Word bank

amplify · a quirk of memory · booze · catcalled · exposure · fleeting once-over before looking · hallmark · momentarily · mislead · pervasive · preoccupied · staggering · subtle · the morass of · ubiquitous · undermine · undergo · wolf-whistles

Fashion is often described as a language, but its messages are not always easy to interpret. A sharply tailored coat or an unconventional silhouette may express confidence; equally, it may simply reflect **(1)** _____, a preference formed years ago and never consciously examined. What we wear can **(2)** _____ observers into believing they understand us, even when clothing reveals very little about the person inside it.

On crowded streets, appearance can also become a form of unwanted **(3)** _____. I once wore a bright, sculptural jacket that attracted **(4)** _____ from a group outside a bar. One man gave me a **(5)** _____ away, while another **(6)** _____ as I walked past. I was **(7)** _____ embarrassed, then irritated by how quickly such behaviour could **(8)** _____ the pleasure of wearing something I genuinely liked. It was a **(9)** _____ reminder that style is experienced both privately and in public.

The fashion industry, meanwhile, is **(10)** _____: its images are **(11)** _____, appearing on phones, billboards and shop windows. Its influence can **(12)** _____ insecurity, particularly when trends are presented as universal standards rather than temporary preferences. The **(13)** _____ of a thoughtful wardrobe, perhaps, is not its price or novelty but the wearer's ability to choose without being **(14)** _____ with approval.

Still, navigating **(15)** _____ marketing, social expectations and **(16)** _____-fuelled nightlife can make that independence difficult to sustain. The pressure to **(17)** _____ a dramatic transformation is often sold as liberation, though the costs may be **(18)** _____—financially, emotionally, or both. Fashion can certainly help us experiment with identity; it should not persuade us that we need to become someone else in order to be seen.

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