I Took Photos of My Outfits for a Month to Figure Out Who I Am

by Amelia Diamond | 03.30.18

Of all the true meltdowns I've ever had over clothes — at age 4, when an outfit my mom wanted me to wear "didn't match"; a very specific Halloween, where I was furious about the unwanted addition of a forced-upon-me turtleneck; one winter break as a college sophomore, when I found that none of my high school clothes fit (literally and metaphorically) — my dramatic hyperbolic rhetoric that "I HAVE NOTHING TO WEAR" was always tied to "I DON'T KNOW WHO I AM RIGHT NOW."

As with most reflections, it's much easier to recognize in hindsight what I was going through at the time: in these cases, a scramble from baby to kid-hood, a longing for just a taste of independence, a pivotal transition through uncharted young adult-ish territory. Of course, it wasn't always so deep. Former Friday night struggles to find "going out outfits" I felt "hot" in were likely not manifestations of my inner desire to grab hold of the bounding journey beneath me, but it does make sense that for the stretches of days I felt the most *like myself* once dressed — those periods of time where putting on clothes felt blissfully effortless, I was in a more comfortable place.

With my 30th birthday on the imminent horizon, I have been able to identify, through an unprecedented lens of present-tense self-awareness, that I am very much changing — and therefore bits of my style must be changing, too. In fact, I anticipated this would happen (perhaps I felt a low rumbling, like a bird before an earthquake) and tried to get ahead of it by way of a few closet cleanings. It helped, but it also left me with holes in my wardrobe. I no longer have a shoe for every dress, a pair of pants for every boot. There were mornings this sent me into momentary tailspins, where I trashed my room with clothes because I couldn't find the solution to make an outfit in my head come to on-body fruition. (On those days, it was my room rather than my outfit that told the story of how I felt.)

To stay organized through the chaos, I took photos of my outfits over the course of a month, from Paris Fashion Week to this otherwise unremarkable Friday, to start keeping track of outfits that didn't send me spiraling.

Day 22: Default outfit. It's starting to warm up-ish. I've also chosen to start ignoring the wind chill on days it does not, in fact, warm up.
J.Crew blazer, Ammara shirt, Stella McCartney jeans, ASOS shoes

Day 23: It was warm enough to wear a skirt and a light jacket so I took advantage of it. Turns out I could have used another layer but it felt good to not be in pants.
Ralph Lauren suede jacket, Ammara shirt, Stuart Weitzman boots, Thom Browne skirt

When I finished, I realized that what I had in front of me was a book of best-practices for the me I think I'm becoming. On days where I had more time, those holes I mentioned encouraged me to think more creatively in terms of how I put things together. They encouraged me to take more risks, and removed the feeling of defeat I used to experience when an experimental combination of shapes or colors didn't work. The exercise as a whole made me think more thoughtfully about what I actually want to wear. I started to ask myself questions like, *Do I actually feel good in this shirt, or was it hanging in a convenient location? Do I really like these shoes, or are they trendy? Does this coat flatter me, or was it a label-blind impulse buy at a sample sale?* I already know what my style is; the core pieces are there. Starting to answer these questions has helped me get more and more clear on what pieces contribute to the overall picture.

As with any existential crisis, none of this was ultimately about the *things* — the shoes, the pants, the coats. It was about the person wearing them. I'm still figuring out what all of this says about what's "me," and who I am right now, but I think I'm closer than I've ever been. That feels new.

Photos *via Amelia Diamond.*

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