

My Toddler Doesn't Dress "On Fleek" and That's OK

 web.archive.org/web/20190108172435if_/http://www.babble.com/style/my-toddler-doesnt-dress-on-fleek-and-thats-ok

According to the saying, "clothes make the man." But what about the boy? Or the infant?

A few weeks before my son was born, I took a child care class at the local hospital. In front of each attendee was a naked doll, a diaper, and a kimono-style wrap. Although we weren't being timed, when the instructor told us to diaper and dress the baby, I set off as fast as I could. "Done," I shouted, one minute in, finishing way ahead of everyone else. The instructor came over to check out my handiwork: I'd pasted the diaper to the doll and twisted the kimono into a de facto straitjacket. "Huh" was her response.

I might have known then, that clothes would pose a bit of a problem when it came to my life as a mom. While I figured I'd lament the amount of time my kid spends in daycare or the number of times I microwave a frozen entrée from Trader Joe's and call it dinner, never did I think that my mommy guilt would extend to pants and tops.

But it does.

The other boys in my son's class wear tiny tracksuits and jerseys with cool graphics that perfectly coordinate with corduroys. Girls wear chunky cable knit sweaters with polished Mary Janes and patterned shirts tucked into A-line skirts. His closest friend sports wee construction boots and t-shirts that say "dude" or "bro" across the front. I half-expect to see a shrunken packet of Camels rolled up in this child's sleeve. Another classmate has a parent who orders pint-sized scarves off of eBay, with patterns by artists like Basquiat and Yayoi Kusama. If you're wondering, yes, they are *beyond adorbs*. Regardless of what it might be, every one of his classmates seems to have a trademark style.

And then there's my kid, wearing mismatched bright yellow sweatpants, pink and white argyle socks, and a forest green Henley two sizes too big, hair un-artfully mussed. It took him so long to grow the bushy, blonde mass atop his head that I can't bring myself to cut it. He looks like Daryl from *The Walking Dead*.

I suppose my son does in fact have a signature style, one you might call "ragamuffin."

Recently, my husband sent Baby back to the bedroom to be redressed, mumbling something along the lines of "he can't go out like that." Perhaps the outfit was pushing it a bit, I concede in retrospect. The kid had on a pair of blue pants with a light blue t-shirt. Sounds OK, right? Overnight, however, the pants had become tights and the shirt a crop top. He's all set if he wants to be Mikhail Baryshnikov (pre-*Sex and the City*) next Halloween.

It's not that I didn't notice the form-fitting-ness. It's that I didn't really care.

"What's your style?" a friend asked when I was pregnant, so that she could better assess what to pass along from the clothes her son had outgrown. "Free," I said. "Barring that, cheap." My family was lucky enough to receive enough hand-me-downs to keep my child clad long into his second year of life. We got peacoats and onesies and hoodies and jeans and newsboy caps. Obviously, I'm friends with, and related to, people with really good taste.

Then came the day when we ran out of free stuff and had to buy some duds of our own. Everywhere I went things were either crazy expensive or crazy ridiculous. I didn't want Baby to be a billboard, nor did I want him wearing any cutesy sayings. Case in point, I misread one t-shirt as boasting "draft dick" rather than "draft pick." And who has time to button a bazillion tiny buttons?

Plus, the clothes are so gendered. Even websites that purport to sell straight-up basics with no frills or logos differentiate between "girls" and "boys." Why shouldn't my son wear a cardigan, which is apparently considered a girl's item (news to me and about half the guys I see at my local coffee shop)? Or a pair of leggings (ditto)? Maybe dressing like a ballerino is my son's true style. At any rate, instead of just being a hassle, shopping has become a fraught, political act.

Now might be as good a time as any to discuss what's in my closet: pretty much all black. Short sleeves in the summer, long sleeves in the winter, slightly flared pants year-round. Mind you, I don't dress this way because I live in New York or consider myself cool. I am not in a permanent state of mourning. Rather, life is so much easier when everything matches. My husband says I have the fashion sense of a stagehand.

It wasn't always this way, however. As a child, I wanted to be like Madonna, complete with rubber bracelets, layered tops, and bandannas fashioned into headbands. When that failed, I turned preppie. For a long time I owned what I considered to be a fancy Nike sweatshirt. My sexiest outfit in high school was an Oxford shirt and sweater vest. Then I went from pegging my jeans and popping my collar to tying a flannel shirt around my waist like everyone else in college and calling it a day.

How we dress tells the world something about our personality. So does how we dress our children. In a time of Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest, it sometimes feels like mommy sacrilege to not have a child who's on fleek. But the truth is, I don't. If it's reasonably clean, reasonably in season, and reasonably the right size, it's OK by me.

That is, for now. The other day Baby pulled off his sweatpants and diaper, then ran around the house bare-bottomed. This nudie phase could be my son's first step toward developing his own sartorial sense. At the very least, there'll be less laundry.