



AYAKO SMITH AND JACKIE HALL LAYER IT
PHOTO BY ZOIEY BURGER

Lack of Clothing

But what about the bare midriffs, six-inch miniskirts and completely visible undergarments? The last few years have been pretty bad, to the point that cleavage was redefined to include anything shown at the top or bottom of the shirt. I taught with a woman who believed that the future of teen fashion would eventually be to wear no clothes at all, just impractical shoes. I am glad to notice current trends proving her wrong. Although the bare midriff was declared dead by *Vogue* magazine in August 2000, Eugene girls are only now seriously giving it up, favoring long, tight shirts that come down to mid-hip, covering the tops of their low-rise jeans. Very short miniskirts are popular, but they are often worn with leggings, big, fuzzy Ugg boots or brightly colored, striped, polka-dotted Wellingtons. I do have a student who regularly wears an electric blue Victoria's Secret nightie to class, but she pairs it with jeans and the occasional dinosaur-print long johns top. Interestingly, girls who wear revealing outfits often have enormous personal power. They are the basketball and volleyball powerhouses, the student government leaders and star actresses. They're not afraid of anything, certainly not their own bodies. This is not universally true, but it is a fundamental change from 15 years ago.

The New Black

Long gone is the media myth of eight Goth teens in black skulking in the smoking area. (Can you believe South had a smoking area for students? It did. Not that I ever skulked there.) Black is everywhere and represents a lot more than an affection for Anne Rice and eyeliner. One of my most brilliant students has longish, scruffy hair and is most often wearing

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black. He always turns in his homework, has many friends and aces his tests in AP classes. Black clothing allows him to be a scholar without the taint of taped-up glasses and plaid pants. He's cool, without rich parents or basketball cred. Another student who dresses entirely in black is a self-proclaimed Satanist. He is well-spoken, cheerful and greets me with an "Arrr" and a wave and a bow between classes. A young woman in black (with matching hair, make-up and a bass guitar) also redefines

the lack of color with a goofy sense of humor and a wide circle of friends wearing vastly different types of clothing. What these students have in common is that, despite their uniform clothing color, they are true individuals. The black serves as an easy canvas for their big personalities. They don't need anything more than a black T and jeans because their expression of themselves comes through in everything they do and say. Hint:

Layered T-shirts, pleated miniskirts, even leg warmers and ponytails on the side: It's all coming back.

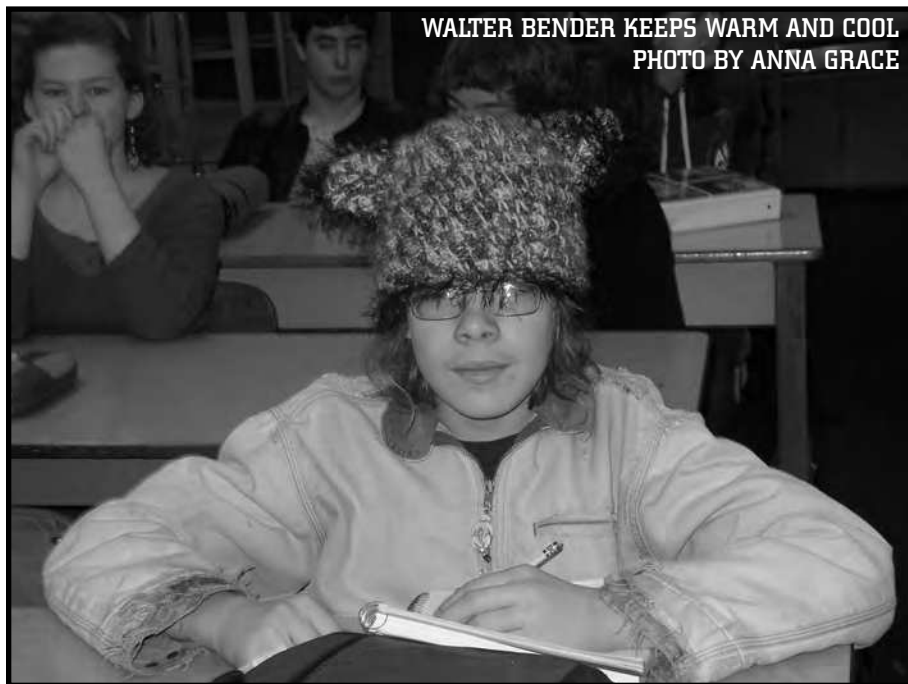
One of the best places to observe "teens in black" is a band concert, where you have 50 highly creative youth who all *must* wear black. At South, this can mean harem pants, North Face fleece, bolero ties and even tutus.

1980s, Remix

Layered T-shirts, pleated miniskirts, even leg warmers and ponytails on the side: It's all coming back. Mostly taken up by girls, the '80s fashions are worn with a wink. The girls know the leg warmers are silly, and they aren't trying to convince anyone they just walked out of a 6 am Jazzercise class. They wear dangly earrings and colorful make-up but avoid Big Hair. There is a lot of whimsy in '80s fashion that I never noticed when I was earnestly trying to follow it through my teen years. These girls just ... well ... they just wanna have fun.

Boys' Pants: Skinny or Huge?

"What really grinds my gears are the guys who wear their pants halfway down their asses; it's so dumb!" said one of my students. Girls have been saying this for years (go rent *Chueless*



WALTER BENDER KEEPS WARM AND COOL
PHOTO BY ANNA GRACE

from way back in 1995 if you need confirmation), yet guys are still wearing them, and they're as big as ever. I have seen boys with the crotch of their pants swimming around their ankles, I have seen a boy hike his pants up 27 times in a five-minute speech, and I have seen pants fall completely off a young man who was walking down the street, yet they wear them. Even as hip hop/rap culture begins to reject the oversized trend for a more refined, 1930s style à la Sean Combs and André 3000, boys only grip more tightly to the front of their falling-down pants. Yet in the last few years, some have exchanged their

mondo trousers for skintight "girls' jeans" with boxer shorts sticking out above the low waist. It's skater chic and probably more practical for the active life of a skateboarder.

Can this author make any judgments about the connections between pants styles and scholastic achievement? No. I have had male students who were brilliant in every way, save their judgment in pant sizing, and surly, squirrely boys whose pants fit just fine.

Andie Walsh

There are a number of teens, primarily girls, who truly do wear whatever they want. They are living the Molly Ringwald dream of *Pretty in Pink*. In spectator pumps and a 1950s shirt-waist dress one day and slippers and a poncho the next, they look great. They cull the thrift stores, vintage shops and even their own mothers' closets. Many of them sew as well. Hair

color, to these girls, is not something that should be confined to genetic probability. In general, because they can tailor their look to their mood and current interests and are not subjugated by the fashion world's rules about a human body, these girls look great. One of these creative girls once wore a gorilla suit to class.

Do Clothes Define the Kid?

These are just a few, and not necessarily the most significant, of the hundreds of trends students at South follow. What can we learn from them? Do clothes define the kid? According to one student, absolutely: "As cynical as it sounds, people our age definitely judge someone on first look by their clothes. And the people who try to deny that fact are pretty much lying."

Is that a bad thing? People generally don't want to be judged on anything but their souls (and personally, I'm not so sure even that's going to reflect the image I want) but wouldn't it be great to get a message across, clear and simple, by an outfit? In a sea of 36 students per class, it's great to look out and think, "That girl is telling me she's creative, that boy enjoys basketball and that girl wants to intimidate others." It is not the final judgment I make of a student, but rather an opening idea. Me, I'd like to put an outfit together that says, "No, I just want my oil changed, and I don't care what you say you found in the air filter." Or perhaps, "I'm on this airplane to get to Chicago, not to make a new buddy."

On the other hand, clothing can be a shallow, expensive and impermanent mode of expression. Think Madonna. What is she now? English gentlewoman feeding her chickens? She's used a new look to communicate a message so often that there is no longer any sincerity to her expression of "self." High school students know they are complex beings and that a print skirt from American Eagle is never going to do justice to an entire personality. That's probably why most of my students wear jeans and T-shirts — because if clothing actually could express our very souls, would they really want their souls to look like a big soccer ball? ■

Anna Grace, who attended South in the era of Duran Duran and Tiger Beat, now teaches history to variously attired students at her alma mater.



JORDAN WILL RELAXES ON THE PIRATE DECK
PHOTO BY MORA REINKA