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Classified: The North Face Files

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Abstract

“You’re going to need to buy nicer clothes,” my dad told me during our first visit to Gettysburg College. I laughed, thinking it was a typical “dad” thing to say and something I would promptly ignore, but after four years I now see that maybe he wasn’t joking.

Let me be honest. I had never considered just how expensive the clothing name brands could be until this year. I do not own an iPhone, an iPad, or an iPod. In fact, you’re more likely to see me on campus with my **#VaginaProblems** t-shirt and a pair of jeans than in J. Crew shorts and a button-up. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, North Face, name brand, social class, fitting in, college look

Disciplines

Community-Based Research | Educational Sociology | Higher Education | Inequality and Stratification | Place and Environment | Sociology | Sociology of Culture

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](#) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

CLASSIFIED: THE NORTH FACE FILES

April 17, 2013

"You're going to need to buy nicer clothes," my dad told me during our first visit to Gettysburg College. I laughed, thinking it was a typical "dad" thing to say and something I would promptly ignore, but after four years I now see that maybe he wasn't joking.

Let me be honest. I had never considered just how expensive the clothing name brands could be until this year. I do not own an iPhone, an iPad, or an iPod. In fact, you're more likely to see me on campus with my **#VaginaProblems** t-shirt and a pair of jeans than in J. Crew shorts and a button-up.

"It's standard to see someone with a North Face jacket and an iPhone here at Gettysburg," my friend said to me as we were talking about name brands and how much more common they seem here compared to our high schools. When she casually mentioned that North Face jackets often run between \$100 and \$200, I paused...Having probably never spent anything more than \$60 on clothing, I suddenly felt, well...

I felt outclassed.

Check this out: A [2011 psychology study](#) had college students view photographs of an African American or white female model wearing grey sweatshirts with Kmart, Abercrombie & Fitch, or no logos. Want to know what they found? Students rated the model with the Abercrombie & Fitch sweatshirt as the having the highest socioeconomic status and rated the model wearing the Kmart sweatshirt as being the least successful and important.

It has been proven that we connect better with people who come from similar backgrounds and separate ourselves from those who are different. If we are of one socioeconomic status, we not only find it more difficult to relate to someone of another status, but we often are less willing to make a connection because of the predispositions we have. Until this conversation I had never thought of myself as being somehow conceptually



“separate” from the North Face wearers, nor did I see myself as separate from a community member at Nicaragua Night who confided in me that she had very little to spend in comparison to many at the event who were bidding hundreds of dollars.

She turned to me and discussed how much money my family must have if I go to Gettysburg College. It was not until I told her that my parents had immigrated to the United States and both work two jobs that she felt a connection to me. In that instant she stopped perceiving me as a wealthy college student and instead as someone who could, in fact, identify with her.

Class not only influences our perceptions of people, but it also has many tangible effects on what we are able to do. I know several people who did not go abroad because of the money it would have taken to go. I know even more people who stated that money was one of the main restrictions in determining where they could travel. And just as there are those who choose not to rush a fraternity or sorority because of the costs involved, there are also many who are forced to turn down career-building internships due to financial constraints. In these ways we are all limited in our choices by what we are able to afford.

It's interesting to note, however, that people do not experience class in the same ways. Additional results from the McDermott study reported that if the white model was wearing the Kmart sweatshirt, she was perceived to have fewer friends. In contrast, the African American model was believed to have more friends when wearing the Kmart sweatshirt. What's even more striking is that participants said that they would be least likely to befriend the white model when she was wearing the Kmart sweatshirt and when the African American model was wearing the Abercrombie & Fitch sweatshirt.

I'll admit I have not consciously thought much about class during my time at Gettysburg—the insight of my dad's statement about needing better clothes did not hit me until a few months before my graduation. However, while I personally didn't notice it over the past four years, it is very possible that others were perceiving me differently. I'm sure my clothes seem like Kmart quality to some and J. Crew to others.

So I have developed an eye for class and class-related problems, and achieved a sense of clarity about my own complex position in the spectrum. But I'm also still left with questions.

What are other instances of class interaction here at Gettysburg?

Where do we as a four year, private liberal arts college fit in the class system?

And, most importantly, what are we doing with our own class predispositions?

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<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2013/04/17/classified-the-north-face-files/>