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You Made Me Wear This

By SIMONE S. OLIVER

Published: July 7, 2010

IT'S been hot lately, which makes getting dressed in the morning a little harder. I want something cool enough for the five-block walk to the subway, but warm enough for an air-conditioned day at the office.

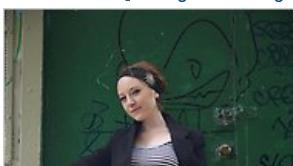
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YES? Ariella Adika in her original choice of wedding dress.

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Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times

DEFINITELY YES Ariella Adika's new dress has a pleated bodice with an embroidered A-line skirt.

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Sometimes it takes a couple of outfit changes, but the other day, I was torn. I wanted to wear a pair of long navy blue Elizabeth and James shorts, with a light purple silk blouse and very high, blush-colored snakeskin heels. But I was afraid that the silk blouse, which I usually wear with skinny jeans, would not be flattering with the loose blue shorts.

My husband was of little help. And I wasn't about to call my girlfriends for advice. So I pulled out my [iPhone](#), snapped a photo of myself in the outfit and uploaded it to a Web site called [Fashism](#). "Is this look too boxy for me?" I wrote. "I love these shorts but not sure how it all looks on my body." About five minutes later, the first comment landed. "It's a tad form-less," the stalwart wrote.

Another commenter, MLG, agreed: "Just a little bit too much going on for my taste."

The crowd-source had spoken. I went back into my closet, slipped on a colorful dropped-waist dress, and headed to work with an extra kick in my flat, silver sandals.

Not long ago, people turned to fashion magazines for advice. Now they are turning to one another. Web sites like Fashism and [Go Try It On](#), both less than a year old, are picking up where fashion blogs have left off, and are making fashion more immediate and personal.

The premise is simple enough: Upload a photo of yourself wearing a particular outfit. Ask a question or share some details about your look. Users then rate your outfit by clicking "I like it" or "I hate it" on Fashism (or "Wear It" or "Change It" on Go Try It On).

Would-be Rachel Zoes can also comment. It's similar to that Web site [Hot or Not](#), where users rate one another's sex appeal. But these sites are geared for fashion and, more refreshingly, are largely free of the snark or harsh

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Heidi Schumann for The New York Times
Amy Silbergeld posts regularly on Fashism.com.

judgments that plague earlier crowd-sourcing sites.

"It's for people who want a quick second opinion," said Marissa Evans, 26, a former Web analyst and strategist in New York, [who started Go Try It On](#). Ms. Evans employs a small team of moderators to ensure civility. "I really wanted to build a site that is helpful, not hurtful," she said.

In some ways, these sites are similar to [other user-generated fashion sites](#) that are riding the crowd-sourcing wave. Sites like [FashionStake](#) and [Catwalk Genius](#) champion up-and-coming designers, and invite users to window-shop and even [finance new talent](#). Show-and-tell sites like [LookBook](#) and [I Like My Style](#) allow users to post new looks, as well as critique other postings, much like contestants on "Project Runway."

But those sites tend to cater to people in or who want to be in the fashion industry. Fashism and Go Try It On are for everyday people including teenagers trying out new looks at the mall, and office workers confused by what to wear. So far, they seem to be among the only sites of their kind, and both were created by fashion neophytes, with no involvement from designer companies or brands.

"I'm not professing to be a fashion expert and neither are most people who use it," said Brooke Moreland, who started Fashism last September. A 29-year-old freelance video editor in Brooklyn, Ms. Moreland hatched the idea while shopping at Uniqlo in SoHo with her husband, Joe Weisenthal. She wanted an opinion on a vest she was trying on, but her husband was in another department, and she was reluctant to ask a salesclerk, who might coerce her into buying.

What if they could create a site that offers instant feedback from unbiased reviewers? Later that day, she and her husband called up a developer and friend, Chris France, to create the site. About a year later, the site went live. It currently has about 3,000 registered users (membership is free) and 100,000 visitors since its debut.

Go Try It On, which went up in March, has about 5,000 registered free users. Ms. Evans, who worked for Digitas, a large digital marketing agency in New York, came up with the idea after years of trading fashion tips with her sister via [Skype](#).

So far, the sites do not have any advertisers or make any money, but they are starting to attract corporate sponsors and investors. Both sites are also developing iPhone apps. Fashism doles out points for the best comments and users can redeem those points for discounts at online retailers like ModCloth and Market Publique.

Not that users need an incentive. Flipping through the slide show of outfits, and offering snap opinions on people's looks, feels a little like a fashion video game.

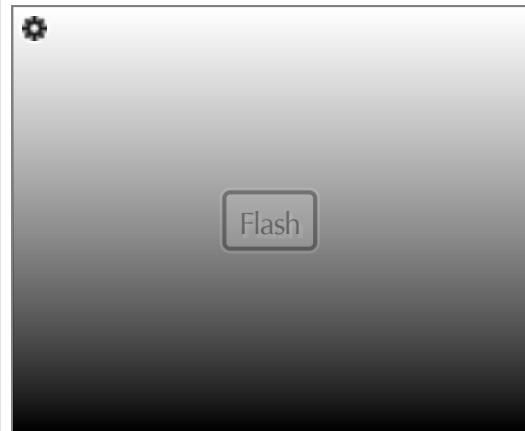
Getting feedback can be just as addictive. Amy Silbergeld, 22, a store clerk and poet from San Francisco, logs onto Fashism daily, not only to see other styles, but also to see what others have to say about her. It helps "people to look their personal best, rather than helping them to conform," she said.

Fashism can also be more honest and constructive than any friend, spouse or personal shopper. "I think my friends will totally lie to me," she said. "It's different when it's a complete stranger."

That was my experience. My first encounter with Fashism was in May, after I found what I thought were the perfect pair of boyfriend jeans, a pair of blue, slightly distressed and torn J Brand jeans for \$49. My husband and friends complimented them, but I still had doubts. A friend turned me on to Fashism.

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Within 15 minutes of uploading my first snapshot, I received a comment: "These jeans aren't doing you any favors," Abulose posted. "Since you're short, cuffed boyfriend jeans are not slimming or elongating."

Only 40 percent of users approved. But instead of feeling besmirched, I was glad for the honest feedback, and those jeans now hang at the back of my closet.

Buying jeans is one thing. A wedding dress is another. Ariella Adika, 28, a fashion creative director who lives in Edgewater, N.J., goes on Fashism several times a week, especially on her shopping trips. "If I'm in a store, I will wait to hear what people have to say," she said.

When it came time to pick a wedding dress, she took no chances. With the help of her mother and sister, Ms. Adika found a \$3,000 ivory floor-length gown by Dominique Daniela at a boutique in New Hope, Pa. It had large origami folds and a black sash that tied around her waist.

She loved it, but was understandably nervous, so she snapped a photo at the bridal store and turned to her friends on Fashism. Nearly everyone thought the origami folds seemed too heavy for her small frame. "You're not wearing the dress, the dress is wearing you," a poster, tianaco, wrote.

Ms. Adika took their advice and found a second dress at Modern Troussseau, a boutique in Manhattan in the same building where she and her husband run a fashion showroom. The new dress was also ivory, but instead of floor-length with dramatic folds, it had a pleated bodice with a rose-embroidered A-line skirt.

It was perfect, she thought. In fact, she didn't need a second opinion, and plans to walk the aisle in it.

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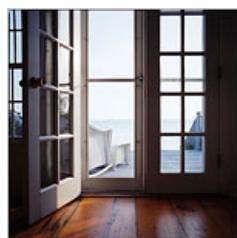
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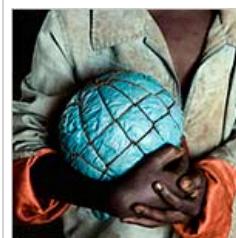
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