

The Seven Universal Styles: tell me how you dress and I'll tell you who you are

Clothes help in the construction of one's ideal image, contributing to a person's mental well-being. Advice on how to use fashion to one's advantage.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- DISCOVER ONE'S IDENTITY

According to a study conducted in the 1960s, clothing affects the way an individual defines his or her identity, both in terms of an individual's perception of himself or herself and the self-image he or she believes he or she gives to others(1) . But what is identity? Identity is becoming aware of one's uniqueness and at the same time of one's similarity to other people. Clothing plays a key role in the way through we communicate our identity and our social role(2). Think for example of currents such as "punk" in England, "grunge" in the United States or the "paninari" in Italy.



Paola Farina - founder of Paola Farina Styling

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Whereas in pre-modern society, identity was a given, determined by gender and social status, with the 1960s identity becomes something to be achieved. Today, identity has to be constructed.”

Paola Farina

As early as 1890, James addressed in his essay "Principles of Psychology" the close relationship between clothing and identity, decreeing that "the person is composed of three parts, the soul, the body and clothing."(3) Dress, body and self, explains personal [stylist](#) and image consultant [Paola Farina](#), are perceived simultaneously, as a totality. Every day we construct our identity through the clothes we choose to wear, contextualizing them within the context in which we live. Not only that, but multiple identities exist. We can define modern identity as a multidimensional reality, not static but redefinable according to three

directives.

THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

The first dimension sees stability and impermanence contrasted, each of us possessing more stable identities and other transitory ones. The second sees the opposition between complete and incomplete. For example, when we become part of a new work context we feel disoriented, we perceive our identity as incomplete, that is, lacking those characteristics that we feel are necessary to be a full part of that particular system. And finally, the eternal dichotomy between real and ideal.

PERSONAL IDENTITY AND STYLISTIC IDENTITY

The perception of having multiple identities, the stylist continues, has deep roots, which clothing can help express. A stylist can help a person bring to the surface all the identities that make up the person and that often, for fear of being judged or because of social pressures, we tend to stifle, with negative effects on our self-esteem and mental and physical well-being. In this regard, Alyce Parsons, an image consultant and trainer, addressed the topic of stylistic identities(5) from a cultural and anthropological perspective, developing a system still used today by stylists, image consultants and the film industry.

THE SYSTEM OF THE SEVEN UNIVERSAL STYLES

The system of seven universal styles, Paola Farina points out, is still very relevant today. It is little known and valued because it is based on a literary-philosophical approach, but all the major research in the psychological and social fields confirms Parsons' insights. Identity and clothing are two sides of the same coin.

According to the system there are three timeless styles of clothing, Natural, Traditional and Elegant. These three styles, in my personal approach to the person, explains Paola Farina; represent his stable identity. Each of us possesses one, it is a kind of original core, the one that defines us as unique and unrepeatable individuals. Then there are four characterizing styles: Romantic, Dramatic, Creative and Alluring/Magnetic. As the name suggests, these are secondary styles that are used to personalize the look and correspond to our transitional identities.

Just as there are roles into which actors naturally fit, so there are clothes with which an individual feels most confident. According to the symbolic self-completion theory(6) , there are clothes to which each individual feels he or she belongs completely. The system of seven universal styles is useful in understanding how to intervene on a person's real image so that it comes as close as possible to the ideal one, creating positive reinforcement in self-perception.

Emotions will be all the more positive, Paola Farina emphasizes, the more the perceived body image corresponds to one's personal ideal of beauty and certain aesthetic standards. It is essential not to be subjected to fashion, but to learn to use clothing as a tool to work on one's well-being, thereby increasing one's personal satisfaction, which is linked to the idea of having a positive body image.

HOW TO DISCOVER ONE'S STYLISTIC IDENTITIES

Beyond the trivialization offered by Social, the stylist points out, mastering the art of styling is not so easy. It takes studies that span not only the fashion sphere, but also the history of costume, anthropology and sociology, along with a good dose of personal curiosity and constant updating that must span a bit of all areas.

Ideally, a professional should be consulted. A professional is the best guide because he or she will be able to make an accurate and, above all, objective analysis. The closet, as fashion psychology explains well, is the container of our identity narrative and collects, sorts and protects the different selves that make it up(7) . It is as if the closet reassembles all the pieces of our being in one place, allowing us to fit them together differently each time, depending on what aspect of us we want to bring out. It goes without saying, Paola Farina continues, that a guide will facilitate us in the task of reading and interpreting each piece. But if we really cannot rely on the care of an expert, then the advice is to try using one of the many tests found online.

SOURCES

- (1) Source: Stone, G.P. (1962), Appearance and the self. Human Behavior and the social process: An interactionist approach, Houghton Mifflin, New York.
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- (3) Source: James, W. (1890), Principles of Psychology, Holt, Rinheart and Winston, Inc. Vol 1, New York.
- (4) Source: Guy, A., Banim M. (2000), Personal collections: women's clothing use and identity, Journal of Gender Studies, 9 (3), 313-327.
- (5) Source: Parsons, A. (2008), Style Source: The Power of the Seven Universal Styles for Women and Men, A Universal Style International Publication, California.
- (6) Source: Wicklund, R.A., Gollwitzer, P.M. (1981), Symbolic Self-Completion, Attempted Influence and Self-Deprecation, Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 2 (2),

Anna Moioli
Paola Farina Styling
press@paolafarinastyling.com

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