

An Interview with *The Fashion Studies Journal*

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Abstract: The following article is built on an interview with two of the co-founders of *The Fashion Studies Journal (FSJ)*, Lauren Downing Peters, Editor-in-Chief, and Laura Snelgrove, Editor-at Large. The interview was conducted and article was written by the editorial assistant at *Fashion Studies*, and is the first step towards creating a collaborative partnership between the two publications. *FSJ* began in 2012 as a traditional academic outlet and was relaunched in 2016 as an online journal, with a focus on taking a thoughtful approach to fashion from a range of perspectives while representing diverse voices. Meanwhile, in 2017 *Fashion Studies* launched as the first open-access journal in the transdisciplinary field of fashion studies, celebrating work that is focused on refashioning the world into a more equitable, just, and inclusive place. Connected through their similar journal names, the two publications soon realized that there were endless ways they could work together to further the field of fashion studies. In particular, the journals are united through their shared values of taking a critical approach to fashion, making fashion studies accessible, and building a fashion studies community. What follows are excerpts from the interview conducted between *Fashion Studies* and *FSJ*. Topics include how *FSJ* began, why the study of fashion is important, and advice for others hoping to establish themselves within the field.

KEYWORDS

- fashion studies
- fashion publications
- collaborative
- interdisciplinary

Have you ever had the experience of forming an immediate friendship with someone through some innocuous similarity? Say your hairstylist grew up in the same neighborhood as you, or the woman in front of you is sporting your favourite team logo on their bag. These types of interactions can add a little jolt of connection to our days. But nothing is more binding than meeting someone with the same name as you — “Hey, that’s my name, too!” Commonplace though it might be, it was in this way that the collaboration between *The Fashion Studies Journal* (FSJ) and *Fashion Studies* began.

ILLUSTRATION 1

Illustration from Issue 2 of *The Fashion Studies Journal*. Mike Thompson, *Scrunchie*, 2016, illustration. “The Scrunchie: An Icon of Bad Taste Turned Ironic,” Lisa Santandrea, *The Fashion Studies Journal* (21 December 2016), www.fashionstudiesjournal.org/what-were-wearing-1/2016/12/12/the-scrunchie-an-icon-of-bad-taste-turned-ironic.



Once the two journals connected, we realized that there were endless ways we could work together to further the field of fashion studies. It was less than a month after recognizing this that I was able to meet Laura Snelgrove, Editor-at-Large and Co-Founder of *FSJ*, in person at the Pop Culture Association of Canada's annual conference. Laura was presenting her work entitled "Online Collaboration in a Fledgling Field: Editing *The Fashion Studies Journal*." She described the process of creating an online publication with the rest of the journal team, engaging the conference audience and encouraging new submissions. Putting a face to one of the journal names only furthered my excitement about collaborating with *FSJ*. Most recently, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to interview both Laura and Editor-in-Chief and Co-Founder Lauren Downing Peters, another fashion scholar I admire immensely, on *FSJ* in my role as editorial assistant for *Fashion Studies*.

The history of FSJ hints at the unique space they would come to carve in the field of fashion academia after their relaunch in 2016.

The journal was initially started in 2012 as an academic outlet, focused on disseminating knowledge through what they have called a somewhat "inaccessible," critical lens (*The Fashion Studies Journal*). Notably, the publication was created when co-founders Lauren, Laura, Anya Kurennaya, and Kim Jenkins, who is now a contributor to the journal, were students in the MA *Fashion Studies* program at Parsons School of Design, the New School in New York. An initial goal of the journal was to create a platform for MA-level students to share and publish their work. In this way, the *FSJ* team was already breaking new ground; they had started a publication by students, for students.

The 2016 relaunch saw a shift in the journal's identity as a strictly academic outlet. Instead, *FSJ* as an outlet would be focused on maintaining their "critical, thoughtful writing," and would aim to "address current issues facing the contemporary fashion landscape, while simultaneously addressing these issues through the lenses of history and theory" (*The Fashion Studies Journal*). The journal has undoubtedly been successful in embracing their new mission and has seen incredible output, with four issues published within the first year of the relaunch. Their "Essays" section maintains a traditional, academic focus, along with the "Visual Essays," "Histories," and "From the Archives" sections, among others (*The Fashion Studies Journal*). The journal also addresses a wide range of topics, methodologies, and approaches: a piece on the relationship between fashion and masculinity in seduction communities is accompanied by a history of hemlines and a personal essay on shopping for a maternity bikini, all coexisting in one issue (*The Fashion Studies Journal*). Through this unique slant, *FSJ* has created a distinct platform for creators and authors to engage with.

It's been clear that many of the similarities between *The Fashion Studies Journal* and *Fashion Studies* can be seen through the journals' ideals. Both are online outlets where content on fashion studies can be accessed easily and, importantly, for free. This is a key way we help to dismantle the privilege surrounding fashion studies and academia more generally. Both journals prioritize turning a critical eye on *fashion studies*, emphasizing the ways in which fashion is a serious field of research. This means highlighting the ways fashion has created and contributed to social conflict, as well as the ways in which it can be utilized to create social change. *The Fashion Studies Journal* invites submissions from a range of contributors, including journalists and emerging scholars; *Fashion Studies*, too, values multiple ways of knowing and of sharing knowledge, encouraging a wide variety of creators to submit to the journal.

Perhaps most importantly, these philosophies signal to a key value of each journal: community. Building community is a part of the mission, the *raison d'être*, of each publication.

As the *Fashion Studies Journal's* website states: "Indeed, at its core, *FSJ* stands as a community for fashion thinkers of all backgrounds, and it is our hope to engage, challenge and inspire our readers to continue building this community and furthering the cause of this common pursuit" (*The Fashion Studies Journal*). For us here at *Fashion Studies*, we contribute to this community by creating a space where scholars can share their work without pay barriers, by disseminating this work democratically, and by encouraging interdisciplinary research and connections; our goal is to "[refashion] the world into a more equitable, just and inclusive place" where a community of fashion scholars will thrive (*Fashion Studies*). It is for these reasons, and many others, that collaborating with *FSJ* is important to us.

With all this in mind, we move forward with our first act of partnership: this interview. It was a true pleasure to speak with Laura and Lauren, asking them questions about how they first started *FSJ* and where they'd like to see the publication in five years. I even threw in a question that I had a vested interest in as an emerging scholar; namely, what advice would they give someone hoping to pursue a career in fashion studies? I think you'll find their answers as insightful and thought-provoking as I did. Moving forward, expect to see more collaboration between the two journals. We have lots in the works.

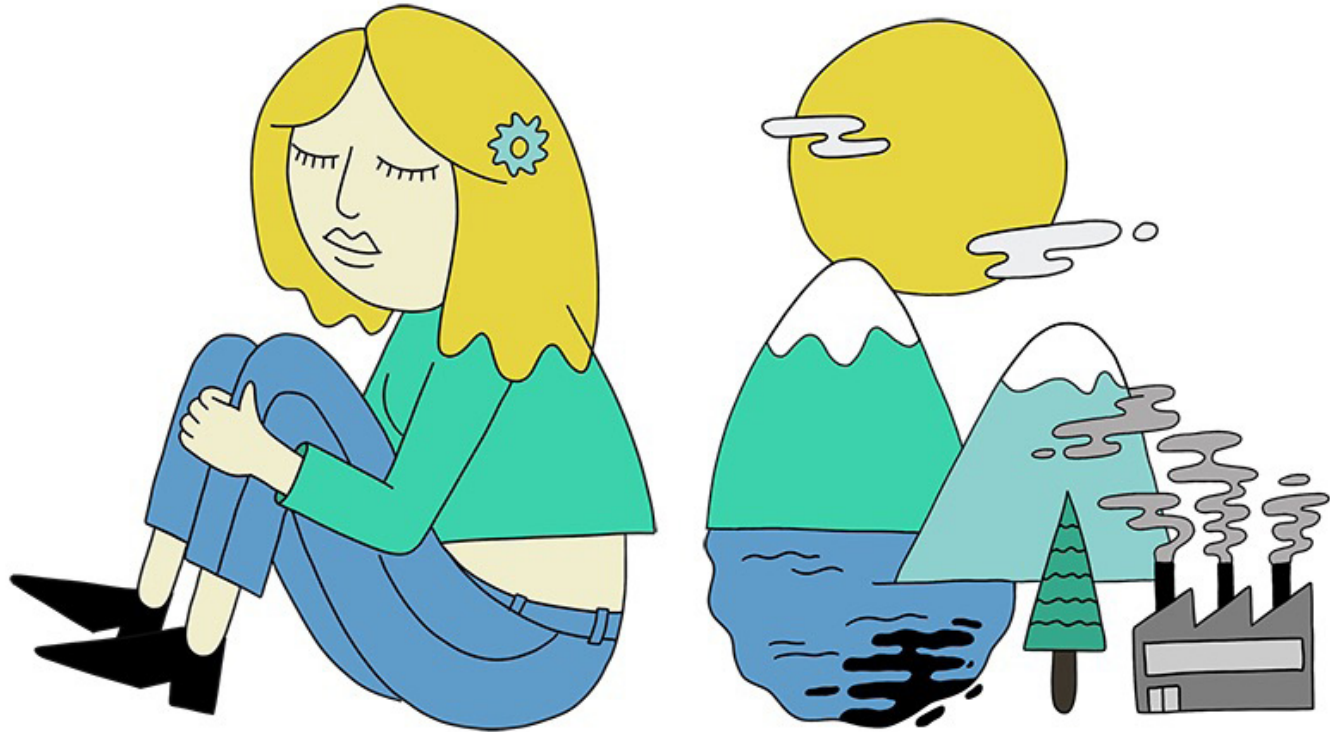


ILLUSTRATION 2

Illustration from Issue 5 of *The Fashion Studies Journal*. Mike Thompson, *Greenwashing*, 2018, illustration. "To Communicate Sustainable Fashion in a Sustainable Manner," Malin Viola Wennberg, *The Fashion Studies Journal* (5 March 2018), www.fashionstudiesjournal.org/5-notes-from-the-field/2018/2/28/to-communicate-sustainable-fashion-in-a-sustainable-manner.

What follows are some of the highlights from my interview with Laura and Lauren at *The Fashion Studies Journal*:

On why studying fashion is important:

LAURA: I remember when I first decided to go to Parsons [School of Design, the New School]. I was at a party for my Mom's birthday with all of these people that I had grown up with. And one of the guests sort of chastised me about wanting to study fashion, basically challenging me by asking: "Is fashion worthy of study?" They were arguing that fashion has created huge inequalities around the world. And my response was, "Well then, how can you imagine that it's not worthy of study? That it doesn't belong in the academy?" So that's always been a thing for me; fashion can be a problem, and that makes it worth studying. As much as fashion is also fun and amazing and wonderful, it can also be a problem everywhere in the world; because of that, we need to get into it.

LAUREN: You know, luckily, I've never had anybody confront me in that way. Everybody's been very supportive of and interested in the study of fashion. For example, when I was a senior in college I had one professor who took me under her wing and said, "Sure, you can write about anything. Let's find a way to apply art historical methods to this fashion paper that you want to write." And once she opened that door for me, I couldn't stop thinking about the question: "Why do we wear what we wear?" It's a question that's really worth answering.

And as Laura said, whether it be that you're studying sociology or any other field, fashion, clothing, and the body often manage to creep their way in there, all the time. So why shouldn't we have specialists who have the language and the know-how to approach and answer these types of questions?

On how *FSJ* first started:

LAURA: Well, we were students at Parsons, and I'm sure it was Lauren's idea. I mean, who knows exactly, but I feel confident that it was Lauren. We felt that there was something missing, in that there was nowhere for MA students to publish. Maybe you could submit part of your MA thesis to journals, but otherwise, we were writing all of these term papers and a lot of them were really good, and so we thought, "Could these be contributing in some way to the field?" So, the idea was that we could create a journal to publish MA-level work, MA-level student work. At that point, the Parsons program was new, we were in the first year of it, and there were all these other MA programs in New York, at NYU and FIT and Bard and everywhere, and so we thought, there's also all this work coming out of those programs that isn't being published. Is there something we could do to make that happen?

LAUREN: I don't think it was my idea; I think it was me and you and Anya [Kurennaya], who all had the idea! And then we were talking, probably, to Heike [Jenss], our program director, and I think she kind of held our hands and told us that this was a good initiative. Especially since around that time we were also preparing our first conference presentations. Parsons hosts the Parsons Festival, and I

think it was a natural outlet to then try and publish these papers [that came out of this event]. The other interesting aspect was the partner program, which began at the same time as ours: the MFA Fashion Design and Society. We had been collaborating with them, and in the first issue [of *FSJ*] we created fashion spreads for their work and published their collection images, so, yeah, it was kind of like —

LAURA: — the idea of combining the theory and practice sides, and showing that this work was really interconnected.

On the best and worst parts about running an online publication:

LAUREN: I think one of the hardest parts is deadlines, honestly. I also feel like, since we're all doing this as a labour of love, we all have a million irons in the fire and a million things going on. So, people really are stealing time when and where they can. And whenever it comes down to actually publishing, I think we really feel the crunch.

LAURA: It's also because we work remotely, we're all in different places, especially over the summer ... Everything we do is online. Every meeting we have is like this [author's note: our interview was conducted over Skype]. Everything is totally remote. So, there aren't those moments where you all get together in one room for the day and feed off of each other's energy. We just don't have those opportunities. So that part is tough; being remote, without being able to fuse all of our energy in the same place at the same time. But that can also be some of the best parts. The flexibility is also cool.

LAUREN: Yeah, I was going to say that it is a minus but it's also a plus. Because I know, at least in my case, and I think Laura you might be able to say the same, that I don't have much of a fashion studies community in Sweden. So, the journal and being able to work with everyone has been really, really important to me these past couple of years.

Even though we are meeting remotely, it's one of the only moments where I get to speak to like-minded people with similar goals.

We've also gotten similar feedback from other people, at least in the New York community, who have said that before we started doing things like our social events, everybody really felt like they were on their own. And I think that just speaks to the nature of the academic climate right now.

On the journal's 2016 relaunch:

LAURA: Well, Kim [Jenkins] gets a lot of credit for that.

LAUREN: Yeah, we'd been doing things here and there. We'd been having conversations since we left the Master's about our second issue [of *FSJ*]. And then we had our first "Fashion and Spinach" dinner, in the spring in 2015. I just had a Facebook notification that popped up and reminded me of that event. We'd been moving in the direction of doing social programming, and I think there'd been some chitchat about getting the publishing going again. But it was Kim who approached us last summer and said that she was interested in starting up *FSJ* again and had this idea to make it more widely accessible, changing the tone a bit. And I think that we were all very down with that idea.

LAURA: Yeah, she gave us a proposal that had all kinds of elements to it. Not all of which we've been able to execute, but the publishing side was definitely her vision that we all got on board with. The idea was that there would still be some academic content, traditional academic content, and that's become our "Essays" section, where there would still be rigorous citations and all that. But then it would be mixed with the kind of writing that could be seen in fashion blogs or magazines; it would still have a critical tone, still be on a bed of real theory, but the tone and the writing style would be more internet-ish, rather than journal-ish. It all came naturally from this idea of marrying history and theory with more fun; fun content.



ILLUSTRATION 3

Illustration from *The Fashion Studies Journal*. Kelly Abeln, *Beauty Salon*, 2016, illustration. "Why a Hijabi CoverGirl Matters to Me," Adelle McElveen, *The Fashion Studies Journal* (9 December 2016), www.fashionstudiesjournal.org/commentary/2016/12/9/curly-hair.

On how the journal and its mission has changed since its inception:

LAURA: It's also become international. Which has been great.

LAUREN: I don't know that we've moved away from academia at all. I think that, to an extent, we've come to embrace it a bit more. I feel like when we relaunched it we were trying to move away from it, but then the response has been so enthusiastic from people within our community that we've rolled with that.

I wouldn't call most of what we do un-academic. Certainly, it's not peer reviewed in the traditional sense, but it's thoughtful, and well researched. I think that we've found this sweet spot, that's funny and also thoughtful.

And I think, especially in talking to all of the contributors, even the ones who are writing longer essays, that they seem so grateful to have this space where they can loosen up. So, I think that's another interesting niche that we've found. I remind people before they publish that this isn't peer reviewed per se and our readership is only so big, but then people are always really, really eager to write the papers that they wanted to write, as opposed to having to follow all of the rules of traditional academic publishing. It's the long-winded way of saying that we've come back around to the academic, but in the sense that we're serving an academic community that perhaps we didn't even realize was there.

On where they would like to see the journal in the next five years:

LAURA: There would be one major thing that I think we'd like to be different, which would be to be able to pay anybody. Ourselves last, contributors first ... paying the contributors is the main thing. It's almost a shame that we harbour with this. We feel like we're talking about how important it is to escape the gig economy, adjunct-ing cycle, and how it would be great to be supportive of people who are being left out of the academic machine. And then we can't provide anything to them. It feels kind of awful, but that is definitely a goal for within five years, for sure.

LAUREN: Yeah. It's our sole goal. I get this immense feeling of guilt, but then I also get really energized whenever we start talking about that because there's so much that's wrong with academic publishing. And yeah — why shouldn't we pay people? It's such a simple question, but that's definitely what I hope we'll be doing sooner than five years from now, maybe within a year or something. That would be great.

On what they would want readers to know about them, the voices behind the journal:

LAURA: What we're doing is because we care about the work. We really think it's important to get these other voices heard as well and to, like we said, build community and find a space for people's work to get out there.

LAUREN: I don't think that this is a vanity project, at all. I don't think any of us are doing this to get our names out into the world and to have another line on our CV. I think we all believe in community building and see the real need for this. For me, it's just been such an amazing opportunity to meet people and to feel less alone in this. So, I think if we can share some of those good feelings then we've succeeded.

On if their own research as fashion scholars has helped to shape the journal:

LAUREN: I think we're die-hard fashion studies people. If anything, I've become more and more confident in the idea that we need dress historians and we need costume studies people and we need fashion studies scholars, and I think in our own way we're claiming that territory.

LAURA: I wish I read more serious-minded fashion commentary in something like *The New York Times*' "Fashion" section. I wish that fashion studies scholars were writing for mass market fashion publications; I wish that was the case, but it's not.

ILLUSTRATION 4

Illustration from *The Fashion Studies Journal*. Mike Thompson, *Protest/Pussyhats*, 2017, illustration. "The Power of Pink and a Bloodstained Black Lives Matter Movement," Laura Beltran-Rubio, *The Fashion Studies Journal* (28 February 2017), www.fashionstudiesjournal.org/commentary/2017/2/28/fashion-and-solidarity-the-power-of-pink-and-a-bloodstained-black-lives-matter-movement.



On breaking down the “fourth wall” of academic writing:

LAUREN: I think that discussion came out of me and Laura just talking about how frustrated we were with this payment thing. We had one really big fiery Skype conversation, where we really became firm in the idea that we needed to begin paying people ... not only begin paying people, but also to make these conversations a lot more transparent. We’re all having these conversations amongst ourselves, with our colleagues and people you meet at conferences and stuff but nobody’s really talking. I don’t know that it’s the fourth wall of academic publishing, it’s the fourth wall of academia. Breaking down this façade and talking more about the system that we’re all complacent to participate in. Creating a space in which we can be a bit vulnerable and talk about the mechanics of our field.

LAURA: I know that we’ve recently had some think pieces about how the personal essay is dead, I know we’ve heard that personally, but that’s still for me so much of what I love to read on the internet ... personal essays that of course always have universal themes.

I think after years of reading and enjoying work like that, it’s hard to not wonder all the time, “Who’s writing this? What do you bring to this story? What do you bring to this conversation?”

So, now it’s impossible to not want to break the fourth wall in everything that I’m personally writing. It’s identity politics conversations that are being had everywhere, and this reflex that comes from wanting to be transparent and personal all of the time.

LAUREN: Yeah, and I think that reflexivity can also be really instrumental and educational as well. I feel like there are a lot of misperceptions about what it is to be a fashion scholar. Misperceptions about the trajectory to become a fashion scholar and what comes afterwards. People have these Master's and they're sort of like, "Then what? What if I don't get into a PhD program?" I think it's really interesting. I really like to push people in their writing to be self-reflexive and speak in the first person and break out of that academic jargon and actually talk about their position to their research; about how they arrived to this particular research question, or this topic of study, or whatever it is. Even beyond all of these big picture political questions, I think having those kinds of asides and those kinds of moments of reflection within a piece can help people find their own way as well. And like Laura said, acknowledging that you're not alone, that it's OK to ask these questions and that it's OK to not follow this perfect, linear trajectory from the Master's to the PhD to a tenured professorship, because that path doesn't exist anymore.

On the benefit of creating connections between journals like *FSJ* and *Fashion Studies*:

LAUREN: We're all in this fight together, and it's not like the struggle to legitimize fashion studies as a field of study is over or has been resolved. I think there's power in numbers, there's strength in numbers. The more that we work together, the better it is for all of us, honestly.

LAURA: Yeah, I agree. And I mean, there's publishing and then there's conferences and there's all kinds of other ways that people get to work together and get to know each other. And, you know, the more you have a friendly face at a conference, the more it makes you want to participate.

Even just the more we all meet each other, the better... Who knows what kinds of ways there are to collaborate down the line once you know people and know their work?

I just think, the more connections the better, in this field and otherwise.



ILLUSTRATION 5

Illustration from Issue 4 of *The Fashion Studies Journal*. Rachel Kinnard, *Russell Westbrook*, 2017, illustration. "Whys and Why Nots: Reading the Stakes and Meanings of Russell Westbrook's NBA Style Revolution," Anna Peppard, *The Fashion Studies Journal* (2 August 2017), www.fashionstudiesjournal.org/4-essays-2017/7/28/russell-westbrook?rq=basketball.

On their advice to others hoping to establish themselves in the field of fashion studies:

LAUREN: I guess the advice that I tend to give to people is, embrace the fact that there's no clear-cut path for you and look for every opportunity to make your own opportunities, basically. Because like Laura said at the beginning, fashion, in a sense, is a big problem, and we're the ones equipped with the knowledge to fix it to a certain extent. I guess that might be a bit optimistic, and we're clearly not getting hired in droves by the industry, but I think there are definitely spaces in which we can apply this knowledge. But we have to make them ourselves.

LAURA: I think that's exactly what I would have said, too. Make your own opportunities. Which I always hate as advice from other people, because it's like, "Well, what if that's really hard? Actually, I would prefer that you gave me an opportunity."

I think it's more about the power of working together with peers. Of seeing peers as a really valuable resource rather than, again, competition.

If we break out of the mindset that there are three academic jobs available and there's thirty of us, so how are we going to compete for those three, if we stop thinking that way and instead think, "There's thirty of us! There's so much that thirty people can do, working together!" You know, taking our eyes off the prize of those academic jobs is probably a sensible thing to do, even though of course some people will get them, but it's not going to happen because you've focused on that at the expense of other things. So, I think yeah, I think seeing each other as our best ...

LAUREN: ... Resources.

LAURA: Yeah, exactly. We're each other's best resources.

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Author Biography



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Jaclyn Marcus holds her MA in Fashion from Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) where she conducted research on the intersections between fashion, literature, and girl culture.

Under the supervision of Dr. Irene Gammel, Jaclyn's most recent work focused on the impact of fashion on the friendships and social identities of young female characters in early twentieth-century literature. Jaclyn is honoured to have joined Toronto Metropolitan University's Modern Literature & Culture Research Centre in 2016 and to hold the role of editorial assistant for *Fashion Studies*, the first open-access journal in the transdisciplinary field of fashion, co-founded and co-edited by Dr. Ben Barry and Dr. Alison Matthews David. Jaclyn is looking forward to beginning her PhD in Communication & Culture at Toronto Metropolitan University in September 2018.

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