' "i-collages" which illustrated their opinions on how adults viewed their fashion/style practices vs. how they viewed themselves. These collages provided a counter-narrative speaking back to the dominant narratives placed upon them by adults and society. One student pushed back on profiling young people in negative ways. Another student understood most adult uniform decisions to be well-intentioned and a means of preparing students to "dress for success" even though she also appreciated her own fashion freedom. This suggests

even further that the participants were keenly aware of their own opinions and the opinions of others and were wrestling with each side.

Gender also surfaced again when it came to the students opinions on earring restricitions for boys and earring size standards for girls. They were bothered by the "hoodrat" archetype the policy seemed to be projecting on them. As a critical race issue, this word is loaded with particular images and behaviors wrongly associated with Black youth from urban areas. The team went on to question why their teachers were not following their own school dress code, a code they told students about as a means of saying they too had to abide by the rules. However, their code was expectation-based and not mandate/punishment-based like the students. From this finding I concluded that Tubman students were involved in negotiating their practices of reading and writing through fashion/style daily, whether they were negotiating messages and meanings with themselves or the adult leaders of their school, parents, and/or society.

The Politics of Choice

The final and most pivotal finding was that students, specifically the Tubman uniform/dress code policy design team, acknowledged in the end they held the power of choice within them to rewrite their fashion/style practices even in the face of an existing uniform/dress code policy and the very hierachy of power that produced it. The team worked together not simply as students, but as professionals, as experts using their own funds of knowledge and their own experiences in relation to fashion/style. Through their time and talents they developed their own student-designed uniform/dress code policy, in just five short weeks. On top of this, according to my extensive background research

in this area, the team was the first group of students in the country to complete their own uniform/dress code policy in an urban school district and also the youngest to do so. The only other documented student plan was developed by high schoolers in a suburban, North Carolina district (Education World, 2009). This plan was primarily focused more on creating a more fashionable uniform instead of the added critical factors (race, gender, class, etc.) the Tubman team pushed through to develop their plan and continue to push through in their daily lives.

In the end, there is no better evidence of what the students gained from the study than their own words:

> I am very grateful to have been able to participate in this program. There are not a lot of schools that have had a chance to do this. We are one of those schools. I am grateful to Dr. Richards to let us have a chance to speak our minds and our opinions.
>
> - Rachelle (Grade 7)

> I think this [program] helps people express themselves because in school you don't get a lot of chances to express yourself, especially if you don't like art that much. I mean if you want to make change in a fashionable way, it's not just painting pictures. I think it helps people learn to express themselves in different ways. It helps show who I am because these are my opinions on how I think uniform should look. These are my creative styles on what I think would be best for the students of the school.
>
> - Ashley (Grade 6)

Limitations

This study was not without limitations. On the surface, some researchers may consider the sample size of five focal participants and nine participants total to be limiting or the amount of time spent with the students being just shy of the number of months in an academic year to be too short. For future studies, I would like to expand

my sample size (to no more than 10-15 students because of the detailed nature of the work) and spend at least two years with the student team. However, I must note that sample size and sometimes even time spent, are common critiques of qualitiative research, particularly in urban schools (Kirkland, 2014). Yet, when it comes to the many hurdles in place to conduct a successful research study or the high stakes environment that students are operating within daily, the rigor of this type of work is certainly unquestionable.

I was careful not to generalize the findings and make them applicable to all Black youth or all urban students. This study was surely about Tubman Academy, but it does help create a lens for how we can begin to make other inquiries with other student populations on a larger scale.

Implications

The greatest hope for this study is its potential to bring forth the lives, activities, achievements, thoughts, opinions, and overall presence of Black youth in unique ways, but more importantly motivating ways. My hope is that this study will continue its steady increase on the registers and radars of scholarship, and the voices of the student leaders involved in this work will shape future knowledge in critical literacy, fashion/style theory, urban education, and other related fields. The goal of increasing engagement and ownership of one's destiny and then acknowledging students as creators of their destiny and expressive beings, through fashion/style and many other outlets, is integral to forward movement. The following parties can benefit from this study's findings in these ways:

Researchers

The principles of Youth Participator Action Research (yPAR) shine brightly in this work and also reveal continued struggles with this research method in urban schools as free-thinking students face hierarchy of power. Ultimately, I hope it will light the spark for more studies of this kind because if allowed, urban students can truly be the change they wish to see. This study also expands the area of critical literacy in new and exciting ways to include the reading and writing of fashion/style as text. Additionally, it contributes to fashion/style theory by bringing in necessary research on youth experiences, intersections with education, and the critical identities we each wear with the very clothes we adorn ourselves with daily.

Practitioners

Though the SWAG School Curriculum was not based on Common Core Standards, it did highlight sessions that addressed and developed specific Common Core Standards. For instance, during the summer program and during SWAG School Beta students were divided into groups and asked to critically analyze articles based on the following re-work of the acronym S.W.A.G:

S – Stance: The general stance of the writer on issues of injustice/inequality
W – With: What parts of the writer's stance they agreed with
A – Against: What parts of the writer's stance they disagreed with
G – Goal: Using the writer's stance, what they agreed with, and what they disagreed with they developed a goal for change that connected to their daily life.

Students were pleasantly surprised to find out at the close of each session that they had just engaged theories in journal and news articles at a graduate school level in the same way that had been asked of me by my own professors at the doctoral level. Not

only were students actively engaged in teamwork and discussion, the students and their permanent teachers, noticed a firmer grasp of material and a desire to continue with critical thinking as a result of this innovation.

It is important to note that nine out of the ten total participating students were summer school students. This population is generally considered to be on the lower end of the school system's academic achievement scale which does not do justice in describing their high level of engagement, involvement, and commitment which culminated in a well-developed final policy/presentation. Hopefully, through their plan and the potential contribution to research, these students and their work can provide an example of how innovative curriculum, such as SWAG School, can help bring about change in education and our young people's lives at large.

The projected potential to increase attendance and retention on the surface offer face value. The potential for students taking ownership of their academic journey, developing design and negotiation skills, and furthering other related skill sets, including leadership, will uncover deeper connections to our students that remain untapped.

One skill set in particular is the potential for students to become artisans of style in the Black community, adding to the tradition of actually designing and creating the very fashions worn by various communities of style. The team of students involved in SWAG School exhibited their artisanship through their logo design skills, and many other students across the country have the potential to do the same and beyond.

Additionally within classrooms, subject areas can be infused with fashion/style threads, like what I implemented with the SWAG School Beta model. Curriculum relevant to math can include dress/style based computer activities and tracking of

consumption trends and statistics. In entrepreneurship and leadership, studies of the impact of student fashion show development and business development may prove useful. In history, tracing style and dress through time is just one of many entry points. Science has the potential to incorporate textile and clothing testing with various solutions in countless experiments.

Policy Makers

Simply put, the very institutions and bodies of people in control of Black youth and urban youth at large can use this study's findings to develop models of policy development that include more student voice, not simply as an exception for one policy here and there, but as the norm. It is important that the very people affected by rules and laws are the very people that have opportunities to help develop them, and more imporantly an environment of ownership and freedom of thought that makes certain rules less necessary to begin with.

Conclusion

This dissertation began on the note of Black Lives Matter, one that echos the reality of death due to simply being Black in America. This dissertaion will end now on a note of life.

Black students in urban schools in particular must be given the opportunity to express who they are in ways that are more meaningful to their everyday lives.

Essentially, there must be a stronger emphasis on all of the story and all of the counter-narrative when thinking of our students' lives versus just some of the story. We must do so in ways that liberate our students and empower them to reach new heights, beyond those previously set by the system of urban education as we know it.

We must clear halls of oppressive surveillance and fill pathways with students taking steps to express their identities without worry of being mis-read and subsequently punished. We are living in a high stakes era. We must create a new day in which students are safe in and out of school spaces, free of worry that they may be suspended, expelled, or worse executed, literally or figuratively, for choosing to wear a hoodie instead of a more socially accepted, dominant form of dress. With students clothed and styled in their right minds, positive change can become a reality. With the Tubman Academy SWAG School Team it already did. Thus, because of them, the best is surely yet to come.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Parental Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
SWAG = Style With A Goal:
Exploring Fashion, Identity, and Urban Black Youth

Your student/child is being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Sherrae M. Hayes from the African American and African Studies Program at Michigan State University. Your student/child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
This study will explore Black student's opinions on fashion and the ways they may use fashion daily to express themselves. Students will discuss possible ways they may communicate through their fashion as a form of identity. Students will participate in group discussions, interviews, and workshop activities over a span of 9-12 months. Also, through this study, students will have an opportunity to participate in student-led development of their own uniform/dress code policy that incorporates their own ideas and may help the school continue to develop student leadership and involvement.

PROCEDURES
If you allow your student/child to participate in this study, he/she will be asked to do the following:
1. Participate in 4-6 tape-recorded interviews, anticipated to last one-half hour, in which the researcher may invite the student to talk about their current perceptions of fashion, how students express themselves in school, and what they feel uniform/dress code policy should include. Following the interview, students and parents can request a transcribed copy of the interview. Upon request, the turnaround is expected to take two to three weeks. On being sent a copy of the transcribed interview, the student is welcome to ask the interviewer to make editorial changes or add comments. Student names will be kept confidential.
2. Participate in group discussions and workshop activities that will help students discuss current perceptions of fashion, how students express themselves in school, and what they feel uniform/dress code policy should include.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS
This study provide students with an opportunity to share their views and opinions. This research may also students because the process of developing their own uniform/dress code policy will be the first student-led opportunity of its kind at your school. This may enhance their leadership, teamwork, planning, presentation, and creative development skills.

POTENTIAL RISKS
This project is not intended to provoke any physical or emotional discomfort. However, students may choose to share confidential information during the interview. All efforts will be made to ensure confidentiality.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by using a pseudonym instead of your name when transcribing the interview. The data collected for this research study will be protected on a password protected computer or in a locked file cabinet on the campus of Michigan State University for a minimum of three years after the close of the project. After the three year period the data will be destroyed. Only the appointed researcher's and the Institutional Review Board will have access to the research data.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
Participation in this research is voluntary. You and your student/child can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you permit your child to be in this study, he/she may withdraw, or you can withdraw your permission at any time without consequences of any kind. Your student/child may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS
If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the follow researchers:

Responsible Investigator   Secondary Investigator
Dr. David Kirkland   Sherrae M. Hayes
Michigan State University   Michigan State University
238 EBH   hayessh2@msu.edu
East Lansing, MI 48824   216-389-0038
517-884-3884
kirklan4@msu.edu

If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to allow your child to participate in this research study.

_____
Printed Name of Subject

_____
Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

_____   _____
Signature of Parent/Guardian   Date

This consent form was approved by a Michigan State University Institutional Review Board. Approved 02/19/14 through 02/18/15. This version supersedes all previous versions. IRB# 13-1059.

Appendix B: Student Assent Form

Research Assent Form

What is a research study?

Research studies help us learn new things. We can test new ideas. First, we ask a question. Then we try to find the answer.

This paper talks about the research study and the choice that you have to take part in it. Ask any questions that you have. You can ask questions any time.

Important things to know...
- You get to decide if you want to take part.
- You can say 'No' or you can say 'Yes'.
- No one will be upset if you say 'No'.
- If you say 'Yes', you can always say 'No' later.
- You can say 'No' at anytime.

Why is this research being done?

This research is being done to find out more about Black students in urban schools feel about fashion and how they display fashion. This research will also give students a chance to create their own dress code or uniform policy for their school.

What would happen if I join this research?

If you decide to be in the research, we would ask you to do the following:
- Participate in interviews: The researcher would ask you questions. Then you would say your answers out loud.
- Participate in group discussions: The researcher would ask a group questions. Then as a group you will discuss your answers.
- Participate in activities: The researcher will organize activities related to fashion and to help students develop their dress code/uniform policy. Then as a group you will participate in these activities.

Could bad things happen if I join this research?

Some of the interview and group discussion questions might be hard to answer. We will try to make sure that no bad things happen. You can say 'no' to what we ask you to do for the research at any time and we will stop.

Could the research help me?

This research may help you because the process of developing your own uniform/dress code policy will be the first student-led opportunity of its kind at your school. This may enhance your leadership, teamwork, planning, presentation, and creative development skills.

What else should I know about this research?

If you don't want to be in the study, you don't have to be.

It is also OK to say yes and change your mind later. You can stop being in the research at any time. If you want to stop, please tell the researcher.

You will not be paid to be in the study.

You can ask questions any time. You can talk to Sherrae M. Hayes. Ask any questions you have. Take the time you need to make your choice.

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Is there anything else?

If you want to be in the research after we talk, please write your name below. The researcher will write her name too. This shows we talked about the research and that you want to take part.

Name of Participant _____
(To be written by student/adolescent)

Printed Name of Researcher _____

Signature of Researcher _____

_____
Date   *Time*

Original form to:
Research Team File

Copies to:
Parents/Guardians

Title: Identifying students' uses of their fashion/style choices and thoughts on uniform/dress code policy

Opening: Provide the student with the following information –

"Hi! So, I really would like to interview you because of your responses in our program session to some of the topics we discussed." (provide examples)

There may be up to three separate interviews. Each will take approximately 30 minutes of your time. However, we can stop the interview at any time if you feel you would like to finish. We will speak today, and I will choose one to two more times to speak with you at another point during the program or after, and I will always ask you first if the time is right. Are you willing to participate in up to three interviews as needed?

I would like to audio record this interview so I do not miss any of your thoughts and opinions. Is this okay? About 4-8 weeks after the interview, I can send you written copies of the words from our conversation and invite you to follow with comments or responses that you would like to add or remove at anytime.

This interview is voluntary. Again, you can stop at anytime if you do not want to answer a question. Do you have any questions for me? Thanks so much for taking time to share your valuable thoughts on these topics.

Questions included the following outlined inquiries and shifted as needed for the purposes of semi-structured interviews.

Measures
Background Demographic Questions (provided via survey prior to interview)
- *Age* - Age was measured using one question, "What year were you born?"
- *Gender –* Gender will be measured by, "Woman, Man, Transgender, Prefer not to Answer"
- *Hometown* - Hometown was measured using one question, "Where do you currently live?"
- *Level of Education* - Level of education was measured by using one question, "What grade are you in?"

Research Specific Interview Questions
Warm-Up Conversation

Option 1: Simple Check-In
o   How are you? How is your day going?

- Get to know each other questions – number of siblings, favorite thing to do, favorite foods, one thing someone wouldn't know about you just from looking at you

Option 2: Check-In related to topic
- Tell me about your fashion today.
  - What part of your fashion holds a particular significance for you? Or- Do you have a particular item of fashion that holds a particular significance in your life?
    - Mention possible reasons: utility, colors as signifiers, creative modifications to a uniform/dress code, piece of jewelry or tattoo that has a particular significance in the participant's life
      - Let's chat about it! (possibly give my own example or provide a photo to spark conversation)

Option 3: Combination of Options 1 & 2

Interview Questions

What age did you become aware of fashion, i.e. the clothing you wear and what styles interested you?
- What was your earliest memory? (favorite shirt, favorite hat, memorable item on another person)

Tell me about a time you wore something that you felt sent a specific message to those around you?
- What was the message/reason behind your choice?
- (Researcher can possibly provide an example.)

If someone took you to the store and asked you to pick out a "professional" outfit, what would you choose?

(May be useful to use props here as needed to start conversation – photos of various forms of dress and ask the students their thoughts)

- What makes the outfit "professional?"
- What about a "fun" outfit?
- What about a "stylish" outfit? (based upon your opinion of what is stylish)

Think about a moment when you feel you were judged based upon what you wore. (Judgment – good or bad) Let's discuss.
- Judged by teachers, administrators, peers, strangers, family, friends, etc.
- How did this make you feel?
- As needed: Discuss the Trayvon Martin case and judgment based upon his hoodie.

Now, tell me about a moment when you may have judged someone else based upon their fashion.
- (Judgment – good or bad)

What conversations/discussions come up in school about fashion?
- With your peers?

- With teachers/staff/administrators?

How do you feel about your school's uniform/dress code policy?
- What freedom(s), if any, do you have to express yourself through fashion?
- What restrictions, if any, do you have with regard to fashion in school?
  - How do these freedoms make you feel?
  - How do these restrictions make you feel?
- If you could change anything about your school's uniform/dress code policy, what would you change? Why?
- If the student wears a school uniform: Do you add any items to your uniform to express yourself? If so, why?
  - In what ways do you feel your fashion style is different from others?
  - In what ways do you feel your fashion style is the same as others?
  - How would you feel about discussing fashion in school as part of class?
    - What would you like to discuss?

Appendix D: Study Recruitment Flyer

Figure 20: Study Recruitment Flyer

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