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Fashion Faux Pas and Cheetah Claws

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Fashion Faux Pas and Cheetah Claws

Abstract
It feels like winter, a time for thick socks, boots, warm coats, and … leggings?

Leggings are one of those articles of clothing we completely overdo… Or UNDER-do. From a practicality standpoint, they’re marvels of winter, but why rock the thin, sheer leggings in 0° weather when you could just wear shorts? [excerpt]

Keywords
Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, diversity, fashion trends, individuality, social media

Disciplines
Place and Environment | Regional Sociology | Social Psychology and Interaction | Sociology

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.

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FASHION FAUX PAS AND CHEETAH CLAWS

December 11, 2013

It feels like winter, a time for thick socks, boots, warm coats, and... leggings?

Leggings are one of those articles of clothing we completely overdo. Or UNDER-do. From a practicality standpoint, they're marvels of winter, but why rock the thin, sheer leggings in 0° weather when you could just wear shorts?

Well, maybe it's okay if everyone's doing it. And maybe it's okay to be one of Gettysburg's clones, identical right down to the same Lilly day planners. Gettysburg College's homogeneity could make sense but with the invention of the interwebs, I'm pretty sure limited shopping options is not the reason. And, yes, some things are practical. But are Ugg boots not as warm and fuzzy now as they were three years ago? Did the developments in manufacturing this past year make maxi skirts and dresses more comfortable than they were before? Sure, availability and affordability contribute to popularity but I think that we all pay too much attention to how we fit into the campus culture.

Fitting in has its advantages. When working for certain companies, it is important to fit an image that the company would like to display. You ensure your customers that you have the ability to provide what they need, and that the service would be the same from every employee. If my flight attendant looked like he/she just rolled around in dirt, no, thank you, I would not like my complimentary drink. I also wouldn't be able to quickly identify and ask my attendant for help if he/she wore clothes like every other passenger.

Fitting into campus culture, or whatever-culture, helps others take you seriously. When others have no reason to doubt that you think like them, your idea is seemingly more trustable. You also become empowered knowing that others aren't judging you, and you are able to express your idea with great enthusiasm and confidence. You can also build more authentic relationships when you don't need to battle for the trust after a negative first impression. Once, during my study abroad experience in China, a group of students and I went to our teachers' apartment to
have lunch. When we walked in, one teacher was wearing sweats and the other, a cheetah print footie pajama. After that I started wearing a pink strawberry hair clip and my teachers began treating me like a trusted friend.

Media and other people tell us what we should wear both explicitly and implicitly. In a country where access to the interwebs and television is considered a basic need, it’s hard to avoid their influence through music videos, TV shows, and tabloids. Even the people around us subtly influence us with their weird looks, whispering, and commenting about others. Unless you’re my employer or hired fashion consultant, what right do you have to tell me how I should dress?

It gets to me. In my ideal world, I don’t get sucked into shopping online for hours, searching, researching colors of the season, adding items to my cart, deleting, re-adding, editing, editing, editing, until I’m 100% sure I want everything. I don’t close the window and never look at the cart again. But, sadly, I do these things because even though the clothes in my shopping cart are items that fit my personal criteria for terms of practicality, shape, cut, price range, and would match other things in my closet, they would be too “in” and I don’t want to be seen as part of a crowd that blindly follows trends just to fit in.

My crazy aversion to buying clothes stems from the fear that people will automatically stereotype me because of what I wear. I assume that this happens, because I do it too. I judge people based on whether or not they fit into the “norm.” If they do, I place them in that “superficial and unable to think for themselves” category. If they don’t, “they’re just trying too hard to prove something.” In order to not fall into this trap of fitting in or standing out, I dress to intentionally fall into neither category. I just try to look...“normal.” I hate worrying about whether or not I will be seen as hyper-cautious and insecure, but I am also wary of dressing so out-of-this-world original that people dismiss what I have to say before I’ve even opened my mouth.

While it would be ideal to live in a world without judgment, the truth is that we react to each other based on perceptions that are often steeped in aspects of racial, class or cultural identities. The way we dress impacts the way others view us, which, like it or not, affects how we are treated and the opportunities we have. The need to be accepted is so ingrained in us that sometimes we don’t even realize it. When we do recognize that we’ve been dressing in order to fit in and are dissatisfied with our actions, making a change is not as easy as dyeing our hair purple to prove we are nonconformists; that too would show the power of society’s influence.

The question, therefore, is not whether we should or shouldn’t conform, but instead, how do we manage complex societal expectations while remaining true to our personal values?

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