The Adventures of the Oreo and Banana:

An Ethnic Minority Struggle

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Origin: Orange Country, United States

Culture: Chinese-American

Deveyn Anderson | Interviewee

Origin: Los Angeles County, United States

Culture: African-American

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If a person is an ethnic-minority in the United States, they will understand the struggle of being labeled as a racial food due to behavioral and fashion-style-dress traits. Meet Deveyn

Anderson, a twenty-year-old, care-free African-American female from south Los Angeles; her food label: Oreo. Personally, as a Chinese-American, twenty-year-old, pedantic female from Orange Country, Mission Viejo; the society-given food label is banana. The shared food similarities are that both females are colored on the outside but labeled "white-washed" in the inside. However, each other's personal story of dealing with ethnic color lies much deeper than a comical, yet societal label. This battle with understanding minority racial placement in American culture affects perspective and articulation of dress. As a result of minorities attempt to balance their ethnicity with the American culture, personal dress is affected when minorities struggle with assimilation and shame for their ethnic identity.

Ethnic Identity and Familial Values

Though both ethnic, twenty-year-old females share intersectionalities in having similar geographic backgrounds (moving from Southern California to San Francisco) and career interests in the fashion industry, their identities and values are still very distinct.

African-American

Deveyn Anderson is the youngest daughter in her middle-class family. She comes from recently divorced parents and has a spunky older sister. Deveyn gets her spontaneous, care-free spirit and style from her father. He raised her with the freedom of doing what she wants and is passionate in. Her mother however, is the counterpart in her value system. Deveyn's mother is more refined, a planner, and logically driven. When raising Deveyn, she sourced her reasoning around stability, finance, and education, so she originally was not thrilled when Deveyn decided to major in Fashion. Both Deveyn's parents have had an influence on her style-dress-fashion formation and values. Deveyn's mom told her "as an African-American, if you don't have a degree the odds of you having a good job is slim" (D. J. Anderson, personal communication, April 9, 2017). In her black prevalent community, college was optional but encouraged. Like herself, many of her peers did not want to go to college. However, the students at her dominantly black high school were forced to all apply to at least four different colleges. In a 2003 study by the Southern Sociological Society, proved even though "many laws were designed to protect and promote the civil and political rights of African-Americans, discrimination, racism, and criminalization against blacks in the area of education and

the workplace were still evident" (Petty, 2003). Deveyn never personally experienced racism or discrimination first hand, but she felt the racial stigma for African-Americans in her community growing up. This type of racial stigma grew into shame she felt for her own ethnic identity.

  Ambiguity leads to anxiety and ambivalence. Even though Deveyn is African-American raised in a black saturated neighborhood, she personally identities with American culture. Her parents never talked about their African heritage; however, from Deveyn's knowledge, her family lineage has lived in the United States for generations. Though her parents never put down or hid their race, she realized that there was a built-up discomfort and disesteem associated to African/black values and/or the color of her skin. According to Kaiser, this is a perfect example of cultural ambivalence and cultural anxiety.

> Emotions such as ambivalence and anxiety are not only personal; they are also articulated through cultural discourses, in the process of "working through" ideas that cannot yet be pinned down. They are "under construction" and generate a sense of unease (in the case of cultural anxiety) or mixed emotions (in the case of cultural ambivalence). (Kaiser, 2012, p.41)

Because of ambiguity and racial stigma, there was a sense of shame that silenced her inhibition to speak out for her confused views her black culture in her American culture.

Chinese-American

  Like Deveyn, as the youngest daughter in my family and raised with an intellectually-driven older brother, there often was a high-standard academic shadow that over casted the years of primary and secondary education. As a second-generation Chinese-American, parents immigrated from China/Taiwan in their youth. Having a father who originally was from Fujian province, a communist-stricken agricultural community, who lived the epitome of the hard-working "American Dream," put a constant pressure of high-expectations. Within two-years he received his Bachelors and shortly after received his Masters from the University California of Irvine, is currently a manager at his firm, and now comfortably supports his family in an affluent neighborhood. He literally worked from rags to riches. Mother immigrated from Taipei, Taiwan with her family during her pre-adolescent years to

grow their interior design and upholstery family business. As the eldest female sibling, she juggled working in the family business since she could walk, the responsibility of taking care of her five other siblings, while still receiving her Bachelors from Cal State Long Beach. Because both parents have worked majority of their lives and had minimal childhood experiences, there was a definite culture clash of harmonizing both Chinese-Taiwanese and American sides of personal ethnic identity.

Americanization amongst second-generation Chinese-Americans. Born in a white-dominant city of Mission Viejo, there were not many Asians in my neighborhood growing up. Raised with traditional-conservative Chinese values, life was structured around respect, pride, structure, and high-pressured academia. However, there was also a counter-part influence of the American culture from a white-dominant community and peers. With the strife of wanting Americanized independence and freedom of voicing individualistic opinions, parents looked at this as disrespectful and unfamiliar territory. On top of parental pressures, there was a societal stereotype for Asians' successful academic performance (Fashola, 2012). Because the competitive pressure in the Chinese community for academics, attending college became an instinct, and revealing a passion/career goal to work in the fashion industry did not sit well for the longest time with parents. Conducted in in-depth interviews on student minorities in the United States, research shows "that identity formation was a fluid process based upon experiences such as the "Americanization" of second-generation students, experiences with biculturality, disidentification and panethnic identity, and interracial friendships" (Meneri & Kessika, 2005). From the outward influences through a binary opposition lens, particularly combing the two different ethnic values, identity and fashion-style-dress articulation was a roller coaster. There was a huge internal conflict of associating myself as Chinese, and not knowing how to balance both cultural identities.

Assimilation and Shame

Seeing from both of points of views on each other's ethnic backgrounds, this overcasting shadow of shame is a common denominator that affects both views and values. Both females struggle with balancing and/or incorporating their ethnic culture and American culture into their life. Deveyn was in constant battle with the negative political stigma toward blacks, while personally was in division with opposite values between my two cultures. Interestingly enough, both feelings of ethnic

shame was/is sourced from Western American culture. According to a 2010 Indiana University sociological study, as the nation becomes racially mixed, "rather than a predominantly white nation, research into the way individuals experience race and ethnicity, as well as the way race and ethnicity shapes individual life-changes, has become increasingly important (Fashola, 2012)." Fashola explains minorities adaptation into a white-centered culture will stimulate significant shift in values, challenging the binary perspective of color versus whites. Accompanied by Newton's law of physics, with change and action there always is an equal and opposite reaction; society is bound to have cultural discord, ambivalence, and anxiety. However, through cultural ambivalence and anxiety, fashion-style-dress is formed (Kaiser, 2012, p.43).

Fashion Amongst Our Environments

Fashion is stimulated by its community. The community's culture can influence the popular majority opinion and the creation/life-time of a trend. And often times those exposed to the community can be swayed by and/or affected in some way by the majority.

Ain't No Wifey Beanie

Hip-hop/rap culture was a huge influence in Deveyn's black central neighborhood. Her schoolmates and peers' behavior/dress were often influenced by hip-hop culture. The music's lifestyle was clearly reflected on the streets through self-expression and dress. Per lifestyle and entertainment article, *Does pop-culture influence fashion*,

Figure 1 Deveyn wearing her Ain't No Wifey Beanie

Styles in both music and clothing are incorporated not only by designers and performers in the marketplace but also by consumers in their everyday lives. Recent influences in clothing fashion may be traced to styles from a variety of subcultures, racial communities and leisure-interest groups. (*Does pop-culture influence*, 2015)

In Deveyn's subculture/community, the popular majority wore designer name brand items, flashy gold accessories, and baggy or skin-tight clothing. During the 2000s, Deveyn said "…everywhere you would see people sagging their pants" (D. J. Anderson, personal communication, April 9, 2017). Seen in Hip-hop pop-culture and the rooted in the black community, rappers and celebrities were sporting the sagging trend. This trend became the popular majority and inevitably trickled in her subcultural environment. Deveyn describes how her community surrounded their fashion and values on materialization. Up until Junior year of high school, Deveyn articulated the same as her peers. One example is she wanted the hyped, iconic, fire-truck red DimePiece "Ain't No Wifey" beanie (Figure 1). In 2012, this beanie was all over social media, re-blogged on every Tumblr site, and seen on selfies posted on Instagram and Facebook, particularly modeled by people of the hip-hop community. During that time the Ain't No Wifey beanie retailed at sixty to eighty dollars. Deveyn was caught up in the hype and her fashion was influenced by her sub-culture.

Oreo-ed. After Junior year, due to cultural ambivalence and anxiety she questioned her individual style identity. Deveyn shifted away from this Black-Rap culture to more neutral and basic clothing

Figure 2 Simple neutral clothing

(Figure 2). Her friends saw the shift, and would joke she's an "Oreo, black on the outside, white in the inside." All jokes aside, she was not even aware of her feelings of dissociating herself with the negative stereotypes of black culture. She souly thought her purpose of changing her dress was sources from her spontaneous and free-spirited personality, before this interview (D. J. Anderson, personal communication, April 9, 2017). As Kaiser pronounces in *Assumption 4 Theory: Entanglements from Identity Not to Identity Knot*, it is easier to dissociate oneself from a concept than to understand it. This process of identity formation and dissociation is all part of subject articulation (Kaiser, 2012, p. 38-39). Deveyn was not sure how or when the shame for her skin color became a factor in her dress articulation, but she knew she

rather be associated with the neutral party. Deveyn expresses who she can't wear her hair naturally, because it's too bellicose. She "doesn't want to stir-up conflict…," so she subconsciously shifted her style to silence and neutrality (D. J. Anderson, personal communication, April 9, 2017). Her shift in fashion, speaks toward her internal conflict in struggling with accepting her cultural identity.

No Tattoos at the Dinner Table

Mention the word tattoo at the dinner table and one will see my father's low baritone voice vibrate the porcelain China-glazed bowls. Coming from a Chinese and Protestant Christian up bring, dress was often conservative, clean, and presentable. With Chinese-traditional parental influence and a full-impacted schedule of Chinese school, piano testing, flute lessons, dance competition, AP/IB/Honors, school clubs, and Church leadership, structure and high-pressure was clearly projected in my lifestyle. When comparing to American friends, there was constant jealously for free weekends and shame connected toward Chinese-culture. However the overwhelming sense of conflict and chaos had a huge influence on fashion articulation. Because of these feelings and often silenced opinions when communicating to the

Figure 3 Minimal, monochromatic clothing

parentals, fashion became an outlet for self-expression. Fashion and presentation became so prominent and a distinctive, the community comes to know my personal style as Minimalism. Subconsciously driven, structure, minimal, and monochromatic dress was to balance the feelings of chaos (Figure 3). Subjectivity, "… cuts across subject positions and intersects them in meaningful ways through the looks …put together to navigate, negotiate, and interpellate their interplay with the circuit of style-fashion-dress (Kaiser, 2012, p. 25). Personal fashion subjectivity and love for definitive and accentuated lines are seen through both structured schedule and dress.

The rebellious nature and American form of self-expression appeared through the action of dyeing hair silver a couple month ago (Figure 4). It was anti-conservative, anti-traditional and

Figure 4 Victoria's Silver Hair

shocked my father. However, the process of dyeing hair spoke more than the action itself. During the whole process of doing it and dealing with the anxiety was almost unbearable. Chinese and familial conservative values set feelings of controversy and doubt toward my Americanized rebellious outcry for individualism. The roller-coaster of emotions toward culture differences was seen through fashion articulation and formation.

Banana-ed. Until my Sophomore year of high school, the racial label of banana was clear- yellow on the outside, white in the inside. For the longest time, surrounding myself with Asian friends was foreign. Now reflecting, shame was the source dissociation toward my race. Like Deveyn, Kaiser's Assumption 4 of Identity Knot was reflected in my life. In elementary school, my parents packed Chinese snacks or bread/pastries in my lunches, shame was seen through the actions of hiding or throwing them away during lunch time. In high school, the transition to accepting Chinese cultural identity began through the outreach toward Asian sub-communities in school. Through new acquainted Asian-American peers, the banana was peeled and my "white-washed" underbelly was revealed. They were so open about their specific ethnic identity, and personally helped the experience/growth in pride for being ASIAN-American. Even during Lunar New Year, wearing red at school to represent my ethnicity was not connect to feelings of embarrassment anymore. Community values influenced perspective on self-expression and style presentation.

The Banana and the Oreo

Racial labels and so prevalent when dealing with cultural assimilation. A huge part of developing racial minorities' identities is the feeling of acceptance. Bicultural individuals are looked at as outcasts in both cultural groups. They are never fully immersed in one culture. For example both Deveyn and I are not "Black/Asian enough," or not "cultured" to be of our ethnicity. But we are not fully American-Westernized to be viewed just American either. Bicultural minorities never have a full societal acceptance of being "ethnic" AND American. There is a sense of loss and displaced cultural identity.

What is NOW

"Ethnicity and national origin, …social class, and …aspirations all intersected to shape… fashion subjectivities (Kaiser, 2012, p. 50). Fashion, background, and diverse cultures are all intersected and transnational.

Opened to Understand

Through this interview process, Deveyn has realized her unknown source of shame for her Black heritage. Especially being in San Francisco, a highly-political active/stimulating environment, while attending SFSU, an ethnic-racial studies centered/influenced environment. She is in a new environment and community to ask questions about her black culture. She is beginning to discover Black-Pride.

The Unique-Tutu. Influenced by her free-spirited, easy-going personality and gain for discovering her both her ethnic identity and personal style, she has become more confident enough to wear more statement pieces. A bright-beautiful tutu collected dust in her wardrobe, until recently. She still stays away from controversy, and unsure about wearing her natural curls, but open to new discovery and understandings for her whole cultural identity. While she still discovers her cultural identity, her style continues to formulate. She doesn't have one distinct style or wardrobe, and doesn't feel like she needs to be limited to one. She is in this process of understanding and discovery in both her ethnic identity and personal style.

Acceptance with a flare of chaos

Personally, have come to this acceptance and pride of being Chinese. Same as Deveyn, the diverse San Francisco community has helped me gain even more knowledge and pride for my ethnicity.

Sophisticated Chaos. Though known for distinctive minimalistic style formation, there has become an openness towards incorporating color into my wardrobe. This new-found openness of letting my interpretation of chaos slowly, but surely, flow into my wardrobe is a significant revelation in style formation. Still with my precise and structured style, I'll have color color-blocked in. I have come a long way in dealing with my cultural identity. I always struggled with my ethnicity, and publically

pronouncing it. I am discovering ways to combine both my Chinese and American sides into my cultural dress.

Grappling the Hyphen

We both grappled with the hyphen between our hyphenated cultures. How do we balance two cultures without offending the other? Is there a way to be not labeled uncultured while being in two or more cultures? Even though there's been hundreds of years of transnational evidence and acceptance seen through trade and globalization, inevitably there will be constant cultural discord due to ambivalence and anxiety. "Whether one feels a sense of belonging to a neighborhood, a rural setting, a city, or a nation, visions of place shape processes of subject formation as place/ spaces undergo their own changes (Kaiser, 2012, p. 55). The feeling of belonging to a place is natural, but with the ambiguity in between two different cultures, minorities will continue to struggle and deal with when formulating their cultural identity.

Embracing the Two worlds and Everything In Between

Both Deveyn and I are societally deemed ethnic minorities. Deveyn was raised in a dominant black community and I was raised in a dominant white community. However, no matter our environmental difference we still have the struggle of understanding this unknown sourced shame we had for our own ethnicity. Our communities have influenced our form of dress. We both have come to perceive and realize that our racial identity is something to be embraced and incorporated in our style. Cultural dress in not distinctive or definite. It is always changing and forming because of other cultural influences and intersectionality. There will always be a constant struggle with style formation correlates to our struggle with our ethnic-cultural acceptance in any setting. If one is a minority in an environment, they will often struggle with adapting to and assimilating that popular majority ideas. In addition, it is inevitable that the environment around oneself will affect personal style formation and societal presentation.

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