Swagger like us: Black millennials’ perceptions of 1990s urban brands

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Swagger like us: Black millennials’ perceptions of 1990s urban brands

by

Courtney Danielle Johnson

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Apparel, Merchandising and Design

Program of study committee:
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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2018

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Black folks. We can do anything. We are limitless and magical. We are art. This is for the culture.

“God created Black people and Black people created style.” – George C. Wolfe
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ABSTRACT

Hip-hop is a significant cultural and artistic phenomenon that was created in the Black community and has since spread around the world (Aldridge & Stewart, 2005). Hip-hop culture has a unique and authentic clothing style, music style, and language (McLeod, 1999). The relationship between hip-hop culture, rap music, and fashion has global appeal (Power & Hauge, 2008). This research is centered around the evolution of this cultural fashion movement in Black history as it relates to Black millennials today and their experiences fashioning their bodies. There is not a significant amount of literature on urbanwear brands that came out of hip-hop culture or the owners of these fashion brands. The purpose of this study is to examine Black millennials attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) about their perceptions and knowledge of prominent, Black-owned, urban fashion brands that emerged in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s during the hip-hop fashion revolution. Black millennials currently attending or who are alumni of HBCU’s were specifically chosen as the focus of this study because of the heightened immersion in Black culture that a HBCU environment provides. Throughout history, Black individuals have contributed significantly to American society, and hip-hop culture is one of those contributions as it was a major cultural revolution. While Black appearance and clothing has been under scrutiny in America since slavery, urbanwear fashion was a way for Black individuals to express themselves and represent their community. Ethnic dress, such as urban styles of dress, are clothing worn by individuals to express their belonging to a community with a common heritage (Kaiser, 2012; Eicher & Sumberg, 1995). The participants in this study explained their experiences with urban fashion brands, support of Black-owned brands, stereotypes associated with urban fashion, and how hip-hop and urbanwear still inspires their
style today. The narratives and perceptions from Black individuals has changed over time and viewing urban fashion through the lens of various social science theories such as Critical Race Theory, Afrocentric theory, and symbolic interaction will further explain the relationship between Black millennials and 1990s urban fashion.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Hip-hop is a significant cultural and artistic phenomenon that was created in the Black community and has since spread around the world (Aldridge & Stewart, 2005). Hip-hop culture has a unique and authentic clothing style, music style, and language (McLeod, 1999). Hip-hop culture illustrates the Black experience and speaks to Black youth (Clay, 2003; Boyd, 1994; George, 1999; Gilroy, 1997; Rose, 1994; Watkins, 1998; Kelley, 1994; Lipsitz, 1994; Stapleton, 1998). The relationship between hip-hop culture, rap music, and fashion has global appeal (Power & Hauge, 2008). This research is centered around the evolution of this cultural fashion movement in Black history as it relates to Black millennials today and their experiences fashioning their bodies. There is not a significant amount of literature on urbanwear brands that came out of hip-hop culture or the owners of these fashion brands. The purpose of this study is to examine Black millennials attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) about their perceptions and knowledge of prominent, Black-owned, urban fashion brands that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s during the hip-hop fashion revolution. Black millennials currently attending or who are alumni of HBCU’s were specifically chosen as the focus of this study because of the heightened immersion in Black culture that a HBCU environment provides.

While there is much research on millennial consumers, there is not much on specifically Black millennial consumers and their spending habits. Millennials are often used interchangeably with the term “Generation Y,” which is defined as individuals who are born between the years of 1981 and 2002 (Dias, 2003). The number of millennials is almost twice the size of people who belong to Generation X (Dias, 2003). The sub-group of Black individuals make up the second-largest minority within the millennial cluster (Seo, 2016).
Understanding Black millennials’ perceptions and knowledge of these brands is important in order to understand the long-standing impact of this major movement in order to unpack concepts related to buying Black or how these styles influence them today.

Millenials, specifically Black millennial consumers are also unique and have distinct consumer-related behaviors. Black consumers are more enthusiastic and social shoppers than non-Black consumers, and will often spend more on apparel (Seo, 2016; Mogelonsky, 1998). Millennials have a high spending power, especially students, who spend billions on apparel following food and cars (Seo, 2016; Mobile Youth Idea Factory, 2013). Despite their high spending power, millennial consumers are difficult to persuade with traditional forms of advertising (Burkhalter & Thornton, 2014; D’Orio, 1999). Black women students have a high level of product involvement and tend to purchase products that emphasize their body shape and express their individuality (Johnson, Banks, Smith, & Seo, 2017). Contrary to popular belief, men use fashion and shopping as a form of entertainment and are concerned with their physical appearance and sense of style (Seo, & Namwamba, 2014). In a 2008 national study, Black men had the highest level of interest in fashion and appearance (Kasier, 2012).

There is also a small body of literature surrounding HBCUs, HBCU students and alumni, and their experiences and opinions regarding fashion. An HBCU is an institution of higher education whose principal mission is the education of Black Americans (Redd, 1998; Federal Law USCS 1061). The first HBCUs, founded in the 1800s, were nonprofit, private institutions (Redd, 1998). Later, two laws were passed to help establish and finance publicly funded schools as well as help educate lower and middle-income Americans, the National Land-Grant Colleges Act in 1862 known as the First Morrill Act, and then the Second Morrill Act of 1980 (Redd, 1998). HBCUs, whose student body, faculty, and staff are
primarily Black have faced many struggles such as inadequate funding, discrimination, and overall lack of support (Redd, 1998). Despite the hardships, HBCUs have been confirmed to positively affect Black students in things such as growth and cognitive development, academic achievement, and degree attainment (Berger & Milem, 2000; Allen, 1991, 1992; Astin, 1993; Bohr, Pascarella, Nora, and Terenzini, 1995; Fleming, 1984; Gurin & Epps, 1975; Jackson & Swan; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996). This study will add to the gap of literature not only surrounding the specific participants of this study, Black millennials from HBCU’s, but also will add to literature on urbanwear fashion brands.

Historically, clothing has been used by Black individuals, a race that has experienced systemic marginalization, as a symbol to achieve a higher social status (Shwartz, 1963). During the slavery era, Black people had no choice in what they were wore as clothing was a means of control by the slave owners (Sanders, 2011; Hunt & Sibley, 1994; Tandberg, 1980; White & White, 1995). Slave owners only allowed slaves to dress their best on Sundays, which led to the long-standing tradition of clothing being a way for Blacks to communicate pride in relation to their community and self-respect by dressing in their finest attire (Miller, 2009).

Born in the Bronx during the 1970s, hip-hop quickly became an artistic and cultural phenomenon far beyond a genre of music (Aldridge & Stewart, 2005). The four main components of hip-hop include breaking (break dance), graffiti art, DJ-ing (disc jockey; playing records on two-turntables), and the MC (the rapper; McLeod, 1999; Hager, 1984). Since its inception, hip-hop has created a unique style, aesthetic, and a dialect that relates largely to youth culture (Aldridge & Stewart, 2005). Little research examines hip-hop as a music phenomenon, and there is even more limited research that has examined hip-hop style.
As rap music grew in popularity, these music artists began to reference luxury brands to “highlight their achievement” of prestige, as this is a way to project socioeconomic status and social class (Burkhalter & Thornton, 2014; Eshun, 2005; Kim & Karpova, 2010). Out of hip-hop culture grew a segment of the fashion industry called urbanwear (Romero, 2012). Hip-hop culture expanded from out of the ghettos into the suburbs, and the main way that one could be identified as a hip-hop enthusiast is by their style of dress known as urban gear (Romero, 2012). While urbanwear was popular during the 1980s and 1990s, it was suggested by industry professionals that the urbanwear industry would be short-lived and did not have staying power in the fashion industry (Royal, 2000). Hip-hop has a cultural and economic influence that should not be dismissed as a fad, but rather taken seriously as other artistic and cultural movements in the Black community such as blues and jazz, Civil Rights, and the Black Art Movement (Aldridge & Stewart, 2005).

Purpose and Research Questions

The brands FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, Sean John were first produced between 1989 to 1998, and are considered five of the more popular urbanwear brands of this time. The urbanwear style was born out of the urban ghettos of New York and was originally geared primarily to Black consumers, but eventually they significantly decreased or stopped buying these products. To understand the importance of urban fashion and hip-hop style within the current generation of Black millennial consumers, three research questions were developed below.
1. How do Black millennials acquire knowledge of fashion?

2. What are Black millennials’ knowledge and perceptions of five of the prominent urban fashion brands that were founded in the 1980s and 90s (FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, Sean John)?

3. How does hip-hop style from the 1990s influence Black millennials’ personal style today?

**Definitions of Terms**

**Urban:** Industrial; city life (Kaiser, 1990, p. 74)

**Urbanwear:** Lifestyle apparel for hip-hop followers and enthusiasts (Romero, 2012)

**Hip-Hop:** Comprised of rap music, clothing choice, attitudes, language, and an approach to culture and cultural artifacts (Ibrahim, 1999, p 351, Walcott, 1995)

**Revenue:** Income; supported by advertisements or sponsors (Wolfe, 2009; Coltrane & Messineo, 2000)

**Culture:** a. Related to the arts, the media, and historical and contemporary value systems or ideologies characterizing a culture or groups within a culture; b. a context that can be thickly described; clothing lends itself as a thick/rich description of a culture (Kaiser, 1990, p. 25; Geertz, 1973 p. 13)

**Dress:** Body modifications and body supplements (Eicher, 2010; Kaiser, 2012)
Style: The construction of self through the assemblage of garments, accessories, and beauty regimes that may, or may not be, in fashion at the time of use (Kaiser, 2012; Tulloch, 2010)

Millennials: Also known as “Generation Y” and individuals who are born between the years of 1981 and 2002 (Dias, 2003)

Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU): Institutions of higher education whose principal mission is the education of Black Americans (Redd, 1998, p. 33; Federal Law USCS 1061)

Status consumption: “The motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through conspicuous consumption of products that symbolize status for the individual and surrounding others” (Pentecost & Andrews, 2010; Easten, Fredenberger, Campbell, & Calvert, 1997; p. 54)
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hip-Hop and Purchasing Decisions

For years hip-hop remained on the outside of mainstream pop culture until the 1980s when rap music became more accepted in pop culture (McLeod, 1999). With rap music selling around $100 million in 1988, rap music accounted for 2% of the music industry’s sales, and by 1992, those sales reached $400 million (McLeod, 1999; Vaughn, 1992). Marketing experts estimate that around one-quarter of discretionary spending is influenced in some way by hip-hop (Bond, 2004; Morgan 2005). Over time, hip-hop culture has become a multi-trillion-dollar industry (Gause, 2008). Companies such as Reebok and McDonald’s use hip-hop as a tool for marketing their product by producing music videos, dressing the artists, and having the artist rap about the product they are selling (Burkhalter and Thornton, 2014; Anonymous, 2005; Kiley, 2005). Music videos are an effective tool in influencing behaviors, especially for young people, who use music videos as a way to learn about themselves, clothing choices, and lifestyle choices (Burkhalter & Thornton, 2014; Hansen & Hansen, 2000; Sun & Lull, 1986; Tiggemann & Slater, 2004). Brand placement in rap videos is a way for companies to have their products endorsed by these artists (Burkhalter & Thornton, 2014; Lehu, 2007). For example, in the 1980s and 1990s, brands such as Tommy Hilfiger and Polo began to place highly visible logos on their garments to promote their brands (Power & Hauge, 2008). Over 90% of rap music videos reference brands (Burkhalter & Thornton, 2014). Over time, high-fashion designers have taken inspiration from the hip-hop culture and urbanwear. For example, in 2017, Marc Jacobs released a collection at New York Fashion Week that was directly inspired from a documentary called Hip Hop Evolution (Phelps, 2017). Jacobs, a New York native, grew up seeing the influence hip-hop had on art and style,
and claims to have a respect for the foundation that hip-hop has laid for youth culture street style (Phelps, 2017). In the 1990s, designers such as Isaac Mizrahi, Anne Klein, and Gianni Versace created collections that included hip-hop accessories such as oversized overalls, medallions, and hip-hop music in the fashion shows (Lewis & Gray, 2013; Solomon & Rabolt, 2009).

Hip-hop culture can be even more influential to an age group that is very impressionable (Morgan, 2005). It is suggested that Black kids are more susceptible to things sold to them through televisions and the media because they may use things they see on TV as a source of guidance (Anderson & Williams, 1983, Morgan, 2005). Adolescents’ views of themselves, desire for material things, their style of dress is often related to the music they listen to (Brown, 2006). The music industry can attract adolescents’ purchasing power (Brown, 2006). Consumer data from 1996 showed the influence that hip-hop had on young people: over 50 percent of young people between the ages of 12 and 20 were strong hip-hop followers, and also that teenagers preferred urban styles of clothing like baggy clothes, hooded sweatshirts and sports gear (Lewis & Gray, 2013; Spiegel, 1996).

**The Relationship of Rap Music and Fashion**

Hip-hop music and fashion combined are marketable and profitable (Baxter & Marina, 2008). During the 1990s, the rap music industry and urban brands such as FUBU, Mecca, and Enyce were prosperous (Kitwanza, 2004). June Ambrose, stylist and former marketing director of Karl Kani, discussed the need for Black owned companies in the fashion industry in an interview with *Essence* magazine (Hodby, 2016). Ambrose noted that large fashion companies who capitalized on hip-hop culture such as Tommy Hilfiger and Polo, were not going after the Black consumer, but what the Black consumer aspired to, such as social class (Hodby, 2016). People are interested and are very involved in what their
favorite hip-hop artists drive, eat or drink, especially what they wear (Bond, 2004; Morgan, 2005). Luxury brands not only not sell clothing, but also sells social characteristics and symbols of certain lifestyles (Power & Hauge, 2008). Brands, especially urban brands, are loaded with symbols of what the consumer aspires to be (Lewis & Gray, 2013; Torelli et al, 2010). Rap music video and lyrics in the 1990s were full of status symbols, which led to rap fans being exposed to the brands that were referenced by rap artists (Power & Hauge, 2008). For example, Burberry, a British luxury brand, gained a large following from the American hip-hop community with rap artists like Nelly, Ja Rule, and Foxy Brown referencing the brand in their music (Power & Hauge, 2008).

Urbanwear Brands

When hip-hop came into the music scene in the late 1970s, it gave a voice to the Black and Latino youth and was a significant moment in Black history as well (Clay, 2003; George, 1999). Throughout time, Black fashion and style has evolved. Decades after slavery, jazz culture heavily influenced Black individuals’ choice of style (Kaiser, 2012). In the 1930s and 1940s, young, Black men were attracted to zoot suits as a means of differentiating themselves from hegemonic masculinity, thus using the suit as a symbol of power (Kaiser, 2012). Lewis (2003) identifies many trends of the African Diaspora in the United States, such as 1960s and 1970s fashion being influenced by “Black Panther style or Afrocentric/soul brother and soul sister style,” as well as “hustler” and “disco diva style” towards the end of the 1970s (Lewis, 2003, p. 166-167). Hip-hop inspired fashion came about during the late 1970s through the 1980s with the “Breaker-Boys” or “B-Boys and B-Girls” style, which included heavy gold jewelry, sneakers, Kangol hats, and bell-bottom jeans (Lewis, 2003, p 167-168). The 1980s urban youth style also included Gazelle glasses, nameplates, sheepskin and leather bomber coats (Kitwana, 2004). The early- to mid-1990s resulted in an era of
Black fashion that Lewis (2003) identified as “gangsta,” which included clothing trends such as oversized clothes, Timberland boots, baseball caps, flat-top hairstyles, and hair weaves (Lewis, 2003, p 168-169). During the late 1980s and 1990s, the “homeboy” trends included oversized t-shirts, combat boots, sneakers, tracksuits, and garments with fake designer insignias and labels on them (Cutler, 2013; Lewis & Gray, 2013; Lewis, 2003). Although during this time, many Black consumers were invested in mainstream fashion brands, there were Black urbanwear brands that started to gain popularity with Black consumers. Five of those urbanwear brands, which are: FUBU, Karl Kani, Sean John, Phat Farm, and Cross Colours, their impact on fashion, and what Black millennials today think of these brands will be examined in this study.

**FUBU**

Daymond John, the owner and creator of FUBU, started off very small. Daymond John began his career in the fashion industry just because he needed money (Banks, 2015). In 1989, he started selling printed graphic t-shirts regarding issues such as the Rodney King riots and Mike Tyson’s incarceration and wool beanies on street corners in New York (Banks, 2015; Harrison, 2014). After selling garments designed around current events such as the Rodney King riots and Mike Tyson’s incarceration, John noticed people had an emotional connection to his clothes (Harrison, 2014). Although Daymond John did not start out with an incredible amount of money to launch his business, he understood that there was a demand for his products (Lee, 2012). Daymond John named his brand FUBU, an acronym for “For Us, By Us,” after he noticed that many big-name designers did not want to acknowledge their Black consumers (Harrison, 2014). When FUBU reached its peak in 1998, the company earned $350 million in sales (Baer, 2013). Twenty-five years later, and Daymond John’s brand FUBU has sales around $6 billion (Harrison, 2014). Daymond John
capitalized on the hip-hop community to help his brand launch. To gain the exposure his new brand needed, John would shop around his FUBU gear to different rappers to wear in their music videos (Harrison, 2014). The FUBU company also used guerilla marketing to sell their products, most notably in a 1999 Gap commercial starring LL Cool J, who wore FUBU gear during a freestyle rap in the commercial (Banks, 2015). Daymond John attributed his company’s demise to a lack of financial intelligence (Harrison, 2014).

**Karl Kani**

In 1989, Carl Williams, now considered the “Godfather of urban streetwear” moved to Los Angeles with some samples and a dream to make it in the fashion industry with his brand Karl Kani (Holly, 2016). Although today, his brand is popular overseas, during the 1990s Karl Kani was a major urban brand having hip-hop performers like Biggie Smalls, Tupac, and Aaliyah wearing his clothes (Holly, 2016). Most notably, Tupac Shakur wore a Karl Kani t-shirt in his “Keep Ya Head Up” music video (Harris, 2017). After meeting and developing a friendship with the late rapper Tupac Shakur, Carl Williams’ Karl Kani brand skyrocketed after Shakur agreed to appear in Karl Kani advertisements free-of-charge simply because Tupac did not believe in charging other Black people (Harris, 2017). His collection, Karl Kani Infinity, became a Black Enterprise Industrial/Service 100 company, as well as bring in 73.4 million dollars in sales (Gite, 1997; Morgan, 2005). The Karl Kani brand attributes their downfall after an ill-fated partnership, as well as the emergence of other urbanwear brands who, according to Carl Williams, copied his blueprint and took his marketing ideas (Holly, 2016; Garland, 2016). After understanding that brands have to evolve, the Karl Kani brand has new collections and are re-releasing vintage pieces from the 1990s (Hutson, 2017).
Sean John

Celebrating their 20-year anniversary in 2018, Sean John is one of the few clothing brands that started in the urban wear industry and still manages to keep up with other fashion companies (Palmieri, 2016). Sean John has annual retail sales of $450 million (Palmieri, 2016). The CEO of Sean John, music producer and rapper, Sean “Puffy Daddy” or “Diddy” Combs, says that Sean John was created to be an aspirational brand for the young consumer (Palmieri, 2016).

Launched in 1998 at a Las Vegas trade show, Sean John quickly grew to fame as a clothing line that had hip-hop roots but reached out consumers from the suburbs to Paris (Givhan, 2016). Combs’ Sean John label intended to be a brand that mixed the streets and the boardroom, meaning the Sean John brand was tasteful and stylish but still had street roots (Givhan, 2016). Although Combs’ never went to school to study fashion, in his early days in the business, Tommy Hilfiger was his mentor (Givhan, 2016). The Sean John brand was proving to be a successful powerhouse in the urbanwear industry, but also in the fashion industry. In 2004, Sean Combs received the award for menswear designer of the year from the Council of Fashion Designers of America (Givhan, 2016). The Sean John label is still carrying on successfully in the fashion industry, producing new fragrances and collections (Spence, 2016).

Phat Farm

Founded by Russell Simmons in 1992, Phat Farm became another urbanwear staple for hip-hop enthusiasts (Rozhon, 2004). Russell Simmons, a music producer and creator of Def Jam Records, had close ties to the hip-hop community. Simmons’ partnered with a SoHo shop owner, Marc Bagutta, and channeled his hip-hop roots by hiring two graffiti artists-turned-designers to help launch the brand (Brown, 2016). Phat Farm was one of the leaders of
the urban fashion brands, earning $2 million in sales during their first year of business (Rozhon, 2004; Brown, 2016). Phat Farm generated 320 million dollars in revenue (Morgan, 2005). Russell Simmons wife at the time, Kimora Lee Simmons, a former model, also had a role in the Simmons’ fashion empire with her own line of women’s clothing under the Phat Farm umbrella called Baby Phat (Rozhon, 2004). After Phat Farm earned millions upon millions of dollars in sales, Simmons’ sold the Phat Fashion company to Kellwood Company, and has focused his career on philanthropy (Mason, 2004).

**Cross Colours**

Although Cross Colours success was short-lived, filing for bankruptcy in the 1990s after making near $100 million in sales, they played a huge role in the success of the urban wear industry (Hundreds, 2014; Romero, 2012). The designers of Cross Colours, Carl Jones and T. J. Walker, wanted to create a brand to boost social awareness in the early 1990s when AIDS and racial discrimination were major issues (Complex, 2011). Cross Colours, with the slogan “Clothes Without Prejudice,” became one of the first urbanwear brands to have a progressive message (McAdams, 1994). It is said that Cross Colours’ success came around the time when it was “cool to be Black” (McAdams, 1994). The name of the brand gives a nod to Los Angeles street gangs, the Bloods (who wear red colors) and the Crips (who wear blue colors), in which the designers hoped that their clothes could “cross the colors” of the gangs and stop the violence (Marriott, 1992). Cross Colours was a new company in the urban wear industry when it caught the attention of the costume designers of the hit television show *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. The company also went on to dress cast members of *In Living Color, A Different World,* and celebrities such as Muhammed Ali and Snoop Dogg (Hundreds, 2014, Complex, 2011). Their brand was founded in 1989 but fizzled out of the
spotlight around 1994 due to problems stemming from a lack of a strong chief financial officer (Rogers, 2017).

**Disassociation of Black Community with Black-owned Brands**

**Decline in Popularity**

In the 1990s, billions of dollars were spent on fashion and accessories, but only a small percentage went to Black-owned designers (Gite, 1997). In the 2000s, there seemed to be a shift in the Black community away from the urban style of dress. It is possible that many people felt that the urban and streetwear styles were further promoting the negative stereotypes of the Black community, particularly Black men. Television ads, the most popular form of advertising, are full of imagery. This imagery, for example, the style of dress of people, can further perpetuate subtle forms of racial bias and prejudice (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). Although in the 1980s and 1990s, we were past the era of blatant mocking and joking about African Americans in media, there was still obvious trivialization and exaggeration of Blacks in advertisements (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). African American men were often portrayed as “menacing and unruly youths” and “hyper masculine thugs,” while Black women were often viewed in advertisements as “exotic or sexually available” (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000, p 368; Gray, 1995; hooks, 1992; Marable, 1996). This could be one of the reasons that the Black community abandoned urban and streetwear brands, because they did not want to further feed into the stereotypes that are portrayed to the world of us through advertisements and television. Urbanwear and hip-hop culture are synonymous. Therefore, because of the negative associations people make with urban African Americans, there is a negative view and attacks on hip-hop music (Rose, 1991). Many people dress however they feel and want to look like, regardless of what race or what type of music they’re interested. Black men and women today are rejecting negative stereotypes placed on
them, as many people have opposed to the seemingly “thug” wardrobe of the hip-hop subculture.

As hip-hop enthusiasts began to mature, so did their sense of style, and some brands could not keep up with the evolving and maturing Black consumer (Lewis & Gray, 2013). Although hip-hop influenced style originated in the streets, this style eventually trickled-up to middle-class youth, while hip-hop fashion influencers began to move on to more tailored and sophisticated looks (Lewis & Gray, 2013). Many Black urbanwear designers do not fit the stereotype of what a successful fashion designer is, and oftentimes the media misses the mark of what Black fashion is (Lewis, 2003). The lack of accurate displays of Black fashion in fashion publications could have led to many supporters of urban wear brands to disassociate from it. Although some brands did try to adapt to their maturing consumer, there was still a lack of innovation in the designing of the urbanwear clothes, which ultimately, became one of the reasons these brands did not survive (Lewis & Gray, 2013). A study by Lewis (2003), says that Black designers are limited by a lack of creativity, and that there needs to be a union between the designer, production, and positive views in the media, which the hip-hop subculture does not always have (Lewis, 2003, p. 165).

**Hip-Hop Goes Mainstream**

Over the past few decades, hip-hop has steadily gained worldwide popularity. As hip-hop artists gained more notoriety, many artists began to develop their own clothing lines instead of relying on existing designers to create their image (Lewis & Gray, 2013). In the documentary *Fresh Dressed*, it is discussed how during the 2000s, the urban and streetwear industry became oversaturated. Once hip-hop was noticed as a fashion “cash cow,” everyone wanted to cash in on it, which led to many rappers, music industry professionals, and new designers to develop clothing labels (Bittenbender, Clarke, & Jenkins, 2015). Clothing lines
by music celebrities, 50 Cent, Eminem, and Snoop Dogg arrived on the scene in the 2000s, but did not stick (Lewis & Gray, 2013). What was once a niche market, was becoming overpopulated, commercialized, and inevitably started great competition amongst brands.

Large fashion companies (Tommy Hilifiger, Adidas, POLO, etc.) began to profit from the emerging urban industry, which knocked down the smaller, lesser known brands. But, many of the urban wear brands held their own in comparison to the big-name designers. A study by Morgan (2005), lists the revenue for companies such as Karl Kani, Sean John, Rocawear, FUBU, and more; who had sales in the millions. There simply became too many brands that wanted to be in the “urban club.” Once trends reach mass acceptance, it is followed by a phase-out stage, which explains why, despite the fact consumers had a bond with urban brands, they may have decided to leave it behind (Lewis & Gray, 2013; Dickerson, 2003). The beloved hip-hop clothing market was being plagued by declining sales and bankruptcy (Lewis & Gray, 2013; Kaplan, 2008).

Today, vintage styles are becoming trendy. Once clothing trends reach a twenty-year-old mark, such as urbanwear brands from the 1990s, they are considered “retro” or “vintage” and tend to resurge back into fashion (Lewis & Gray, 2013). Companies are taking advantage of this nostalgic trend of 1990s clothing. For example, according to an article on re-emerging 1990s urban fashion in Women’s Wear Daily, companies such as The Gap, Guess, and Calvin Klein are releasing capsule collections of their 1990s clothes (Hughes, 2016). With hip-hop still being a fashion cash cow, apparel brands are teaming up with rappers to promote this nostalgic 1990s streetwear trend. Guess hired rapper ASAP Rocky as their spokesperson and likewise with Nautica, who is now teaming up with rapper Lil’ Yatchy to promote the urban/streetwear trend (Hughes, 2016). Although many brands are tapping into
this 1990s, vintage trend, is there a gap in the fashion industry, particularly the urbanwear section, which only Black-owned brands can fill?

**Black Culture, Identity, and Fashion**

Like Black culture as a whole, the hip-hop subculture along with other subcultures such as underground gay scenes, types of rock music, and rave communities, are threatened with assimilation (McLeod, 1999; Duncombe, 1997; Ennis, 1997; Frith, 1981; Garofalo, 1997; hooks, 1992; Lubiano, 1996; Lull, 1987; Neal, 1999; Peterson, 1997; Thornton, 1996). Because the Black community has historically been subjected to discrimination and oppression, Black individuals must find ways to compensate for this feeling of being marginalized, often by using clothing as a tool to raise status or self-esteem (Schwartz, 1963). Clothing is a communicative tool that aids Black individuals in their more subordinate position in society by expressing a higher status (Schwartz, 1963). Race and ethnicity are intertwined in everyday style-fashion-dress, while also intersecting with class and gender (Kaiser, 2012). In fashion-related studies, race is studied in the context of visible features such as hair texture, skin color, or facial features, which can often lead to discrimination because some of these things cannot be easily changed (Kaiser, 2012). However, a person’s identity may not be based on visible racial features like hair texture or skin color but rather their intra-ethnic construction of their identity (Clay, 2003; Hall, 1992). Ethnic dress, such as urban styles of dress, are clothing worn by individuals to express their belonging to a community with a common heritage (Kaiser, 2012; Eicher & Sumberg, 1995). Things such as fashion and taste in music are considered “subcultural capital” (Thornton, 1995, p. 9) for youth to distinguish themselves from others (Baxter & Marina, 2008; Thornton, 1995). Lamont and Lareau (1988) defined cultural capital as widely shared cultural signals such as attitudes, formal knowledge, behaviors, and credentials (Clay, 2003; Lamont & Lareau,
1988, p. 156). Social and psychological aspects of clothing are not just focused on the meaning of clothing, but rather the process in which people associate clothing and appearance with certain meanings and the social consequences of those meanings (Kaiser, 1990).

**Theoretical Framework**

This study will be informed by various theories, including Critical Race Theory, Afrocentric theory, and symbolic interaction. Building off movements such as critical legal studies and radical feminist movements, Critical Race Theory (CRT) developed in the 1970s after the Civil Rights era (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT explores the relationships between race, racism, power, and how those factors are embedded in American society, as well as history, economics, self-interest, and even emotions (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Creswell, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2107). Critical Race Theory has three main tenets, the first of which is the social construction of race, in which we learn that race is a social construct and is not an actual biological thing, the second, the idea of interest convergence, and the third tenet of CRT is the centrality of narrative, in which using people of color’s experiences to help tell their story and add to theory and literature (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In an education setting, Critical Race Theory focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences for students of color (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000; Creswell, 2013). Researchers who study CRT take the position that racism is an ordinary part of American society while also questioning unjust assumptions and reasonings (Harris, 2012; Delgado, 1994).

Another theory that will be used in this study is Afrocentric theory. Afrocentricity is an approach that views situations through the perspective of an African person or a person of African descent (Asante, 1991; Asante, 1987). An Afrocentric prospective “allows Africans

Like semiotics, a symbolic interactionist perspective examines symbols and the meanings of those symbols (Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, Demirbuken, 2009). Symbols, such as clothing and appearance, have shared meanings for different people and those symbols initiate meaningful responses (Stryker, 1980; Kaiser, 1990). Symbolic interactionism examines appearance management of both ideas and actions and appearance perceptions (Kaiser, 1990). Symbolic interaction is focused on negotiation, such as the individual and the observer communicate meaningfully when both have the same responses to one another (Kaiser, 1990). According to Goffman (1959), appearance is a stimulus that tells us the performer’s, or individual’s, social status (Goffman, 1959, p. 15). Each of these social science theories will help further explain Black millennials’ relationship with 1990s urban fashion.

**Summary of Review of Literature**

Throughout the literature related to urban brands, there are some gaps that this study hopes to fill. The hip-hop subculture has created a place in the fashion industry. From the literature review, it is noted that the five brands in this study (FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, and Sean John) were making millions of dollars throughout the 1990s. With
the re-emergence of 1990s fashion trends, the literature does not support that FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, or Sean John are as popular or making as much money as they were in the 1990s. The literature does support that the consumers of these brands grew out of the urban style but does not give much clarity as to why exactly that is. There is also a gap in literature regarding style choices of students who attend HBCUs. Along with the lack of information on HBCU student’s clothing and style choices, there is still a lack of information on how Black millennials shop. Although there is information on Black millennials and their spending power, we still do not know exactly what the motivations are behind purchasing from Black-owned clothing brands or their opinions on Black-owned brands such as the five urban brands featured in this study.
CHAPTER 3. METHODS

For this qualitative study, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews. There was no particular qualitative tradition used in this study. Throughout interviews, I investigated what Black millennials think of urban fashion brands from the 1980s and 1990s era, as well as their knowledge and perceptions of 1990s trends that are emerging into style today.

Participant Recruitment

To obtain participants, a snowball method was used. I first contacted professors at an HBCU because they have connections to students and could pass along the flyer for the call for participants. I also emailed or sent personal messages to personal contacts who I knew would be eligible for the study or who might know others they could share the information with. To be eligible to participate, people had to meet the following criteria: (a) identifies as Black or African-American, (b) born between the years of 1990 to 1999 (age 27 to 18), and (c) student or alumni of a Historically Black College/University. Once potential participants showed interest in the study, I sent them the informed consent form and the FACE sheet. If interested, they filled out both forms, sent them back via email, and then we scheduled a time that worked for both us for the interview. On the FACE sheet, participants filled out demographic-related information.

Data Collection

Before I began collecting data, I completed two pilot interviews. Data from these two pilot interviews were not included in the final data set. These interviews were used to practice interviewing, clarify the interview questions, re-order questions as needed, and to check the length of the interviews to ensure I stayed within the time limit originally set that
was approved through the Institutional Review Board. After these two pilot interviews, fifteen official interviews were conducted, and at the end of the fifteenth interview, I determined that saturation was reached, and no more interviews were necessary. Saturation refers to gathering enough data from the interviews to develop a model or theory (Creswell, 2013). All of the interviews were conducted over zoom, a video chat system, so this way we could see each other during the interview, which helps to build rapport, to be able to see their reactions, and I could garner if they needed more time to answer each question or were still thinking. The interviews ranged from 28 to 56 minutes and were conducted in March of 2018.

The interview questions were developed based upon the research questions (See Table 1). As shown in the table 1, each interview question tied back to a research question. In total, there were 27 questions. I allowed for flexibility during the semi-structured interview in that if participants brought up something else, or if I needed clarification of a question that was not on the list, I allowed the participant to relate their story. However, if they got too far off track, I attempted to keep the participant on topic, and in some instances, it was easier than others. One example of how I tried to guide the participant back to the interview question was when participant 14 began talking about how her students dressed, which was irrelevant to the project and the interview question, and after a few minutes, I interjected and asked the next question. This participant moved on without thinking about it. The FACE sheet that participants filled out included demographic information such as age, race, home town, classification/year at the university, and gender.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do Black millennials acquire knowledge of fashion?</td>
<td>1. Where do you get info on the latest fashion trends?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. How do you express your personal fashion style? Does your taste in music affect your fashion style?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Is self-expression through style important to you?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. What fashion brand do you wear that are important to you?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. How would you like fashion brands to market their products to you?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. In what ways, if any, do stereotypes of African-Americans affect your choices of clothing or appearance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does hip-hop style from the 1980s and 1990s influence Black millennial’s personal style today?</td>
<td>7. How do you define hip-hop style?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. What factors most influence your sense of style?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. How has hip-hop influenced your personal style?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. How have you seen 1990s hip-hop trends back into style?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. What decade of hip-hop do you find most influential to fashion? (Ex. 70s, 80s, 90s, 00s?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are Black millennials’ knowledge and perceptions of five of the prominent urban fashion brands that were founded in the 1980s and 90s (FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, Sean John)?</td>
<td>12. How would you define urban fashion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Explain any prior knowledge you have of these brands: FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, and Sean John.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Where did you first see or hear about these brands?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Explain your experience, if any, on wearing urban brands?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. In what ways do you feel that these five urban brands are culturally significant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17. Give your opinion on how fashionable you view: FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, and Sean John. (show 2-3 images of each brand)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18. What are three words that come to mind when you see urban wear brands such as these?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. What do you think about 1990s brands’ (FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, Sean John) mission statements, are they relevant to you or today’s consumer? (mission statement was provided)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20. Are these styles/brands something that you would wear today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21. What are your thoughts on buying from Black-owned fashion brands/designers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22. Do you feel obligated to support Black-owned designers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23. In what ways have you seen urban brands having a long-term “staying power” in the fashion industry? Or not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24. If they do not have staying power, why are they unpopular?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25. Is urban fashion a key component in the fashion industry?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26. How do you feel the urban brands featured in this study are important and influential to Black culture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27. What are your thoughts on urban style of dress being associated with negative Black stereotypes?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

Data analysis began during the interviews, where I took notes while they were talking, which is referred as memo taking (Creswell, 2013). Each interview was audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. An outside transcriptionist, a person, not a transcription service website, completed all transcriptions. There were some mistakes in the transcriptions due to the use of slang or unclear words from the participants, in which I later replayed the audio recording for clarification of what was said. After the interviews were transcribed, all identifying information was removed from the transcription, and participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. The transcriptionist was added to a shared online folder, where I uploaded the audio recordings, and she later uploaded the transcribed documents.

Next, each interview was analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding in a cyclical process to find themes and subthemes within the data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). During the open coding process, I first began looking through the memos I took during the interview and wrote out the themes and subthemes that were re-occurring in my notes. Next, I uploaded the transcripts into MaxQDA, a qualitative data analysis software, and defined the original codes I identified from my memos in MaxQDA as well. Then, I began reading through the transcripts over and over to look for additional codes to add to the original list. At this point, I made a first draft of the codebook where each code was identified with a word, phrase, or sentence and then had a definition. The original codebook had numerous codes as I wanted to start with a lot of detail, and I ended up with 62 original codes and code definitions. I continually re-visited the codebook, code definitions, and transcripts to add or delete to this original list.

Next, I moved into axial coding. Axial coding refers to, relating the categories to the
core phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this stage, I began grouping the codes together and looking for relationships. I began to significantly condense down the codebook into larger themes. Then, I re-defined my codes and code definitions within MaxQDA and re-coded all of the data with this new code book. I continually debriefed with the person who served as my audit coder. It was during this stage that I checked inter-coder reliability. The entire process of checking inter-coder reliability is described in the next section. Finally, I moved into selective coding where I defined the five larger themes, which each had numerous subthemes. These themes serve as the framework for my results.

**Credibility or Trustworthiness**

Before the interviews began, to increase rapport or trust of the participants, we first engaged in small talk. These conversations centered around how they were doing and what they were up to lately. I also let them know how long the interview would be, and if they needed to take a break to let me know and I could stop recording. During the interviews, I used probes to get richer information such as “in what ways,” “why,” or “can you explain that a little bit more?” Each section of my interview schedule was about a different research question, so when I got to a certain point, I let them know what topic we would be talking about, so they could have it in their mind.

To increase credibility of the study, I used several techniques. First, I used the same interview questions for each participant, in the same order. Then, I worked with an audit-coder to check inter-coder reliability during the analysis process. My co-major professor, Dr. Kelly Reddy-Best, Assistant Professor in Apparel, Merchandising & Design, served as audit coder. First, the audit coder and I reviewed the codebook, and made revisions for clarity. We also removed any duplication in the codebook and condensed codes down, which also served as a debriefing session where we discussed the interviews in great detail. In this way, the
audit coder could provide a “fresh set of eyes” on the data. I first coded 20% of the data, then, the audit coder used the codebook and codes to check for agreement. I calculated inter-coder reliability by dividing the total number of agreements divided by the total number of codes for each interview. We did audit coding of three interviews, which was 20% of the sample. The audit coder and I aimed to achieve the 80% or above agreement as recommended by Creswell (2013). The first transcript had 93.6% agreement, second had 94.7%, and the third had 96.3%, with a total of 94.9% overall. Since I had such a high agreement, I did not check any other transcripts and then utilized the codebook to analyze the rest of the data.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Participants

Fourteen individuals completed a single in-depth, semi-structured interview. Participants ages ranged from age 22 to 30, and they were born between the years of 1988 to 1996. All participants identified as African-American or Black. There were originally 15 participants, but I did not receive a sign informed consent document or FACE sheet from one participant, so that interview was removed from the sample. See Table 2 for a categorization of each participant’s assigned code number, age, and current state in which they are originally from.

This era of Black fashion in the 1990s, that was created in a highly-concentrated Black area, birthed the urbanwear segment of the fashion industry (Romero, 2012). Although the participants were not from the birthplace of hip-hop and urbanwear, the Bronx, one of the connections they have to their Blackness stems from the HBCU environment of which they all encountered. The focus of an HBCU is the education of Black individuals and serves as a hub for Black culture, and the participants’ responses reflected that close connection to Black culture as they were all students or alumni from an HBCU.
Table 2

**Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Date of birth</th>
<th>Home State</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>Current undergraduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Completed bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Completed bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Completed bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Current graduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Completed bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Completed bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Completed bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Current graduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Completed bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Current undergraduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Current graduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Current graduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Current undergraduate student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme Overview**

Based upon analysis of the data, five themes emerged including: (a) knowledge acquisition, (b) awareness of urban styles, (c) ambiguity, (d) 1980s/1990s urban style influence, and (e) cultural appropriation. Each theme and the corresponding subthemes are identified and described below.
Theme 1: Knowledge Acquisition

All fifteen participants explained that they actively sought and acquired fashion knowledge from a variety of spaces, which highlights their overall interest in fashion and aesthetics. Social media was a leading source of fashion inspiration and obtaining information on current trends for all participants. Not surprisingly, all the participants viewed social media outlets, primarily Instagram. They also viewed other mediums, including art (n = 2) for their style and fashion inspiration. Visual art such as photographs and paintings were listed as a source of inspiration among these participants. The theme of knowledge acquisition is comprised of two subthemes: focus on blackness and criticism of the media.
Not only were participants interested in mainstream fashion or fashion knowledge, specifically, there was an interest and focus on blackness where participants (n = 8) followed Black bloggers, entertainers, or websites. The focus on blackness was evident when participant 2 said, “I literally look at Media Take Out and World Star Hip-Hop every day.” *Media Take Out* and *Worldstar Hip-Hop* are blog sites that share content from the hip-hop community and rap music scene. Participant 2 continues, “That’s my hip hop culture move, and I look at those every day, watching how the celebrities do, and just noticing stuff from around me and looking at how trends are going.” Another example of how participants focused on Black social media emerged when participant 7 explained, “I will look at Rihanna and Beyoncé and take from their clothing and try to implement that into mine.” While all of the participants used social media and had a heightened attention to fashion, they were most often interested in following social media accounts or profiles that had a strong intersection with Blackness or being Black whether it was Black celebrities or media outlets that mostly featured and/or targeted Black people. This is not surprising as the participants all identified as Black and indicated that they related to individuals who were more like them who were featured in the media.

While participants were discussing where they seek fashion knowledge or style inspiration, there was also a heavy emphasis by participants (n = 10) on a *criticism of the media* because of the lack of diversity regarding race and body size in brand advertisements. Even within the media that focused on Blackness, participants felt that there was not an abundance of diversity within these spaces. One example where a participant offered a critique of how fashion brands market to Black consumers was when participant 9 said,
I think for us [Black people], they’re [fashion brands] so big on trying to incorporate hip-hop and make hip-hop and rap music the ‘go-to,’ to attract younger people, but most of us are actually working professionals. So, even though we listen to the rap music and things like that, we still need suits.

Participant 9 recognized that while seeking fashion knowledge, many brands reach out to the Black consumers with rap music, which she feels is not an accurate way to connect with the working, Black millennial consumer. Therefore, some of these brands are making assumptions about what Black individuals want to look like, and not including a diverse range of aesthetics. Participant 9 explained that while some Black individuals may be interested in hip hop styles, they also need business attire that might not reflect the hip hop aesthetic. Participant 12 was also critical of the media within the spaces where she acquires fashion knowledge regarding race, specifically skin color, and then also body size. They explained,

I feel like a lot more brands should probably be more diverse when advertising their clothing, and not just with skin tone, but the shape of the models as well. I notice that a lot of designers, they try and be diverse by using a skinnier model and then they have plus size [models], but they don’t really have many brands that carry models with natural body figures, like the body shapes in between.

Participant 12 feels that brands could be more successful with the consumers they attract, such as the Black millennial consumer, if they show a broader range of models. The reference to skin tone in their statement is referring to the use of lighter skin tone individuals
more often as opposed to representing a range of skin tones as well as using one body type, such as plus size or model type size, that does not fit the average size of most people.

**Theme 2: Awareness of urban styles**

Theme 2: awareness urban styles yielded three subthemes regarding 1980s/1990s fashion: definitions of urban or hip-hop fashion, memories of urban brands, and oversized silhouettes. To further examine the concepts of what Black millennials think today about urban or hip-hop fashion, I first asked participants how they defined urban or hip-hop fashion? Participants used varying descriptions such as “expressive”, “roughness,” and “authentic” to describe urban or hip-hop fashion, which will be used as micro-themes. Each of these micro-themes were a part of the participants’ definitions, such as expressive meaning urban fashion is a way for young, Black people to express themselves, roughness regarding the rugged, street nature of urban fashion, and authentic meaning a true connectedness to urban fashion and hip-hop culture. Their definitions or interpretations of urban or hip-hop fashion outlined how they feel it is unique and part of the authentic self for some people.

Participant 2 explained that urban fashion is “not as polished. It’s not preppy. You can express yourself more with urban design than you can with runway design.” Participant 8 said,

I would define it as so cool that you just can’t make up. Like, urban fashion is just so authentically cool. You have to be a cool person in order to care, and you have to have that certain type of demeanor about you to carry it, you know, so, definitely urban fashion is coolness that you can’t reproduce, you can’t bottle it up and sell it everywhere else.

The point participant 8 made regarding the essence of “cool” explains an effortless swagger that one carries when they are authentic and true to hip-hop culture. Participant 12 describes
their interpretation of hip-hop fashion as reminiscent of the 90s specifically when they said, “I think straight back to the 90s. I think it’s more like hip-hop fashion for sure, definitely dealing with the Black culture and the Latin[x] culture.” Although participant 12 was in their early youth in the 90s, the thought of urbanwear brought about memories from the development of this cultural movement.

More recognizable urban fashion brands of the 80s and 90s include FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, and Sean John. These brands represent the iconic styles of the revolutionary era in Black fashion history. When inquired about their knowledge of these urban fashion brands, the participants all illustrated various levels of awareness or a recognition of the signature styles. In many instances, the participants (n = 14) related early memories of the urban brands from their childhood. They identified and described their experiences with wearing or seeing other people in their life wearing the five brands and shared specific stories that resonated with them from earlier in their life. For example, participant 6 shared, “There’s just a bunch of nostalgia for me. I didn’t really wear the clothes that much, but my reference is always the people I saw, the music videos, you know, 106 & Park, it’s nostalgic for me when I think about that.” The show 106 & Park was a television show on BET (Black Entertainment Television channel) that played hip-hop and R&B music videos. Even if participants did not wear the brands themselves when they were younger, they often had memories of family members such as siblings wearing these styles. Participant 5 reminisced,

My older sister, she was a really big fan. I remember being in elementary school when my sister wanted FUBU jackets, FUBU shoes, anything FUBU, it was a big thing for her. I was too young to care, but I remember when she
got the FUBU pullover for her birthday, and she wore it to school every day.

While participant 5 did not have personal experiences wearing urban brands, their memories of sibling experiences with these brands was significant and illustrated the importance of these styles for other people in their lives.

Participants were asked more specifically what they remembered of these iconic hip-hop styles. The most common descriptor (n = 14) was *oversized silhouettes*. The participants associated hip-hop or urban style with oversized, loose-fitted silhouettes as a telltale sign of 1990s urban style. In relating to the bagginess of this style, there was often negative critiques of this aesthetic, that it was somewhat outdated for today’s trends. For example, participant 1 said “I do not like baggy clothing. I don’t like too big of clothing that doesn’t fit me. I like my clothes to be fitted.” While participant 1 remembered the baggy characteristics of urban styles, they indicated a personal preference for different silhouettes. Participant 6 also supported the idea that bagginess is no longer popular among Black millennials in that, “I don’t think guys would bring that back too much because they’re [current Black men] into the tight clothing, like the tight skinny jeans and fitted shirts and stuff like that. So, I don’t think that would come back.” Although most of participants did not favor baggy clothing, they did recognize that baggy or oversized pants mixed with a fitted top are currently emerging into style. For example, participant 14 recognized that fashion trends are cyclical when she said, “History is starting to repeat itself yet again, 90s fashion is literally here again, more of the baggy pants is starting to come back out.” In this sense, the participants are relating that baggy styles were popular during the initial developments of style created from hip-hop culture, yet went away for a short period of time, and now are resurfacing into trends today.
Theme 3: Ambiguity

When asked about their perceptions of the 1980s/1990s urban styles, the participants provided ambiguous responses. Their responses varied from loving the brands to thinking the brands were outdated with no chance of coming back into style. This theme has seven subthemes: loved brands, no interest, unfamiliarity, out-of-style, obligation to support Black-owned brands, no obligation to support Black-owned brands, and Black pride.

One of the positive perceptions was that they (n = 10) often related that they loved the brands. They often described how they loved one or more of the five urban brands or how they are still enthusiastic about wearing them. Not only did the participants discuss which urban brands they favored, they also showed an admiration for the Afrocentric colors incorporated in urbanwear styles of this era. For example, participants 12 and 13 showed a love for Cross Colours more than any of the other urban brands, and when asked why it was so appealing, they said, “I love it. I think it’s really cute. It [the color scheme] kind of gives me like a Jamaican vibe,” (Participant 12) and “The colors, the whole thing itself. It’s like art to me” (Participant 13). Participant 10 felt that one of the reasons urbanwear brands from the 80s and 90s would sell today is because of the “cultural influence” in the clothing such as the African or Pan-African colors. Another example of a participant expressing admiration for urban brands discussed, was when participant 8 explained their connection to FUBU, that they currently own and still wear FUBU, and how they feel that FUBU “will always be hot in the streets.”

In some instances, participants (n = 9) expressed that they had no interest in these urban brands or they explained that they (n = 11) were unfamiliar with the brands. The lack of interest shown for urban brands and the unfamiliarity of these brands are not mutually exclusive. For instance, participant 7 explained that they do not like the urban aesthetic when
they said, “It’s [urban fashion/styles] not something that I will want to wear and go out in public in, it’s just not fashionable to me.” During the interviews, while viewing images featuring clothing of the most prominent brands including FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, and Sean John, all of the participants (n = 14) mentioned how some of the looks were out-of-style or suggested how these brands could benefit from redesigning to bring those trends back into style, yet as the brands currently were pictured would not work within today’s marketplace.

The five urban brands discussed in this study, FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, and Sean John, are all Black-owned companies. During the interviews, participants mentioned how these brands are important to Black culture and how they had an appreciation of Black-owned businesses and what these brands did for Black culture, such as their establishment of urban fashion brands that impacted the fashion industry. These Black-owned brands made the participants (n= 14) feel a sense of Black pride. The linkage between urbanwear brands and the Black community was a source of inspiration and gratification for the participants. Participant 9 discussed how urban brands are influential because they embraced Black culture when they said,

They [urban brands] represented the African flag. They represented everything that black people were doing during that time. It was almost like a Black revolution where people were coming out and trying to be more aware of things that were going on in the community and rebuild and bring people together.

The creation of businesses by Black entrepreneurs was an inspirational thing for the participants. Participant 6 discussed how the Karl Kani brand started with a “shoestring budget,” and how he feels that “Black entrepreneurs were just cool.” Participant 10
mentioned how representation of Black-owned urban brands is a source of pride for Black individuals when she said,

I think as far as representation, it’s really important because it helps kids to know that you can do and succeed in something other than sports, rap, and the stereotypical jobs in entertainment of an African-American, you know?

While discussing how she felt proud to wear Black-owned urban brands, Participant 8 said,

All of those brands, they all stand for the same things which is to represent Black people and to support Black businesses, and definitely when I do wear them it’s just an authentic feeling because it’s made from a place that was for me.

In some instances, due to their connection with Blackness, they (n = 3) felt obligated to support Black businesses, but for some they (n = 11) felt no obligation to support Black businesses. When asked about feeling obligated to support Black brands, many participants indicated that they do not feel obligated but rather they choose to support their own race. For example, Participant 3 said, “Support your own, man. Support your own at all costs, no matter what. You can go out there and spend a thousand dollars on some Caucasian brand, why not spend it for your own, you know what I’m saying?” When asked if he feels obligated to support Black brands, Participant 3 responded with, “I don’t really feel obligated, but I’ll make sure that they’re my top priority, some type of way to support black owned businesses at all costs.” Some participants did feel obligated to support Black-owned businesses, such as when participant 9, said,

I just feel that we get the short end of the stick in most cases. So, we didn’t really have the opportunities everybody else had to be successful. So, we’re always a step
behind. Why not try to at least support others in getting that extra edge or getting that extra help that they need to get where everybody else is already at.

Participant 13 had a similar viewpoint, saying that she feels obligated because, “it creates jobs for our people.” Participant 13 also explained how despite the perception that Black business owners provide cheap products or provide sub-par customer service, we should still support Black brands to create wealth within the Black community. Although Participant 8 did not feel an obligation to support Black brands or businesses, she emphasized that she does actively seek Black designers or brands through social media. Participant 8 further explains why she thinks that it is necessary to support local, “homegrown” Black businesses when she said,

I feel like I don’t need to buy from big box brands or department stores, who would blatantly disrespect us in an ad campaign or won’t book us to walk in their shows or anything like that and [instead] go to this [store] down the street and get what I need. It might not be exactly what I need but it’s going to be something that I need, and I’d rather get it from somebody like me. And I’d rather get it from somebody who looks like me, anyway.

Despite many participants’ desire to support Black-owned brands, some participants (n = 11) did not feel that it was as necessary. Participant 6 described how he does not feel obligated to support Black-owned brands simply because he identifies as Black when he said,

I don’t feel obligated, but I mean, if I think it’s good, if I like it, then I’ll buy it. But, otherwise, if I know a person who is a Black designer and looking to get their brand out there, but I don’t necessarily like what they’re doing, and it
doesn’t really speak to me, then the best that I can do is share it with people who I think would appreciate it more.

Participant 5 also described why they did not feel obligated to support Black-owned brands by mentioning how price is a factor when they said, “If I see this Black-owned brand [product], but I also see this at Forever 21 for half the price, I might have to go with that one from Forever 21.”

Theme 4: 1990s urban style influence

All the participants were born during the 1990s, and each have expressed how that decade of fashion, the 90s, has influenced their personal style and that it is currently influencing fashion. Music artists such as Tupac, Aaliyah, and TLC were mentioned by participants as 1990s trendsetters in urbanwear that still have an impact on urban style today. The influence from 90s music artists and pop culture continued into today where recent music videos, for example for singer Bruno Mars and rapper Cardi B’s song titled Finesse were also mentioned by participants as something that was inspired by 90s urban fashion. The signature sporty aesthetic that 90s urbanwear garments had was also noted by participants as being featured in the styling of the Motorsport music video by the rap group, Migos. Participant 9 recognized that the clothing of this music video was reminiscent of Karl Kani clothing from the 1990s, particularly while viewing a photo of singer Aaliyah dressed in Karl Kani when she said, “The Karl Kani stuff, well especially what Aaliyah has on, looks like that Motorsport video with the Migos.” The participants were asked about which decade of hip-hop style or aesthetic (1970s, 1980s, 1990s, or 2000s) did they find most influential to fashion, resulting in most of the responses (p=9) favoring the 1990s era of hip-hop as the most influential. Participant 8 believed that the 1990s is the most influential time for fashion, saying that people from the 90s generation are “heavily influenced by what Tupac was
wearing, or LL Cool J, or whoever was like big in the 90s,” and that, “We still look to them to get our fashion and inspiration.” Participant 8 also described that because she is inspired so much by the 90s that her style is in a “90s renaissance.” Participant 13 said that the 90s era of fashion was more influential to fashion than other eras because the music then had “meaning” and “soul.”

Many of the participants acknowledged that fashion trends are cyclical and currently the 1990s fashion trends are trendy again with more current styling. Participant 9 spoke on this when she says that current fashion is a “watered-down version of the 90s when it comes to style.” Participant 9 also referenced Marvel’s Black Panther film when discussing how people will “get in touch with the African part of fashion” and that the Afrocentric style, such as clothing with colors that are representative of African flags, that was popular in the 90s is coming back into style today. While discussing urban brands’ mission statements or slogans, participant 8 made the point that people today are more conscious of where they spend their money and more aware of the brands they support, when she said,

They’re [consumers] really aware that how society is going and how the racial tensions are and things like that, and they’re also aware of how they’re spending their dollars. If I see a brand today that has pretty decent clothes, but they have a slogan that is like FUBU or Sean John or definitely Cross Colours, then I would be more inclined to definitely buy something that has a strong mission.

Along with current music videos and movies, participants 1 and 11, who were both undergraduate students during the time of the interviews, noted how they see 90s urban fashion in college. Participant 1 says, “Even in TV now, you see it in fashion and even at school, you recognize it [trends] stays in the 90s.” when discussing what decade of hip-hop
fashion is most influential to fashion, participant 11 stated, “Um, as of now I would say the 90s cause there’s a lot of people, even on campus, trying to post parties 90s theme.” When asked why she thinks the 90s is so popular, participant 11 mentions, “I feel like everybody thinks it [the 90s] was so good. The music was better, and they had better shows.” While many participants acknowledged that 90s trends are back in style, such as baggy clothing or brightly colored clothing they also explained how 90s urban styles can be mixed with current pieces of clothing to give a more modern look. Participant 13 explained how she chooses to shop at thrift stores for a 1990s urban, aesthetic but mixes those styles with more up-to-date pieces of clothing, when she said, “It just looks like kind of outdated but not so outdated, to where I can’t wear it.” Participant 13 also mentions that she purposefully seeks vintage clothing by saying, “I’m looking for something that looks vintage. I don’t want to mix it up too much to where it looks like it’s been made in 2018.” Participant 8 explains that wearing vintage pieces is all about how you style the outfit, by saying, “It’s not what you wear, it’s how you wear it.”

Hairstyles of the 1990s were also mentioned as having a great influence on today’s styles. For example, participant 12 said, “I do have my moments where I am in like my 90s vibes, like when I have my box braids for example.” Participant 10 also mentioned how she’s noticed 90s trends for men, specifically men’s high-top haircuts, saying, “I would have to say the hair. That’s where I kind of saw it first.”

Although most of the participants found the 1990s era of urban fashion to be the most influential, Participant 6 raised the argument that no decade of hip-hop is more influential to fashion than the other. But, participant 6 also acknowledged the 1990s urban fashion was very influential to fashion by saying, “Most influential to fashion, like the 90s had something
very distinct, like the 90s is just coming back” and that, “Every time that something happened in hip hop, somehow it became part of pop culture. We just kind of lead the way.”

**Theme 5: Awareness of Cultural Appropriation**

While some of the interview questions were direct questions about stereotypes of Black individuals in relation to clothing and appearance, some of the responses from the participants indicated an *awareness of cultural appropriation*. The emergence of these discussions showed that stereotypes in relation to Black individuals and urban style was of significance to participants. This theme has two subthemes: *stereotypes* and *commodification*.

Throughout each of the interviews the participants of this study exhibited an overall awareness and consciousness regarding how people *stereotype* Black individuals wearing urban styles of dress. When discussing stereotypes, participant 6 explained how the Trayvon Martin case had a lasting effect on him and his choice of appearance when he said, “I’m conscious about hoodies, which kind of sucks.” Participant 6 also mentioned an instance he saw on the news when someone critiqued Trayvon Martin’s death by saying that things would have turned out differently if the young man did not have on a hooded sweatshirt. Regarding this statement relating Trayvon Martin’s clothing to his murder, participant 6 said, “It didn’t have anything to do with the clothes that he was wearing” and that, “it’s people being racist more than it is the clothes. The clothes are nothing.” Along with hoodies not being accepted by non-Black people, participant 10 discussed how headwraps or durags are often seen as “unprofessional,” rather than headwraps or head coverings being viewed as an important part of African and African-American/Black culture and style.

Regarding stereotypes as an influencer of how Black individuals want to look, some participants stated that they disregard stereotypes when it comes to their self-image, such as participant 7, who simply stated “I’m going to wear what I want to wear.” While some
participants do not let stereotypes affect them, they did acknowledge that appearance related stereotypes against Black individuals exist. For example, Participant 9 said,

[Stereotypes] kind of give me some insight as to how certain looks are perceived and whether or not it’s a positive or a negative, and that kind of weighs me in which direction I want to take as far as trying it or not.

Participant 11 felt that stereotypes did affect her choice of clothing regarding wearing shorts, when she explained, “I feel like it’s [shorts] not presentable unless you’re at a beach.” When asked to clarify why she feels this way, participant 11 said, “I feel like a lot of people think Black girls wear revealing clothes, and we tend to have more junk in the trunk than other races.”

Participants (n = 11) also described how non-Black cultures capitalize or commodify hip-hop culture and urban fashion without the stigma that Black individuals face. A few participants described how celebrities or fashion influencers, such as the Kardashians, have appropriated Black style: “they wear their nails and their hair like Black girls,” (Participant 7). Participant 9 discussed how urban fashion has become “watered-down,” and that urban is a term that used to be synonymous with the Black community, but now “everybody’s trying to use the word urban to appropriate black culture.” She clarified that urban style is no less than any other type of fashion, saying that, “Black fashion is not ghetto fashion.” Participant 6 also spoke on the ghetto stereotype and how non-Black individuals commodify Black style when he said, “ghetto until proven fashionable” and that, “it’s always that way, until they [non-Black people] decide it’s cool, it’s ghetto. But, there’s nothing we can do about it.”

Urban fashion brands were considered leaders in the fashion industry according to the participants, yet they felt many people outside of the Black community engaged in cultural
appropriation related to the style. Participant 10 shared how mainstream fashion is late when it comes to urban fashion trends when she said, “All of a sudden it’s like, wooo, this is fashion [urban style]. It’s on the runway. And I’m like, we’ve been wearing that for years, you know?” Participant 1 also related his thoughts on the commodification of urban fashion by saying, “I feel like everyone wants to be urban. I feel like everyone wants to at least get a taste or a feel of what we do in our daily lives.” While discussing commodification of urban fashion, Participant 10 also raised the argument of how Black individuals do not support their own brands until White people or other races acknowledge or approve those brands, by saying, “I know sometimes we can’t be as supportive of us until we see others jump on the bandwagon, and then we’re like oh, whew.” The participants comments raise awareness to the notion of non-Black individuals appropriating urban style without giving credit to its origins, which was a topic that was full of tension.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to find out how Black millennials perceive 1990s urban fashion. The following points of discussion were created to relate theory to urban style, and how Black millennials approach urban style. Each research question has a discussion that relates back to theories such as Critical Race Theory, semiotics, Afrocentric theory, the trickle effect, and symbolic interaction as well as supporting previous literature. The following research questions were created to guide this study:

1. How do Black millennials acquire knowledge of fashion?

2. What are Black millennials’ knowledge and perceptions of five of the prominent urban fashion brands that were founded in the 1980s and 90s (FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, Sean John)?

3. How does hip-hop style from the 1980s and 1990s influence Black millennials’ personal style today?

How Black Millennials Acquire Fashion Knowledge

Research question one addressed the participants’ responses to where they find style inspiration and information. Most of the participants (n=12) in this study viewed social media accounts and profiles that featured or were focused on Black artists, musicians, and Black culture, while others (n=2) chose art or photography as sources of fashion inspiration. Based on findings from this study, the Black millennial consumer looks to avenues for style inspiration as they often do not see themselves represented in mainstream fashion media outlets. The participants used social media as a tool and were more focused on social media and the representation of Black music artists or blog sites, such as Rihanna’s social media accounts or Worldstar Hip-Hop, within that avenue.
While it has been studied that millennials are the first generation to have technology integrated into their everyday life and that they also rely heavily on technology and social media for entertainment purposes (Bolton, 2013; Bennett et al., 2008; Wessner & Miller, 2008; Park & Gursoy, 2012), we do not know much about what specifically Black millennials use social media for regarding style purposes. Viewing the aspirational lifestyles of Black artists such as Beyoncé and Rihanna, confirms previous studies that outlined that the Black consumer is interested in cultural items related to hip hop (Bond, 2004; Morgan, 2005). Johnson, Banks, Smith, and Seo (2017) reported that African American females were interested in products that more closely aligned with their body size and shape and their individual expression of self. In this study, while the participants all had an interest in looking for different fashions and styles, they expressed more of an interest in looking for styles that were more like themselves specifically focused on race or being Black, which confirms findings from the previous study. The fact that the participants in this study prefer to view social media accounts that feature Black celebrities or bloggers is an example of trickle-down theory, in which the content shared by Black celebrities or bloggers will trickle down to the participants. According to Crenshaw (1991), isolated or marginalized groups use identity-based politics as a source of strength and community, which supports why the participants of this study felt more comfortable viewing social media sources from their own race. The participants viewing social media accounts of celebrities and musicians can be supported by the trickle-down effect, in which fashion or goods are passed down from the social elite to a lower socioeconomic class (Fallers, 1954).

These findings add to literature regarding millennials, but also provides information about Black millennial consumers, in which there is a lack of literature. This information can
used in the academic setting for teaching about how to market products and goods to
different races and age groups such as Black millennials. The findings of this theme can also
be helpful to the apparel and fashion industry, as this information provides insight to what
Black millennials seek regarding style knowledge and inspiration, which can be beneficial
for marketing to this large consumer base.

**Black Millennials’ Knowledge and Perceptions of Urban Brands**

Research question two addresses the participants’ perceptions, memories, and
opinions regarding specifically FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, and Sean John,
as well as other Black-owned urbanwear brands and urban fashion trends. Each participant
provided their own definition of hip-hop style or urban style. While the responses varied
from person to person, each participant used key words as descriptors for urbanwear such as
colorful, authentic, and expressive. Each participant explained what all they knew or
remember about FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, and Sean John. The age range
of the participants of this study show that they were born in or grew up during the height of
urbanwear fashion and had a nostalgic viewpoint of the urban brands from this time, whether
those memories involved people close to them wearing these brands or seeing these brands in
hip-hop music videos. While the participants had moderate knowledge of FUBU, Karl Kani,
Phat Farm, Cross Colours, and Sean John, other urban brands such as Rocawear or Baby Phat
were mentioned as brands they previously wore. Many of the participants did not like the
oversized silhouettes that many urbanwear styles had during this time. The color scheme of
many of the 1990s urban styles was something that not only stood out to the participants but
was something that they admired as it showed a close connection to African and Caribbean
roots. This study also found that some participants loved the urban brands of this era while
some participants were not interested in the urban aesthetic. Whether or not the participants
liked urbanwear, they did acknowledge that urbanwear style are currently trending. This “gangsta” or “homeboy” era of fashion in the 1990s featuring oversized clothes, flat-top haircuts, and sneakers (Lewis, 2003, p.168-169; Lewis & Gray, 2013) was acknowledged by the participants and was favored by many of the participants as the most influential era of Black fashion compared to other decades.

Not only did the participants show respect and admiration for the establishment of these Black-owned brands, but more specifically, the topic of how FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, and Sean John were representative of the Black community was a point of pride for the participants. Many of the participants felt a need to support Black-owned businesses but did not feel that it was an obligation simply based on identifying as Black. The participants of this study felt that it is a choice to support Black-owned businesses because there is a lack of support in the Black community.

Many of the participants’ perceptions of urban style was related to race and stereotypes that accompany this aesthetic. The participants had strong feelings toward how they were perceived by non-Black cultures based on their choice of style and appearance. The participants of this study acknowledged that their appearance yielded discrimination and stereotypes from the dominant culture. While the participants did not feel that negative stereotypes affected their choice of personal style, they did give examples of how stereotypes are placed on Black individuals based on how they look or what clothes they choose to wear. The participants also recognized that urban style has become a commodity adopted by non-Black cultures. Commodification was discussed along with how non-Black cultures appropriate urban styles and do not receive the negative assumptions or discrimination that Black individuals face. The tone of the conversations with the participants in this study
regarding commodification was not only tense, but the participants seemed to feel that hip-hop culture was being used by those who may not fully appreciate the culture and those who created it.

The idea that hip-hop is a cultural phenomenon beyond the genre of music (Aldridge & Stewart, 2005) aligns with participants’ opinions on urbanwear being expressive and authentic to Black culture, and more specifically, hip-hop culture. The participants’ feelings towards authenticity regarding urban style can be explained by McLeod’s (1999) idea that “keepin’ it real” or being “true” has been invoked by hip-hop fans and rap artists throughout the 1990s (McLeod, 1999, p. 136). According to a study by Clay (2003), there is an identity struggle in the Black community centered around who is “authentic” and who is a “sellout” (Clay, 2003, p. 1348; Binder, 1999; Collins, 1990; Rose, 1994), which supports why there was a reoccurrence of the term authentic as describing urbanwear style from the participants.

According to Lewis and Gray (2013), once clothing trends reach the twenty-year mark, those trends resurface back into style. This supports what participants said regarding fashion trends, particularly 1990s urbanwear trends, being cyclical, going away and then returning back into style with a newer take. Although many participants did not favor the “gangsta” or “homeboy” (Lewis, 2003, p. 168-169) trend of excessive bagginess in urbanwear clothing, the participants did acknowledge that this was a major trend during this era and is making its way back into current styles.

Some of the participants’ memories of urbanwear involve music videos, which supports Burkhalter & Thornton’s (2014) claim that music videos are an influential tool for younger generations to learn about clothing and lifestyle choices (Burkhalter & Thornton, 2014; Hansen & Hansen, 2000; Sun & Lull, 1986; Tiggemann & Slater, 2004). The urban
styles of dress that the participants used to wear or remember seeing in music videos or on people around them, is considered “subcultural capital,” as coined by Thornton (1995, p. 9), and were a means for young Black individuals to distinguish themselves from others (Baxter & Marina, 2008). This type of subcultural capital of urban style of dress is one way that Black individuals can not only distinguish themselves from others but express their connection to a community with a common heritage (Thornton, 1995, p. 9; Kaiser, 2012; Eicher & Sumberg, 1995).

The subtheme of Black pride sustained throughout the participants’ responses regarding 1990s urbanwear and confirms previous work that appearance and appearance behaviors can create a shared sense of pride (Miller, 2009). The pride that is associated with Black entrepreneurs, Black-owned fashion brands, and clothing trends that come from the Black community further explains the defiance of hegemonic authority, as written by Baxter and Marina (2008). The brands discussed in this study capitalized on resisting hegemonic authority by creating clothing that represents Black culture (Baxter & Marina, 2008). Coming from marginalized communities such as the Black community, wearing urbanwear brands or integrating urban fashion trends into personal style shows that urbanwear is a way for Black individuals to show pride and feel more connected to their community (Kaiser, 2012).

Symbolic interactionist theory explains that symbols can have shared meanings for people and they can initiate responses and focus attention on critical social situations (Kaiser, 1990; Stryker, 1980). Symbols such as the mission statements or slogans of these brands, color schemes used in the clothing, or the use of models of color or Black musicians in urbanwear advertisements was a positive factor in the participants’ responses to urbanwear. The colors that participants identified in urbanwear styles that reflected African cultures exhibited a sort
of “Black nationalism” or Afrocentricity (Boyd, 2004, p. 325). This Afrocentric aspect to urbanwear styles shows a strong connection to Africa (Boyd, 2004). According to Boyd (2004), Afrocentric style loses its value when it is turned into a mass commodity, which supports the participants’ feelings towards authenticity and urban styles being commodified by other races.

The participants recognized how urban styles are stereotyped, and idea of urbanwear aesthetic being referred to as “gangsta” is one of the “cardboard stereotypes” identified by Baxter and Marina (2008, p. 101). Previous literature supports that there is trivialization and an exaggeration of Black individuals in mainstream media, such as Black men being portrayed as “menacing youths” or “hypermuscle thugs,” while Black women are often portrayed as “exotic” or “sexually available,” which aligns with the participants views on stereotypes of Black and urban style of dress (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000, p. 368; Gray, 1995; hooks, 1992; Marable, 1996). Due to the negative associations non-Black individuals make of Black individuals, this yields a negative viewpoint and attacks on hip-hop culture (Rose, 1991). These sort of ideologies not only fit the bill of stereotypes associated with hip-hop culture and rap music, such as violence and misogyny, but further help to explain the importance of the third tenet of Critical Race Theory – centrality of narrative (Baxter & Marina, 2008; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). According to Delgado (1990), people of color speak from experiences framed by racism, which gives them a voice, such as when the participants explained their views on negative stereotypes associated with the urbanwear aesthetic (Tate, 1997; Delgado, 1990). These voices and exchanges of stories surrounding individual experiences are important because they help to construct social reality (Tate, 1997; Bell, 1989; Matsuda, 1989; Williams, 1991).
These findings can help further explain how this age group views this important time in fashion history, as well as their views on the establishment and success of these Black-owned companies. The findings of this theme can also bring awareness to how Black millennials feel about stereotypes and how this particular group navigates through those stereotypes.

**1990s Urban Styles Influence on Today**

Research question three address how the participants are still inspired by 1990s urban fashion, and how they incorporate that into their style today. Some participants did not find urbanwear style appealing – either the urban aesthetic was not their personal style, or they felt the urban style of clothing was not age appropriate for them. 1990s Black-owned urbanwear brands are still in-style to some participants, as they still purchase from some of these brands today. Some participants actively seek to buy from not only Black-owned brands, but purchase from 1990s urban fashion brands, as the 90s urban aesthetic is something they like to incorporate into their personal style. Factors like hairstyles, such as box braids, or music artists who were popular in the 1990s were also listed by participants as current 90s style inspiration. Music artists from the 1990s, such as Aaliyah, LL Cool J, Tupac, TLC and more, were mentioned by participants as influencers for their sense of style today, which supports the fact that popular artists during this time wearing urbanwear brands were effective in attracting Black consumers who were fans of the rap genre. The participants also identified ways that 90s trends including Afrocentric styles, such as dreadlocks, patchwork or paintings on clothing, or very sporty, urban styles, like bomber and puffer jackets/coats or jerseys are coming back into style as seen in current music videos and movies, as well as people around them.
Previous literature identified that hip hop artists are one way to promote fashions and endorse them through style icons in the Black community such as the music artists listed by the participants (Burkhalter & Thornton, 2014; Lehu, 2007). A study by Dixon, Zhang, and Conrad (2009) shows that rap music videos and content yield high levels of materialism which the participants of this study did not mention that hip-hop culture begets materialism, but rather rap videos were a way to be connected to the Black culture and see what is trending. While the participants of this study appreciated 1990s urbanwear brands, their responses regarding urbanwear trends supported the notion from Lewis and Gray (2013) that the Black consumer who grew up with these brands began to mature and opt for more tailored and sophisticated garments. The participants suggested that urban brands from the 1990s might be more successful today if they re-invented or redesigned the clothing while considering current fashions and styles. Companies, such as Sean John and Karl Kani, have updated their brand and released new collections (Hutson, 2017; Spence, 2016). The participants’ responses regarding factors that influence their decision to wear urban fashion such as age, occupation, or even following 90s trends currently can be viewed through a symbolic interactionist lens focusing on appearance management, in which the participant wants to convey certain messages like age, occupation, or social conformity to others (Kaiser, 1990). The points that participants made regarding whether or not stereotypes influence their choice of clothing may also be supported by symbolic interaction, as they are managing or modifying their appearance to fit a situation or create an impression (Kaiser, 1990). According to Kaiser (1990), symbolic interactionists examine that people and their appearances cannot be viewed outside of the social context, but rather jointly (Kaiser, 1990).
This further explains how Black individuals in an HBCU social setting view urbanwear brands similarly, and also have like-minded views on wearing urban brands today.

The findings from this theme can be helpful in the fashion industry setting, as this theme shows that 90s urban trends have an audience. This finding also illustrates why some Black millennials are not interested in wearing urban style clothing.
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

Urbanwear fashion was created during a time when Black individuals wanted to celebrate Black culture. The creativity and authenticity of urban style made a lasting impact on people in the Black community as well as the fashion industry long after the 1990s. The collaboration of hip-hop and fashion can still be seen today because of the urbanwear brands from the 1980s and 1990s that paved the way. While there is a limited amount of research on Black millennial consumers, this study will fill that gap in the literature of not only Black consumers but urbanwear brands that were created from hip-hop culture, and how urbanwear affected the fashion industry. The reason why this study is important is because it tells a story of a specific group of consumers that is not often told. The urbanwear brands in this study and their owners do not seem receive the same amount of honor and respect as more big-name fashion companies. These urbanwear brands are proof that people from marginalized communities can produce businesses that influence people, pop culture, and fashion for years to come. The participants of this study had positive memories of the 1990s when they were children, and also fond memories of the fashion that developed from that era. The connection between hip-hop and urbanwear trends that were created in the late 1980s throughout the 1990s were a source of happiness for the participants, which they related throughout many of the responses. The purpose of this study was to examine Black millennials attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) about their perceptions and knowledge of Black-owned urban fashion brands that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s during the hip-hop fashion revolution.

Although many of the participants in this study acknowledged 1990s urban fashion trends, few knew all of the five urban brands mentioned in this study. This was a surprising
find because FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, and Sean John were popular urbanwear brands that had a lot of exposure in pop culture during the 1990s, but many participants were not familiar with them by name, but rather recognized them by image. Another surprising finding was how strongly the participants felt about supporting businesses within the Black community. Although many participants did not feel an obligation to support Black businesses based solely on the fact that they are Black, they did feel that their support was needed, and it is helpful for the Black community to support one another. While discussing 1990s urbanwear fashion, the participants responses were more pleasurable, and they happily reminisced back to the 1990s, but it was unexpected how the tone of the conversation became tense and serious when discussing how race was intertwined with urbanwear. The intersection of race, appearance, and gender seemed to be something that affected the participants personally, and they were vocal about their opinions on stereotypes Black individuals face, how other races take from Black fashion, and supporting Black brands and businesses.

Urbanwear brands and their owners provide a representation of Black individuals in the fashion industry, a place that people of color are often not seen or overlooked. Theories such as Critical Race Theory, semiotics, symbolic interactionism, and Afrocentric theory can all help explain the dynamic relationship between Black millennials and urbanwear. Throughout history, Black individuals have contributed significantly to American society, and hip-hop culture is one of those contributions as it was a major cultural revolution. Hip-hop was created by Black individuals for the Black community, and criticism from mainstream America has followed hip-hop since its inception. A branch of hip-hop culture, urbanwear, was another way for Black individuals to express themselves and represent their
community. Black appearance and clothing has been under scrutiny in America since slavery when Black appearance was a means of control. Urbanwear fashion, because of its ties to hip-hop and the Black community, also became demonized and vilified. According to participants in this study, urbanwear fashion was stereotyped simply because of the people wearing the clothes, Black individuals. This expression of style comes from a marginalized group of people that have been targeted by racism for decades. With race and racism, gender, sexuality and other identity-related topics in American society being at the forefront of many conversations today, urbanwear fashion was, and still is a way for Black individuals to show pride of their culture and community despite marginalization, stereotypes, and hegemonic ideologies they face by mainstream White America.

**Limitations**

The scope of this study had many limitations. Despite all the participants being millennials, there was only one participant that was born in the 1980s. With the millennials age group ranging from being born in the early 1980s until the early 2000s, a wider, more diverse age range of participants could have been chosen outside of people born in the 1990s. Along with millennials being a part of the criteria for participating, the participants were also required to either be currently attending or previously attended an HBCU. Each participant had a degree in fashion-related studies or was in the process of obtaining a degree, and each participant also had well-developed critiques of the popular urbanwear brands of this time as well. This study was limited in the fact that the participants were only from one university, and that their perceptions of urbanwear do not reflect the entire Black race or other spaces that have a high focus on Black culture such as other HBCUs. The participants of this study all had a background in apparel-related studies, which also limited the study in that there was not a diverse group of participants from different fields of study. Most of the participants
were from southern states, which provides a different lifestyle than other parts of the United States and could have been reflective of their perceptions of urbanwear that was created in New York.

Implications

This study has implications that are beneficial to the apparel industry and apparel studies, as well as benefit Black individuals. This study contributes to knowledge in the fashion industry, as it gives a firsthand account of what Black millennial consumers like, dislike, and seek when shopping for clothing. With the participants describing where they look for fashion inspiration, fashion brands could use this information to better reach out to Black millennial consumers. When discussing 1990s urbanwear fashion, the participants were vocal about how they felt about the style of this era. Information from the participants of this study will contribute to knowledge of the 1990s urban aesthetic. This study will not only add to literature of stereotypes against Black individuals, but this study will give a firsthand account of how Black millennials feel about these stereotypes regarding their appearance and style. The topic of commodification arose in this study, which can be useful in an area of research regarding cultural appropriation, from the point-of-view of the people of the culture that is being appropriated. Through this study, the information provided by the participants regarding their views of 90s urbanwear can be used to benefit the industry, support theories, and add to the academic setting.

Future Research

The small scale of this study left much room for future research. While the five urban brands discussed in this study (FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, and Sean John) were popular amongst young Black individuals during the 1990s, they were not the only well-known urban brands of that time. Future research can include other urbanwear brands of
the 1980s and 1990s. Although the 1990s was considered to be the era when urbanwear began, hip-hop inspired style goes back for decades. Hip-hop style does not have to be limited to only 1990s urbanwear but can also include other hip-hop fashion trends from the 1970s and 1980s, or throughout the 2000s. While all of the participants of this study were Black students or alumni of an HBCU, future research could include Black students or alumni of predominantly White universities (PWI), which in turn, may offer a different perspective to Black urbanwear fashion. Participants for future research regarding this topic can be sought from a variety of different universities in different locations in the United States, and also can be from different age groups. The geographical location of the participants must be taken into account as well. None of the participants were from the New York area where urban fashion, as well as hip-hop, was started. Future research could include participants who are from this area, which may lead to a different perspective of urbanwear. Future research can expand on the theories used in this study to get a deeper theoretical understanding of the relationship between urban fashion and Black individuals. This study shows Black individuals, and other people of color, that those from within marginalized communities can rise above statistics and stereotypes and own their own businesses that leave an impact on their culture for decades to come.
REFERENCES


Harrison, J. D. (2014). When we were small: FUBU. Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/on-small-business/when-we-were-small-fubu/2014/10/03/b9280a48-4596-11e4-b437-1a7368204804_story.html?utm_term=.954cefb39845


APPENDIX A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL LETTER

Date: 2/6/2018
To: Courtney D Johnson
1307 Coconino Rd Unit 210
Ames, IA 50014

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Swagger Like Us: Black Millennials’ Perceptions of 1990s Urban Brands

IRB ID: 18-022

Study Review Date: 2/6/2018

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
  - Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
  - Any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:

- You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.
- You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application. Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form. A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review. Only the IRB or designees may make the determination of exemption, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Please be aware that approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g., student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. An IRB determination of exemption in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Please don’t hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.
APPENDIX B. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hi [Potential participant name],

As you may know, I am a M.S. student at Iowa State University in Apparel, Merchandising, and Design. I am currently studying Black millennials’ perceptions and opinions of 1990s urban fashion brands. My research background is based on the social and psychological aspects of African-American clothing and appearance, and I love to educate people on our unique style.

Attached below are two documents that I need you to sign - an informed consent document and a FACE sheet. The informed consent document is a legal document giving me permission to use your responses from our interview in my thesis and briefly outlines what we will discuss in this interview. Please sign these two documents and send back to me as soon as you can (digital/E-signature is fine).

For our interview, we will use Zoom video conference. I will email you the link to this prior to our interview.

What day and time works best for you? I am open to schedule our interview on the weekends as well.

Thank you again for choosing to participate in my study.

Courtney D. Johnson
Graduate Administrative Assistant, AESHM
Iowa State University
APPENDIX C. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Consent Form for Swagger Like Us:
Black Millennials’ Perceptions of 1990s Urban Brands

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include people who choose to take part – your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Who is conducting this study?

This study is being conducted by Courtney D. Johnson, master’s student; Department of Apparel, Events, and Hospitality Management at Iowa State University.

Why am I invited to participate in this study?

You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a student or alumni of a Historically Black College/University, you were born between the years of 1990 to 1999, and you are someone who identifies as Black or African American. You should not participate if you are under age 18.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to share your thoughts, experiences and opinions regarding urban brands popular in the 1990s. You will be asked to complete a brief demographic survey to answer questions regarding your age, ethnic background, education level and gender.

Your participation will last for approximately 1-2 hours and will be audio recorded.

Types of questions that you may be asked include, but are not limited to:

- Do you feel a sense of obligation to buy from Black-owned designers? Why/why not?
- Where do you learn about the latest fashion trends?
- Explain your opinion on: (show 2-3 images of each brand)
  a. FUBU?
  b. Karl Kani?
  c. Phat Farm?
  d. Cross Colours?
  e. Sean John?
- Explain your experience, if any, on wearing urban brands.
In addition, if you agree to be re-contacted, you may also be asked for feedback about the researcher’s analysis of findings and conclusions. This process called member checking will allow you to check for accuracy of information, correct misinterpretations or fill omissions.

**What are the possible risk or discomforts of my participation?**

The risks or discomforts related to your participation in this research are very minimal. While participating in this study you may experience possible discomfort at disclosing personal information during the interview.

No names of people discussed in interviews will be reported in results, except yours, should you agree. Following the interview, you will be provided with results and allowed to make corrections or remove any information that may be harmful to you or others.

**What are the possible benefits of my participation?**

You may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will fill a void in research pertaining to Black-owned brands in the urban sector of the fashion industry, and how hip-hop has created a place for itself within the fashion industry. This study will illuminate the unique characteristics, challenges, and the rise and fall of five urban brands from the 1990s.

**What alternatives do I have to participating in the research?**

If you are unable to participate in a face-to-face in-depth interview, you may consider participating in a telephone or video conference call as an alternative to an in-person interview.

**How will the information I provide be used?**

Audio versions of your interview will not be shared with external parties. The information you provide will be transcribed, reviewed, and coded by the investigator and used to complete research for a master’s thesis, potential conference presentations, and potential publication. Your identity will be confidential.

**What measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the data or to protect my privacy?**

Records will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the ISU Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies with human subjects) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and analysis. These records may contain private information.
To maintain confidentiality, the following measures will be taken for published reports of the study:

- Participants names will be known only to the investigators of this study
- Participants will be assigned or asked to choose a pseudonym
- Any identifying details obtained during the course of an interview will be generalized to protect confidentiality
- All data gathered will be kept in a password-protected computer file
- All information will be destroyed upon the completion of the study.

The member check procedure will allow you the opportunity to redact any information you consider too private or sensitive.

**Will I incur any cost from participating or will I be compensated?**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**What are my rights as a human subject participant?**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you permit your name to be linked with your answers, you may change your mind at any point, and your confidentiality will be protected.

If you have any questions *about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury*, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office of Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, Iowa State University, Ames Iowa 50011.

**Whom can I call if I have questions about the study?**

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information, please contact Courtney Johnson by phone at (318) 554-8915 or via email at courtdj@iastate.edu or supervisor Eulanda A. Sanders by phone at 515-294-7857 or via email at sanderse@iastate.edu.

**Consent and Authorization Provisions**

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, that your questions have been satisfactorily answered, that you have decided whether to allow the use of your name in published reports, and whether to
allow photographs of your work and/or workspace. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) ______________________________ Date _______

Signature _______________________________________________
APPENDIX D.  FACE SHEET

Date of Interview: ______________________________________________

Location: _____________________________________________________

Start Time: ____________________________________________________

Participant Name/Code: __________________________________________

Demographic Information:

Gender: _________________________________________________________

Year of Birth: __________________________________________________

Ethnicity/Race: _________________________________________________

Classification (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, Graduate Student, or Alumnus):

______________________________________________________________

Hometown/State: ________________________________________________
## APPENDIX E. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1: How do Black millennials acquire knowledge of fashion?</th>
<th>1. Where do you learn about or get info on the latest fashion trends?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. How do you express your personal fashion style? Does your taste in music affect your fashion style?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Is self-expression through style important to you? Why/why not?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What fashion brand are you wearing that are important to you? And why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Many brands today have tried to market their products to a younger, diverse audience, but often miss the mark. How would you like fashion brands to market their products to you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. In what ways, if any, do stereotypes of African-American people affect your choices of clothing or appearance?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ3: In what ways has hip-hop style from the 1980s and 1990s influenced your personal style?</th>
<th>7. How do you define hip-hop style?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. What factors most influence your sense of style?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How has hip-hop influenced your personal style? If so, in what ways?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. In what ways have you seen 1990s hip-hop trends back into style? Provide examples.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. What decade of hip-hop do you find most influential to fashion? (Ex. 70s, 80s, 90s, 00s?) Explain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| RQ4: What do Black millennials know about the five urban brands (FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, Sean John?) | 12. Explain any prior knowledge you have of these brands:  
   a. FUBU?  
   b. Karl Kani?  
   c. Phat Farm?  
   d. Cross Colours?  
   e. Sean John?  

13. Where did you first see or hear about these brands?  

14. Explain your experience, if any, on wearing urban brands.  

15. In what ways do you feel that these five urban brands are culturally significant? |
| RQ2: What are Black millennials’ perceptions of urban fashion brands (FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, Sean John)? | 16. How would you define “Urban” fashion?  

17. Give your opinion on how fashionable you view: (show 2-3 images of each brand)  
   f. FUBU?  
   g. Karl Kani?  
   h. Phat Farm?  
   i. Cross Colours?  
   j. Sean John?  

18. What are three words that come to mind when you see urban wear brands such as these? Explain why.  

19. What do you think about 1990s brands’ (FUBU, Karl Kani, Phat Farm, Cross Colours, Sean John) mission statements, are they relevant to you or today’s consumer?  

20. Are these styles/brands something that you would wear today? Are they on trend? Why/why not? |
21. What are your thoughts on buying from Black-owned fashion brands/designers?

22. As a Black person, do you feel obligated to support Black-owned designers? Why/why not?

23. In what ways have you seen urban brands having a long-term “staying power” in the fashion industry? Or not?

24. In your opinion, if they do not have staying power, why do you think these brands became unpopular?

25. How is urban fashion a key component in the fashion industry?

26. How do you feel the urban brands featured in this study are important and influential to Black culture?

27. What are your thoughts on urban style of dress being associated with negative Black stereotypes?
APPENDIX F. CODING GUIDE

Theme 1: Knowledge Acquisition
1a: Focus on Blackness
   - The participants are looking for fashion media that focuses specifically on Black people/artists/etc.
1b: Criticism of media and racial representations
   - Participants made remarks about wanting a variety of body sizes/shapes, and skin tones present in fashion brand advertisements

Theme 2: Awareness of 90s Urban Styles
2.1. Memories of Urban Brands
   - Participants discussed and explained memories of family members, people in their community, classmates, or themselves wearing urban brands in the past
2.2. Oversized Silhouettes
   - The participants mentioned that clothing was oversized and had much fullness in the entire silhouette in the 90s
2.4. Urban fashion and hip-hop fashion definitions
   - Participants’ descriptions/definitions of urban and hip-hop style

Theme 3: Ambiguity
3.1. Loved brands
   - An admiration for a particular brand or multiple urban brands and reasons why they loved the brand(s) was mentioned by participants
3.2. No Interest in brands
   - Explanations by participants as to why they do not favor the urban aesthetic
3.3. Unfamiliar with five urban brands mentioned
   - Participant had little to no recollection or memory of urban brand(s) discussed
3.4. Outdated/need to re-invent pieces of brand
   - The participants express opinions on how brands could be relevant or sell today if they made design changes after viewing images of 1990s urban brands
3.5. Black pride
- The participants showed an admiration and have respect for urban brands, and felt that these brands paved a way in fashion
- Participants acknowledge that urban fashion is part of Black identity/culture
  - The participants felt a connection to Black fashion brands

3.6. Obligation to support Black businesses
- The participants explained why they feel it is necessary to support Black-owned businesses

3.7. No obligation to support Black businesses
- The participants explained that it is not necessary to support Black businesses, or that is a choice not an obligation to support

Theme 4: 1990s urban styles still influence Black millennials today

Theme 5: Cultural Appropriation

5a: Stereotypes
- The participants acknowledge stereotypes that are associated with urbanwear such as thug, up-to-no good, promiscuity, or ghetto

5b: Commodification
- Mention of how other races can wear urban trends without stereotype/stigma that Black individuals face
- Participants mentioned styles started in the “hood” with people of color, but are now being appropriated by mainstream culture