

Abstract – Braithwaite and Ng Styling Identity in the City

Through the spectacle of consumption and the stylistic expression of its inhabitants, the city and fashion have an intriguing visual relationship. Focusing on this, the paper draws on fashion as a method for exploring how individuals construct identities, creating a visible presence in an urban environment. The role of fashion in visualising individuality in cities warrants academic interrogation. Further exemplified by the prolific rise in street style blogs, another medium where individuals' styles play out on a global stage. The paper applies a new approach, exploring style choices from the perspective of foreign university students, who come to a new city, and may, undoubtedly, want to conform to a diverse, cultural environment, while asserting their individuality.

The city of Nottingham in the UK and the hyper-modern Asian metropolis of Hong Kong, are the study's focus. A visual ethnography documents the individual styles of Asian students on the streets, and on campus, in Nottingham, as well as international students in Hong Kong. An initial sample of 20 students from each location is profiled. Their fashion choices, and how these may have evolved, serves as an inroad to understanding how visual identity is negotiated within these cities. The images and supporting narratives bring to life an international student's experience of cities, and the distinct locations bring opportunities for cross-cultural analysis. While these students may have initially felt a sense of anonymity, the ethnographic data situates them as a visible, defining presence in city life.