

# Clothes: What They Say About You and Me

Victoria Press, College of Arts and Science

Clothes say a lot about who you are. I care about clothes and have for as long as I can remember. I even lay my clothes out the night before and sometimes plan outfits a week or more in advance. Not once have I thrown on even a sweatshirt over pajamas and not checked in the mirror to see if the look is cohesive. Even on days that I dress casually for class—maybe a t-shirt and gym shorts—I have thought through the outfit. I won't leave my room until I am happy with what I am wearing. You could almost say my infatuation with clothes is an obsession or compulsion. I think this is because I see clothing as one of the most important forms of self-expression; clothes help people understand me, and most importantly, understand themselves. Even people who could seemingly care less about what they wear say something about themselves through their clothes.

Growing up in New York City, I have always had easy access to the latest trends. I began working at a clothing boutique, Cloe, at horse shows when I was really little. As an eight-year-old, I was not exactly able to draw a salary, so each month I got to pick out one item to keep. I related well to customers and was a very successful saleswoman because I was good at understanding what kind of message people wanted to convey through their attire. The items that shoppers purchased were very telling of how they saw themselves and how they wanted others to interpret and relate to them.

My personal style has changed so much over time, and even sometimes changes dramatically in the course of a day. It all really depends upon what side of myself I feel most in touch with. The things that influence my style include what career I am interested in at the moment, which friend I feel most connected to, which boy I am into, what music I am listening to, what TV show I have been watching lately, where I am living, and even smaller things like where I plan to get my studying done that day.

At times my style has been very preppy. I was obsessed with Lilly Pulitzer during the period when I wanted to attend a New England boarding school. At Vanderbilt, bright patterns and nautical stripes have often been replaced by the muted colors of a look inspired by the high school I attended in my home city. While studying in Paris this past summer, I adopted the look of the girls native to the magical city, wearing relaxed jeans and loafers. Then there are times that I watch "Friday Night Lights" and only listen to country music, wearing Western boots and jeans to class. However, sometimes my Vanderbilt friends from Dallas and Houston inspire me to dress in a different Texan style: not so much cowgirl as cheerleader, and I will wear tennis skirts to class and bold jewelry at night. When I'm feeling sporty, I emulate the northern lacrosse player, a role I played in high school. Once in a while I embrace the music industry in Nashville, which I hope to be a part of one day, so I dress like a hipster songwriter or wear jeans and a t-shirt as casually as if I worked at a record label. My style ranges from very feminine to almost androgynous, depending on if I am in a Taylor Swift or Lorde phase.

Just as my mindset affects my look, I use clothing to change my mood. If I am having a terrible day, putting on my favorite jeans, even just to wear around my room, helps. When I am missing my family or a friend, I wear something that seems like something that person would wear or something that belongs to them, and I instantly feel more connected to them. I also sometimes wear things that I wore for a special moment, and it brings me back to the way I felt at that time.

When my friend from Alabama visited me recently, she commented on the fact that my outfits seem so different from one another. This moment really marks when I first became conscious of just how much outside forces dictate how I present myself to the world. What does the fact that my style changes so frequently say about my identity? Am I so easily swayed by influences big and small? Other people really do not seem to experience such drastic fluxes, or at least they do not express them in the same manner.

I have begun to wonder if clothes are accurate markers of character, or does my obsession with them simply indicate that I am entirely superficial? Caring about your clothes intrinsically means that you care how others see you. However, is it really humanly possible to *not* care what people think of you? I use my clothes to express to the world how I am feeling. My wardrobe is one of the few things that I own that genuinely encompasses all aspects of who I am.