

Hide and chic

Hoodies go mainstream among many demographics

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For years they were strictly utilitarian pullovers spotted on athletic fields and at car washes.

But today, the hooded sweatshirt has become part of the uniform of young people everywhere, from hipsters to hip-hop artists to skateboarders.

The essence of laid-back cool, the hoodie has graduated from utilitarian — the \$18 heavyweight cotton college sweatshirt with drawstrings — to higher-priced, high-fashion zip-ups covered in camouflage, screen prints or Gothic letters; some are even made of cashmere.

Hip-hop artists Jay-Z, Kanye West and Pharrell Williams have helped drive the demand for designer hoodies that can cost hundreds of dollars. Juicy Couture popularized the velour hoodie track suit seen in grocery stores and airports.

Although embraced by everyone from street kids to soccer moms, the hoodie, and particularly the hood itself, has not completely shed its bad-boy image as the clothing choice of miscreants.

Some still equate it with something sinister, or at least something suspicious.

Consider: St. Paul, Minn., police investigating two rape cases last month included "hooded sweatshirt" in their description of the suspects. The Unabomber used a hood and a pair of sunglasses to disguise his identity in the early 1990s.

In England recently, large groups of teenagers wearing hoodies committed a rash of muggings at one of the country's largest shopping malls. Officials responded by banning anyone wearing a hoodie from entering the mall.

On this side of the Atlantic, hooded sweatshirts aren't welcome in many schools and some nightspots.



SCRIPPS HOWARD PHOTO

Not all hoodies embrace the hoodlum persona. This hoodie's embroidery and tassel ties give it an original look.

Threatening hoodies are all over television. A commercial airing currently for a home-security benign jogger who, upon seeing Dad drive off down the street, throws his hood up over his head and instantly acquires a menacing expression before breaking in to terrorize Mom and Baby.

But for all the fussing, the reasons for missing up one's hood are often misunderstood, hood-wearers say.

"The hood up just allows you to show the whole hoodie," explained Sly, the surnameless owner of Status, a sneaker boutique in Minneapolis that also sells streetwear.

No longer are graphics and words reserved for front and back; elaborate designs adorning the hood can't be seen if the hood is lying flat on one's neck, he said.

"It's like trench coats. We went through that long period where kids were wearing trench coats everywhere and people didn't like it because they thought that they concealed weapons underneath," Sly said.

But hoodies have become more acceptable now.

"I'd probably say like seven to 10 years ago, a lot of people associated hoodies with a (hoodlum) mentality," Sly said. "But now it's a fashion statement."

Status carries hoodies that only select stores around the country sell. Brands like Artful Dodger, Orchard Street, Coup de Grace, Crooks & Castle and Pharrell's line, BBC Ice Cream. Prices range from \$125 to more than \$300.

Robin Givhan, the Pulitzer Prize-winning fashion editor for The Washington Post, said she's not sure if the hood-up look is a fashion statement so much as an affectation.

"Sometimes it's just purely a matter of practicality; it's freezing outside. Sometimes, I think it's a way of enhancing any kind of intimidation. When I think of people wearing their hood up, I think of the Unabomber," she said.

"I also kind of think back to Project Runway, and the last winner (Jeffrey Sebelia). He made a comment after he'd won saying that his whole persona on the show had been thought out beforehand and that he made a point of wearing these hoodies with the hood up as a way of coming across as mysterious and somewhat intimidating.

"There's also an element of kind of burrowing in a little bit," Givhan said. "It's almost a substitute for wrapping yourself in your blanket. It has that same kind of feeling to it."

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