

Audio Transcript for Episode 606: "The Woes of Using Fashion as a Mental Health Check"

Please note: This transcript has been lightly edited to remove filler words or sounds.

AMBER GARDNER: I grew up in the 2000s emo kids scene, and I feel like that was like a stereotype that it was like, Oh, if you're an emo kid wearing black, you are sad and depressed.

[music playing]

CHAD MOSES: You're listening to the "To Write Love on Her Arms" podcast, a show about mental health and the things that make us human. I'm your host Chad Moses, and in each episode, we'll be talking about the things that can often feel hard to talk about, like depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. We'll be sharing stories and exploring big themes like hope, healing, and recovery. If any of the topics we discuss, or the stories we share, feel too heavy for you, know that it's OK to pause, to restart, or to stop altogether. As we discover new stories, we hope to remind you that your story is important.

[music playing]

CHAD

Whether it's our own perceptions or what the media has designated, when it comes to fashion and clothing choices, we tend to make quick assumptions based on what someone is wearing. All black? You must be emotional or depressed or troubled. Bright and light? You must be carefree and happy. We see people's mental well-being placed into boxes based on what's in their closets and on their bodies. At the same time, there's also space for our fashion choices to express who we are and what we like.

To help us address the woes of using fashion as a mental health check, we're joined by TWLOHA staff members Alex Jones and Amber Gardner.

Alex Jones (he/him) is an Ohio native and has been a designer at TWLOHA for seven years and counting. Alex grew up doodling on any scrap of paper that came his way and still enjoys creative pursuits like photography, illustration, and lettering. When he's not slinging designs at work or at home, he can often be found at the nearest theater watching the latest Oscar winners or nominees or playing games like "Up and Down the River" with friends.

Amber Gardner (she/her) works at To Write Love as our Director of Partnerships, and is originally from the Northeast but currently calls Nevada home. When she isn't cultivating relationships with both companies and individuals invested in mental health advocacy, you can find her hiking with her dog Lola, growing her plant collection, or traveling the world. And I am your host Chad Moses. We're so glad you're here. Let's get started.

CHAD

Thank you for joining us again. Today we're talking about clothing, about style, about the ways that impacts or maybe even communicates our mental health. And I guess we'll, we'll start here, be honest. Do you think people dress cooler now than when we were younger?

AMBER

100%.

ALEX

But like looking back on it, there's definitely some styles that I think oh, that was actually pretty cool. Back in the day.

AMBER

And they're coming back. Yeah.

CHAD

What era is coming back in a cool way?

ALEX

I don't want to age myself. Like, I think like some like ,90s windbreakers are still pretty cool looking.

CHAD

I'm sorry. 90s windbreakers you say?

AMBER

Matching pants?

ALEX

Yeah, matching pants. Maybe straight up like Marky Mark and The Funky Bunch. Absolutely. Converse. Yeah, the eternal shoe.

CHAD

The eternal shoe. I mean, they're there, Chuck's. Yeah. So Amber, you had with no hesitation saying yes, people dress cooler now.

AMBER

Like, if you look at like high school seniors, now they look so much cooler than I looked in high school.

ALEX

That's true. You looked...terrible. Whoa.

CHAD

This is a Bully Free podcast. I've often called Alex the friendliest bully you'll, you'll ever meet. And that's not like how he treats other people, it's just how he treats me. So for y'all personally, when did your sense of style start to emerge? When did you first become aware of, you know, clothing as a way to express yourself?

AMBER

I think after college, after college, yeah. Yeah, well, like, we kind of had a dress. We went to college together, and we kind of had a dress code. Yeah. So there wasn't like too much room for freedom for that expression.

ALEX

I would say for me in college is when I really started to express myself with clothing, or you know, tried to, you know, honestly, I just tried to dress better than my friends.

CHAD

Yeah, well, I mean True. Like that kind of comes into, you know, the next question like, what were the determining influences on what you saw as cool or just what you saw as me like that, that's gonna be what I wear?

AMBER

I think for me, after college, after growing up in the northeast, going to college, Ohio, I moved to the southwest, where A- it is warmer, so like different clothing options, than like maybe Ohio winter. Yeah. But yeah, I think like, it was more of a coastal vibe versus Midwestern and nothing wrong with either, but just it was like, adapting to where I was living. And I was like, Oh, these are cool, new styles that you wouldn't get in the cornfields of Ohio.

CHAD

Yeah, so it was really trying to assimilate in some way to the culture. Yeah.

ALEX

And because for me, you know, in high school, I was in one building all day, did not have to really dress for the weather, just had to get in my car and get to school. But then in college, you're walking around campus all the time you're back and forth. And so having to like, dress for the elements and having to like figure out layers, because you're going to be cold outside, but then once you like, are sweating, running the class, might need to shed a couple of layers. So like, having to think in those kinds of terms helped write my fashion sense a little bit.

CHAD

And y'all y'all both have siblings? Yes. Are either of you younger siblings? Do you have older siblings?

ALEX

I'm the baby of the family

CHAD

You're the baby.

AMBER

I am the oldest, the oldest.

CHAD

Do you feel like your younger sister modeled her sense of style off of you in any way? Or? No? No, no. Totally different. Do you think that was? That was intention? You don't have to speak like for her, but you know.

AMBER

I think I was also like, at the weird, she's five and a half years younger than me, so it was at this time that like, the I feel like the generation was changing and the styles are changing. And so I think like she dressed cooler than I did, so she was dressing to not look like me

CHAD

Yeah. And as the baby were you following in the footsteps? A lot of hand-me-downs. Right?

ALEX

Well, initially, but then, you know, once I got into once I, you know, was growing up the divide between, like the personality divide between my older brother and me was really starting to widen.

CHAD

I'm trying to think back in like, I, I'm the baby also in, you know, tons of Hami downs everything from like Halloween costumes to jeans, you know, we're like hand me downs. And I remember I think it was like middle school when I first got to shop for my own clothes. And then I'm like, man, like, I just want to dress like my brother like, so I was wearing like, collared shirts and you know, because

AMBER

Popping the collar

CHAD

No, no, that didn't happen until college. But even then, it was like, ironic, but yeah, like, so I remember. That was, I started hitting growth spurts and I'm like, all of a sudden, I'm wearing like high water pants. I'm like, man, like, I don't feel cool anymore. Like, I like mom, like, can we go shopping? Please, I need to wear clothes that, that fit me. But yeah, I remember like, probably about middle school was when I first realized, oh, I gotta dress right to fit in. But that was really like my only desire to, for self expression was just make sure I didn't stand out from anyone else. So and that, you know, fall into adulthood. Like, you know, I don't want to stand out in Texas, like right on. So kind of taking that into the next step over. From a personal perspective. How have you seen clothing and the way someone dresses as a means of making certain assumptions about their, their lifestyle or their interests? Or maybe even how they're feeling in a particular season?

AMBER

Yeah, I think, Well, I grew up like in the 2000s emo kids scene, and I feel like that was like a stereotype that it was like, oh, if you're an emo kid wearing black, you are sad and depressed. And that, you know, like, that was it like it was just like, like, sad and depressed. Yeah, you have no other. No other personalities. No other music tastes. And there were just so strong. I feel like there's probably still strong stereotypes today, but definitely back then I feel like that's one that stands out. And it was like, You are a sad teenager. If you dress this way

ALEX

Or moody, yeah. Oh, yeah. Heard that term a lot. Yeah. I think we really tell different stories through clothes. You know, a lot of my shirts in high school were from bands that I saw, or, you know, graphic novel T-shirts, or things like that, things that were that I was really interested in and really enjoyed. So I, you know, kind of adopted those and, you know, used them as ways to identify things that I liked, things that I was into. So the idea that, you know, we use clothes to communicate and to send messages to other people in and to ourselves, you know, it was kind of always had that a little bit in the back of my mind.

CHAD

Yeah. What's the oldest piece of clothing that you, you own and maybe still wear?

ALEX

I have changed body types as an adult. So

CHAD

Have you ever kept anything as like a keepsake? Like, one you just can't get rid of?

ALEX

I haven't. No, I keep a lot of hats, because they still fit my head. So a lot of hats that I've designed here at TWLOHA I keep around and keep them in rotation. Yeah.

AMBER

I have a T-shirt for my senior year in high school and like a memory box somewhere, but I don't like pull it out and wear it regularly. You know? Yeah,

CHAD

Last year, two years ago. Jack asked me to bring in all of the old to write love shirts that I owned. And we couldn't even get through all of those so I have, it's a, it's an embarrassing amount of them. But I still have my first one and which may be the oldest one that I could squeeze into. But, I won't. Nott here. That's for our paying subscribers. I'm kidding. The Patreon, But yeah, I mean, I guess kind of bringing that around to how clothing can be nonverbal communication. We happen to use a lot of words in our design and in our clothing. But do you recall the first time that you saw a To Write Love on Her Arms piece of clothing? And what was that communicating to you? Do you remember the first person who's all wearing it, did that kind of carry with it a cultural or even personal mental health connotation with it?

ALEX

Yeah, I think the first time I remember a TWLOHA t-shirt, my sister picked one up at Hot Topic. And back in the day, and I thought it was a really cool shirt. The placement it was, you know, top shoulder, you know, not a whole lot of shirts, print right there. So I thought that was really cool. And then also, on the inside of the shirt, they had the first blog about to TWLOHA and about the reasons behind this shirt and what it meant and what it was going to be doing. So I thought that was super cool.

AMBER

Yeah, I was at a summer camp in northern Michigan. And one of my friends there had on one of the first TWLOHA tees Black, White title t-shirts. And I was like, what, what is that? And so that's the first time that I heard about To Write Love. And I was just really cool, because it was something that like spoke volumes to me. So it was cool to like, hear about this group.

CHAD

Were you able to like I mean, summer camp, that's, that's gonna be pretty niche kind of community. Right, right there. And you're saying, you know, family? So I guess there weren't a ton of assumptions to be made, you're kind of aware of the context you're going into. Was there a moment when you maybe did a little more investigating with, let's just say even in To Write Love? And was there ever a moment where like, well, you know, that's maybe not for me, because either my mental health isn't in the same spot that this story is talking about? Or this isn't my community?

AMBER

Yeah, I did research immediately after summer camp. I don't think we had Internet access. So when I got home, I was like, What is this and I've been following ever since I think it was like 2008. And it really aligned with what I was going through, I was struggling with depression, anxiety, and suicide attempts. And it was something we didn't talk about in my family, we weren't talking about in school. And so to hear about this group that was openly having these conversations, like meant the world to me, and so yeah, after doing that research, I was follower, and then, been following since.

ALEX

For me, kind of a little bit, the opposite in high school, did not really feel these kind of things or, and didn't even have a name for it for other people. You know, when I think the first shirt that I got was yellow, and it said rescue in Hindi. But it was very much like, Oh, I'm getting this shirt to support other people not realizing that, you know, we all have mental health, like, you know, we all experience things to different degrees. So

CHAD

I think I relate to that. Like, for me, it was, it was so much like tied to the music community first. And you know, I remember seeing the name and the shirts, in the the music scene I was a part of, and just assumed it was something else assuming it was a new band, or record label or some other sort of project dealing with music and it wasn't until like, months after I'd been seeing it a lot that I was kind of keyed in what was going on. I'm like, man, like this actually hits really, really close to home, backing away from you know, To Write Love, specifically, in clothing and fashion, we know that fashion is beyond our, our own manifestations of it. Do you, can you recall a time that, that you felt sized up or judged or put into a category based on your own style?

AMBER

Yeah. For me, it was around the same time that I first heard about To Write Love I kind of dressed preppy. Back in high school, so bright colors, Lacoste polos, like the whole nine yards, and I was popular, you know? I was more cool than that. No, just yeah, oh yeah, layered, like, oh goodness, so many layers and not in a productive way. But I fit into like this preppy category, I always wore bright colors and like, looked happy. But meanwhile, like, I was not, I was not thriving. And so people are like, you're sad, or you're depressed? Or you're feeling anxious? Like, No, you're not like, You look happy all the time, why? You're just like, seeking attention and things like that. So that was hard.

ALEX

Um, I think for, as a guy, I think the standards are way different. So I haven't necessarily felt like people come at me with an assumption based on the clothes that I'm wearing.

CHAD

When we make assumptions about people in their states of mind, or their, their mental health based on just outward appearance, that hinders real, authentic conversation, that hinders community. And it's kind of ironic, and that, you know, a lot of people will use their clothing to assert their role in a community or, or their sense of belonging to a community. And yet, this can stand in the way. And you know, it occurs to me, and that's, that's nothing new. Like, you, you go back, and you watch Breakfast Club. And these are all different people from all different walks of life, and they can prove it by what they're wearing, right? And, and that's still true today, in some sense. I mean, we know that the 90s are making a big, big ol comeback. I guess let's kind of flesh it out a little bit more like, in what ways and maybe if you have a personal anecdote or story about it, in what ways can just allowing a shirt or allowing an outfit to speak for someone else really be a detriment to, to caring for people's mental health, sense of community sense of belonging?

ALEX

I think it's super easy to just assume people are fine, you know, especially when they wake up in the morning and, you know, get ready for class, get ready for work, or whatever, and put on their uniform of life. And just think, Okay, well, they're, they showed up, they're fine. They don't, I don't need to check in on them or anything like that. So I think having to fight against the easiest assumption is something that I

will always have to be doing in my life, especially even when it comes to something that seems as trivial as clothing. Yeah. Yeah. To be the last part of the question.

AMBER

Yeah, I think you know, colors are associated with certain moods and things like that. So if you always see someone in bright fun colors, you might not think to ask, like, how are you really doing because you always, they always look put together or wearing fun, bright things. Whereas someone that you know, is wearing maybe the dark clothes or like dark comfy clothes, you might be like, oh, like, maybe they are going through something and I'll check in but what if it's the opposite? Like, I feel like there's times where it's like, all leave the house in black sweatpants and sweatshirt, like, no makeup hair's not done. And if it's been like, after several days of people seeing me like in bright colors, they're like, oh, what's wrong? And I was like, oh, like, I'm, I'm okay. Like, I just- tired, you know, or like, didn't have time to do, I'm just running an errand whatever. But why don't we, you know, ask those questions, when, why don't we just ask those questions generally, to, you know, everyone and check in on how they're doing? Why do we have to wait for how someone looks or what they're wearing or not wearing to check in?

[music playing]

LINDSAY KOLSCH: The world is not better without you. That's the statement we're declaring defiantly in honor of our 2023 Suicide Prevention Month campaign. We believe those words to be true to their core. The world would not be made better in the absence of your presence, of your existence. To help spread this message and movement, we invite you to join us by learning more and purchasing a pack at twloha.com/store. The Suicide Prevention Pack is special in that it gives you the tools to check in with those you love, start conversations that challenge stigma, make professional resources known, and learn what mental health care options exist for those struggling. And as a thank you for tuning into the podcast, you can enter the code **PODCAST20** at checkout for 20% off your order.

[music playing]

CHAD

In what ways did the worlds of social distancing, or the habits of social distancing? And our sense of self-expression through clothing? Like and what ways, I guess, are you still seeing kind of ripple effects of what went through there? The times where, you know, the joke of, okay, yeah, if I'm just doing meetings, and I guess I can totally do a collared shirt and sweatpants. You know, it gets, I don't know, I feel like, in many ways, that was a humbling moment for people that that care about clothing, care about community expression through, through clothing. And now not even having that. I don't even know if there's a question there. But am I alone?

AMBER

I feel like, well, for me, like, I feel like what I wear, like changed throughout the pandemic, like we were home. So like, it was definitely more comfortable. Clothing, the world was like, chaotic. And so it was wearing comfort and clothing was a sense of comfort. But then yeah, like emerging back into the world. And like seeing people again, they feel like, my style has changed a bit. And then I work remotely. So like, I'm not seeing everyone in the office. Like I think about it that way. Like before, you would see people and you might like you might pick up on cues based on how they're expressing themselves in what they're wearing. But now I work remotely and so like, you can't tell like is that a sweater? Or is that a sweatshirt? Is that the same T-shirt? Like for the past five meetings? You know, you can't really- Yeah. Is it actually me on the screen? But I feel like that has that's something now to like, consider to like, there's a lot more people working remotely and so.

ALEX

I think, for me, during the pandemic, I kind of just became very numb. So I did not feel the need to express myself, especially did not feel the need to dress up or anything. And then coming out of the pandemic and you know, emerging back into the real world and stuff. It was like, Oh, well, now now, what do I want? Like, who am I? And how does that, how do I say that? These close now. And, I work remotely as well. And then again, it's kind of the same thing as like, oh, I guess I could just wear the same thing over and over again. And it wouldn't matter necessarily, but it's still, you know, something that I have to catch myself and be like, Oh, no, like, just because you're working from home today, doesn't mean that you have to stay in your pajamas, you can still like get up and get, a fresh pair of clothes on and still present yourself, even if you're only presenting yourself to yourself.

AMBER

No. And sometimes I'm doing that for myself. Like I know, I'm having a rough week. And if I don't get properly dressed for work, even if it's just in my home office, like you know I need, I need that little boost like oh, this is a fun new shirt I got or a dress or something that like it brought me joy when I bought it, so I'm gonna put it on today because it's going to be a little mood boost and I'm going to do that for myself. So it's not always dressing like for the outward and the other people's approval. It's for myself, too,

ALEX

And there are definitely times when I noticed that what I wear really does motivate me differently. Like, if I wear an outfit that I like, cool shorts and stuff to the gym, and like really liked my socks, I will probably enjoy that workout a little bit more or feel more inclined to like, you know, do all my reps and sets and stuff if I'm pretty jazzed about my outfit.

CHAD

Yeah, no, I mean, mean, I totally relate to that. Like, you know, I do, I do a lot of running and yeah, for whatever reason, it feels like man, like if I get a new pair of kicks or new shorts, it's like, yeah, there's gonna be it's gonna be a good day. Yeah, fun, personal bests, here we come. Yeah, but I remember when, the when the work from home orders first came down when it was like y'all do not come to the office. Like we were staying home for a while. And during that, we reached out to different friends who have been familiar with remote work for a while and just getting some pointers. And I remember one of the pointers I read and kind of scoffed at was, do not work in your pajamas, get out of bed, get out of your room, take a shower and put on clothes as if you're about to drive to work. You're just not driving to work. Like you're, you're now going to be working here. And it didn't hit me until months into it like the importance of that. You know, just thinking about people that wrestle with anxiety, wrestle with depression. And you know, when the big tasks feel daunting, you hear counselors, and therapists say, let's start small, like Yeah, did you get sleep? Are you hydrating? Did you get dressed today, and just just focus on those three things like those three things can be enough. And I don't even care what you wear, just wear something

ALEX

Well, I was doing a little bit of research before this podcast last week. Like there's a study back in 2012. There were participants who one group of people just had to do- take a test. And then the other group of people, they were given a lab coat, and then they had to take the same test. But the people who wore the lab coat ended up performing better across the board. Because when you think of a scientist or a person who wears a lab coat, you think of attention to detail you think of very cautious, very intentional. And so you give those qualities to the lab coat. And then whenever you wear the lab coat yourself, you kind of

take on those qualities back. The second part of the study, they gave one group of people lab coats and said, these are lab coats or doctors coats and the second group, they gave the same exact coats, still whites still everything, but they called them painters coats. And even that differentiation, the people who were given doctor's coats or lab coats still performed better. Because the way that we think about clothing, and the way that we the attributes that we just mentally assign them impact the way that we think about ourselves.

CHAD

That's fascinating. Yeah.

AMBER

There was some things that like, I already knew, but just the association of colors and emotions with it, I was looking at or thinking about the movie. Oh, no, I forgot it. Inside Out and the colors that they like, give the characters and how like, anger is red, and blue is sadness. Disgust is green. Yellow is Joy. Joy. Yeah. And then purple is fear. But like thinking about like, how we even have movies now or like things that we're you know, teaching like this color is associated with this emotion or this mood. And so I was just doing some research on that and how that like effects like or just the psychology behind like different colors and why brands choose certain colors and things like that

CHAD

Is that- Alex- something that you are- have studied or cognizant of when you are making designs, like how a color can convey a message versus the words on a shirt?

ALEX

A little bit because we do a lot of combinations of colors. So, you know, this shirt has yellow on it and blue, which, you know, as she said, represents kind of the highs and lows. And this talks about being in valleys, there being hope when you're in the valley, but also being able to be hopeful when you're up at the top of the mountain. I'll be honest, I did not- I just really liked the color combo. But it's still you know, it still kind of subconsciously does show up in different places.

CHAD

Yeah, and, you know, that's also then this comes as no surprise to people that study you know, pop culture but that's also very present in the stories that are being told you mentioned Inside Out like those colors are intentional. I remember we were talking just last year about Encanto and the idea of Bruno wearing green and specifically Disney's patented, invisible green that they put up when they're- go away green, right when that your eyes meant to overlook it. And this is something that even directors and costume designers and our favorite TV shows and movies are hyper-aware of they get paid the big bucks because they they do this thinking for us, you know, some recent examples of how clothing and color kind of play into stuff. As a staff, where I think I can speak for everyone on staff are big fans of Stranger Things. And there was this moment early on in season four. Skip ahead if you aren't at Season Four yet. Spoiler alert, but you have the characters of Eddie Munson who is wearing like, you know, the metal rocker, grunge, proto grunge kind of look.

ALEX

A lot of black, leather. Chains, chains.

CHAD

Rips in the jeans, like yeah, all of that. Chuck's. Yeah. And contrasted with cheerleader, Chrissy Cunningham. And that that character Chrissy was looking for, for some pills that were not prescribed to

her or was it weed? We think it was pills, right? Yeah. Anyway, she was looking for something that the assumption was Eddie would have plenty of, and that no one would assume that a cheerleader who's preppy who is wearing bright colors would associate with this, this person Eddie just the clothing itself said I am part of this community. And, and you are part of that one and never the two shall meet. More recently with Wednesday, you have a character who is you know, by the book literally allergic to color rooming with Enid who is bright and bubbly, and all that so I guess in what ways are what are some other examples that kind of hit your mind about clothing and and the cultural assumptions and the personal assumptions they're in?

ALEX

Yeah, I think one of the things that I thought of was the most recent Star Wars trilogy Kylo Ren.

Throughout the most of the films, he kind of has like a standard bad guy uniform. He's wearing you know, head-to-toe black, billowing capes, a very aggressive helmet. And that character, he ends up going through a little bit more of a redemption arc and kind of switches from being more of a bad guy to kind of being an ally to Rey who is in white, most of the film signifying that she's, you know, the good guy, but Kylo Ren at the end, he is no longer wearing his uniform he's wearing you know, this soft looking almost like sweater kind of material. Read at the end kind of really gives the audience the visual cue that he has fully transformed and is now trying to do good.

AMBER

I just think that you know, in the film industry they use colors to tell a story and so you just see, you can walk through how maybe someone in the beginning of the movie starts in a, you know, depressive state or sadness and you can just see, like, there'll be like, oh, now they were there, they stopped wearing black and other wearing bright colors because they're in a better, in a better place. And so they just, there's a lot of color usage in the storytelling. Based on you know, what we've been told equals colors

ALEX

In the hit 90s, early 2000s. Show friends. Monica heard of it. Monica on episodes where her character is a very central character to the story, she ends up wearing red. So in, halfway through this series, she gets-wears red whenever she gets engaged, or wears red whenever she first starts dating Chandler, again, spoiler alert. 20 years later. But and then conversely, in other episodes when she's like, not the main character wears more muted tones, more, less flattering colors. So again, costumers really use colors and, you know, clothes to push the story along.

CHAD

Kind of looking at how so much of our sense of style is communicated these days, you know, it's through targeted ads on social media. But Have y'all ever used kind of style as a shorthand style as a code of sites, to check in on friends or family people that you haven't been in touch with for a while, but maybe you're, you're picking up on a certain style that they're wearing? And has that ever been kind of a cue how people present themselves on social media, we all know that, we often choose our best and brightest moments, but we also know that sometimes we're, you know, going to be snapping an Instagram, without previously planning our wardrobe for that particular day.

AMBER

I've had a few friends and even myself, like, if I am going through a hard time, like, definitely my wardrobe changes, because my energy level has changed to, you know, maybe not necessarily care about putting my best dress on or whatever. And so, definitely use that to be able to check in with friends or like, maybe, you know, maybe on Instagram, they still have the picture perfect, you know, look and outfit, but

you're seeing them in real life. And you know, it's not the same. So using that as a cue to check in and see, hey, like, what, what's really going on here?

ALEX

I think almost kind of the inverse of that, whenever I notice that somebody is showing up, like showing pictures of themselves or posting on their Instagram stories, and they are very much not putting any effort into what they're wearing. It is kind of like, Oh, they're being really vulnerable right now, and are kind of opening up to their friends and followers online. About, you know, you know, I have a friend who has posted about a chronic illness that she's going through, and it's like, okay, I can see how that's at play now because of the way you're allowing yourself to be shown now.

CHAD

Yeah, totally. And, you know, beyond the trope of dark clothing, necessarily equating depression and bright colors, equating someone being happy and, you know, well, for lack of a better term, what are some other ways that y'all have seen or even just still perceive of fashion intersecting with mental health?

ALEX

I think we, as humans have kind of always used clothing to communicate abstract ideas, like identity. You know, if you look at the military, they're a very strict dress codes for different things. And you know those things like rank or superiority, kind of abstract ideas of importance, or, you know, they'll have very specific dress blues to signify honor and respect for an event or for an occasion or for a person. So I think, yeah, I think the way like using clothing, to communicate ideas and to meet and to think about abstract thought, is, happens whether we know it or not. Yeah, or whether we acknowledge it or not.

AMBER

With, like, the societal standards, or norms that are placed on fashion, and what's in like, this is what we're wearing this season. Like, don't you dare be caught in anything else, I feel like that generally could like, affect someone's mental health, but also, like, touching into disordered eating and body dysmorphia and how fashion of like, this is what we're wearing, like, we are only wearing these items this season. So like, figure it out, but you're like, my body doesn't look, I don't believe my body looks well in that piece of clothing, or like, this is only being marketed to certain body types. And I think that that, I mean, that plays a I feel like fashion plays a huge part in that realm of mental health as well. Yeah.

CHAD

I mean, I know, you know, even when, 10 years ago, even longer than that, the idea of you know, try love being cautious on how many long sleeve shirts we're putting out there. You know, not wanting to play into a stereotype that this is only for or even, you know, enabling some harmful behaviors. The jelly wristbands, you know, being a piece of it. I know, for me, as someone that struggled with self injury, I was very, I felt at home in my chosen style of wearing jeans, often not wearing shorts, you know, that that helped cover stuff up having, you know, thick wristbands on my watches, like that certainly helped, you know, kind of hide certain behaviors. And, you know, I know, even today, that that turns into a big tip off of parents or caretakers or teachers, if they are assuming that a young person that they care for that's in their orbit is struggling, like, you know, if you're wearing a hoodie, and it's 95 degrees outside, you know, maybe there's some questions to ask. It doesn't have to be accusatory, like, Hey, are you self-injuring? Or is it just, hey, like, are we doing good? Like it's warm out, no.? But, ya know. Any other ideas that are things that you wish we would have touched on or?

ALEX

One more thing about color psychology and how it plays into how it affects people. A lot of athletic teams in high school in college, tend to gravitate towards red or black. Because those, when you wear those colors, you tend to be a little bit more aggressive, a little bit more domineering. So it performs better in the arena or the court or field. So I thought that was an interesting thing that I learned this week.

AMBER

My high school colors were red, and blacks shout out to the Easton Area High School red rovers were winners. We were Yes, we were undefeated from the very beginning. Yeah.

CHAD

Well, y'all mentioned having to kind of partake in uniform culture. And what ways did that that help or hinder a sense of self-expression? I know a lot of people they actually that have gone through, you know, strict uniform code. felt really at home, in that, like the idea of not needing to think about what you're wearing. I don't know. Just kind of wondering, I've never had to experience this.

ALEX

Well, you know, I think there's adults nowadays who are finding, oh, if I just give myself a uniform, that means that I don't have to, I don't have decision fatigue. Like, if I just, you know, have my T-shirt and my Oxford and my, this pair of jeans or these kind of pants, that's one less decision that I have to make. That's one less, you know, evaluation that I have to make. But for me I like being able to work within limitations, I like being able to push up against things and being able to find new ways to, to work with the box that I'm in. So I, I wouldn't love I don't, I wouldn't ever, like give myself a uniform or dress code. But at the time, I still didn't enjoy it. But it was still almost a creative exercise to express myself.

CHAD

So you felt like you were able to still find ways to say, okay, everyone's wearing the same thing. But I'm doing it, Alex. Yeah. Which I can only assume was wearing like your tie around your head. Yeah.

AMBER

So I experienced like some sort of like uniform or dress code never like an actual, you can only wear like these two items uniform, but dress code in high school, and college. And so high school was, we weren't allowed to wear certain colors. Because it was associated with certain activities. And so that like, and your shirts couldn't be oversized. And so like, we were very limited in the types of like shirts that we could wear, which was frustrating to like, find those items. But at the same time, it was like, Well, everybody's wearing these like, ugly looking polos or you know, whatever. And so like it was okay, because we knew everybody was doing it. And then you're limited layout. You don't have decision fatigue, as you know, high schooler freaking out if am I gonna look cool today? Because we're all limited to what we can wear.

ALEX

There's almost a sense of solidarity.

AMBER

Yeah, exactly. And in college, I don't know, I feel like I like I said, I didn't figure out like any sense of who I was or because everybody just, yeah, ready for class. Yeah. And I was also a business major. So like, on certain days, you had to wear business attire, so it was like everyone's doing it so everyone's doing it then.

ALEX

For me in high school, I also went to I had a pretty strict dress code in high school. The guy's had to wear a collared shirt, whether that was a button up or polo, or they could wear like a crewneck sweater. So for me finding you know, different kinds of shirts and patterns that I liked that I thought were cool was still pretty fun for me despite those kind of limitations

CHAD

And then was the weekends like time just to go off like stylistically like-

ALEX

Go crazy jeans you know

CHAD

Yeah. But no like what was was that seen as a time like we're finally, I can this is the real me like let me show the world who I am.

ALEX

Yeah, immediately go home and put on different clothes.

AMBER

Oh, 100% and I think too I found like you were saying like found other ways to make it your own. In high school, I dyed my hair a lot because it was like the one thing I could change, there were no rules about what hair color you could have. There were no rules about what hair color you could have. So I would find my expression in that if if you're going to restrict me and my clothing choices I'm going to dye my hair different colors.

ALEX

Yeah. I did not dye my hair yet. We're working on it, when those grays come in and baby man hits. Called out.

CHAD

So with all that being said, What's the best To Write Love on Her Arms shirt that's ever happened. that's ever been made.

AMBER

That's tough on the spot.

ALEX

I always say the shirt that I'm most obsessed with is whichever one I'm working on. you know, whatever. I have. I very much have a recency bias forever with whatever I'm working on.

AMBER

I think my favorite change I think right now I love Daisies, Daisies is great. Yeah. Home. Um, it's a good one. And the Mental Health Month design is pretty sweet too.

CHAD

Yeah. So I am just gonna go ahead and assume that we still have all of those in the webstore. You should check them out

ALEX

Store.twloha.com

CHAD

Yeah, awesome. Yeah. Well, thank you so much for your, for your time. Thanks for your fashion etiquette, critiques, and wisdoms. And let's go shopping.

ALEX

Yeah.

AMBER

Let's go.

[music playing]

CHAD:

To our pal, Alex, thank you for bringing your comical one-liners and vulnerable thoughts to this episode. To our friend, Amber, thank you for sharing your personal experience with the intersection of fashion and mental health. And, to you, thank you for tuning in. For spending your time and energy being a part of these important conversations. We are endlessly grateful for your presence.

[music playing]

CHAD: We hope this episode has been a reminder, that your story is important, you matter, and that you're not alone.

If you're struggling right now, know that it's OK to reach out, and that there are people who want to help. Part of our mission is to connect people to the help they need and deserve. You can find local mental health resources on our website [twloha.com](https://www.twloha.com). That's T-W-L-O-H-A.com. And Click FIND HELP at the top of the page.

If you're in the US or Canada, and need to talk to someone right now, you can always text our friends at Crisis Text Line. Simply text the word TWLOHA— again, that's T W L O H A—to 741741. You'll be connected to a crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7. For a list of crisis support resources for listeners living outside of the United States, please visit TWLOHA.com and click on the International Resources tab.

Finally, if you've enjoyed this episode and you want to hear more, we really hope that you'll subscribe wherever you get this podcast. And if you can do us a favor, we'd really like for you to write us a review. It'll help more people find this podcast and the mission of TWLOHA. If you have any feedback or questions, please send us an email to podcast@twloha.com.

A big thank you to our friends at Copeland for the original music on this episode. The To Write Love on Her Arms podcast is produced by Rebecca Ebert. Music assistance was provided by James Likeness and Ben Tichenor. And again, I'm Chad Moses, thank you so much for listening. We're glad you're here.