Discovering Myself. My Freedom. My Joy. Through Fashion.

NYC College of Technology CUNY

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Forward

Growing up as Asha's younger sister I have seen her style develop and grow tremendously. She wore a uniform from elementary to highschool. When she was younger her clothes mostly consisted of abercrombie and fitch, Aeropostale, UGGs and H&M. Her typical outfit would consist of boot cut jeans with an abercrombie & fitch shirt, a cardigan, brown UGGs and a headband to complete the outfit. She mostly wore outfits like these throughout middle school and some of highschool. She started to wear pleated skirts in highschool. Her style became a bit more expressive in highschool because she had a bit more freedom to wear what she wanted to wear. Every friday she didn't have to wear her uniform. She started wearing platform shoes and wedged Nike sneakers. She still wore cardigans but not as often. She wore a lot of skinny jeans and fitted high waisted mom jeans and cropped sweaters. She mostly shopped at American Apparel and Urban Outfitters. She always completed a look with earnings and a necklace. She would thrift sometimes and wear oversized knitted sweaters. Her style was basic but she always made it work. Now her style is more bold and at times a bit edgy but it varies depending on the day and her mood because it can also be a laid back look. Her style consists of a 2000s aesthetic with a 80s and 90s flare as well as luxuries and chic.

By: Asha's little sister, Takiyah

Prologue

Fashion has played a huge role in my life in every aspect. But especially how I see myself and how others do. It has helped me wake up to my purpose and my passion which is why freedom and joy had to be included in my reflection of all of my wonderful fashion memories. It's interesting to see how you felt, and how you thought about yourself throughout your life and how fashion played its part. Although I didn't always have the most stylish clothes, or money, or popularity, fashion always brought something out of me. These memories are very precious moments that I hold dear to my heart. They have helped shape my entire being, especially when comes to who I am today.

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I would like to thank my mother, Michelle. My cousin, Karee, my sister, Takiyah, my father Theodore. As well as all of my fashion inspirations throughout my life. Love You All.

The Jersey Dress

(2002, The Head Start Program, 5 years old)

This was one of the earliest moments I was given the freedom to dress myself with no limits. There was no one there to tell me how or what to wear. My mother had left to run some errands earlier this day so my sister was stuck with me. She had gone downstairs in the front of our house to hang out with some of her friends and some of our cousins.

I was extremely young so the only *body modifications* I would have done at 5 would have been brushing my teeth. Ever since I could remember I hated the feeling of plaque on my teeth, so I always made sure I brushed them. My mother, Michelle most likely made me shower before she left. I probably didn't put on any lotion, I always forgot to lotion as a young child. My oldest sister, Makia would always bully me about it.

Opening up my draw to go through my options my eyes were drawn to one of my favorite dresses. During this time turning a men's and/ or boys basketball jersey into a dress was very popular, especially in my neighborhood. This specific jersey dress was navy blue with a red number five on it. I paired it with my favorite payless silver light up sneakers. I was ready to go downstairs

As soon as everyone laid eyes on me they began to laugh. The loudest of them all was my sister as she explained in between laughing how my outfit didn't match. Matching was the farthest thing from my mind, it was refreshing to be able to express myself through my clothing. Although everyone talked about how my outfit didn't match, my mother included, it became a memory I cherish to this day. I felt beautiful and was excited to be seen in the clothing that I loved the most.



Blue Leather Set

(2003, Kindergarten, 6 Years old)

The infamous blue leather jacket and skirt set. There wasn't an exact event that this outfit was linked to, but I remember being extra excited every time I put this outfit on. It is an understatement to say that I loved this outfit. I would've gone to sleep in it if my mother would have allowed me to. Although it made me feel all of these things my mother would always comment on how she needed to throw it out. I understood why, everytime i wore it I couldn't help but pick at it, it peeled A LOT. Although it didn't look as fresh as when my mother first bought it I still loved it with all my heart.

My body modifications were still slime to none, other than the basics. Brushing my teeth, taking a shower. My hair was always pretty much done, my mother, Michelle did my hair every 2 weeks. She was very adamant on doing my younger sister, Takiyah and I's hair. It was always put in multiple ponytails held by colorful rubber bands, with barrettes at the ends.

My mother surprised me with this blue leather set. A leather jacket with the matching skirt. It didn't matter what shirt I put on with it, I loved it every time I put it on. The leather jacket fit a bit *oversized* due to my very small frame. The skirt sat right above my hips and stopped right above my knees.

One of my favorites, the rips and tears were evidence of how much I loved and cherished it. Wearing this set nobody could tell me anything, I felt like the prettiest girl in the world. It was

always a sense of joy, I even caught myself with a little extra flare in my walk.



Apple Bottom

(2005, 2nd grade, 8 Years Old)

My elementary school was located a few blocks away from my home in Bed-Stuy. I was mostly excited to show my outfit off to my classmates during lunch time. This was the part I looked forward to on my birthday. I liked attention as a young child, especially if the attention was coming from my outfit.

I woke up, brushed my teeth and washed my face. I always took my showers the night before to get as much sleep as I possibly could. My mother was famous for slabbing a large amount of vaseline on my face, neck, and ears.

Apple Bottom Jeans were very popular around this time. My mother decided to surprise me with a full Apple Bottom Jeans outfit. I was super excited to get to school and show off my new outfit. I was already excited about my birthday but this new outfit just put the cherry on top. So the day was here, it was my birthday. My mother made sure my hair was fresh and flat ironed, I put a little pep in my step. I found myself doing everything with extreme joy and excitement. Arriving at school gave me that extra bit of confidence I needed.

Receiving compliments throughout the day was an exciting thing. I even found myself asking to go to the bathroom a little more just so I could roam the halls and demand everyone's attention. My outfit made me feel like one of the popular kids for the day, more people paid attention to me. It made me feel seen for one of the first times.



Golden Goth Prom

(2008,5th grade, 11 years old)

This was one of the days I dreamt about growing up, PROM! I always envisioned that this day would be perfect and it was. My prom was the same day as my graduation so my closest family members were with me, helping me get ready for the big event. This was also the last prom my grandmother, Mary got to see me in before she died. It was going to be held at my elementary school, Benjamin Banneker.

My graduation and prom were on the same day so I didn't have to do any extra *body modifications*. This was around the time I started shaving my little hairs under my arms. I still didn't have enough hair on my legs to do that yet. I manipulated my straight hair by combing through it with a wide tooth comb. Making sure each strand was in its proper place. My mother sprayed some of her expensive perfume on my while my cousin put my earrings on.

My mother laid out my dress on the couch with my black Kenneth Cole shoes on the floor. My dress was fitted at the top then puffed outward, similar to a *princess dress* just less dramatic. My dress was extremely different from the dresses I saw while shopping, it embodied everything I wanted to be, a rebel. My Kenneth Cole shoes had a little 2 inch heel with small detailed *pleats* by the toe area. Getting dressed in the living room with my sisters, Makia and Takiyah. My brother Steaffond, my cousin, Karee. My grandma, and mother, Michelle.

I felt special seeing the love reflecting in their eyes. It was the first time I felt like a true princess with everyone paying attention to me and helping me get ready. It was something really special, genuine, and beautiful. This is where my love for getting dressed up bloomed.



True Religions

(2009, 6th grade, 12 Years Old)

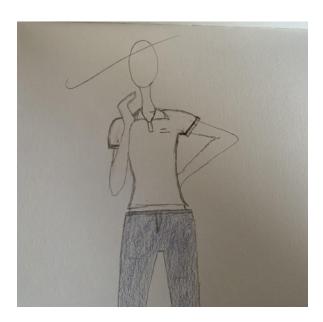
It was going to be the first time I celebrated my birthday in a new school, with new friends. Although I had been in Satellite East Junior High School for just a few months I made a good amount of friends. Which was one of my fears going into a new environment. With these new friends and a new environment came wanting to impress them. So for my 12th birthday I wanted to get these really expensive jeans to wear with my uniform shirt. Around this time I didn't know how to be myself or who I wanted to be, I was adamant on blending in and being popular.

I woke up, took a quick little 15 minute shower, removed the slime and plaque off of my teeth. Washed my face with a rag, removing some dead skin off of my face. Then removed those little eye boogers I usually got in the early mornings. After properly moisturizing my face and body, I stole a few sprays of my mother, Michelle's favorite perfume. I didn't have my own perfume to myself just yet.

The star of the show was my new, very expensive True Religion jeans. These jeans were very popular around my community as well as my pairs, it signified that your parents had "money", so i wanted a pair. It was a shock to me when my mother agreed to get me a pair, I was extremely excited. Going into the boutique there were a few pairs of jeans that caught my eye. Trying on all of them I narrowed it down to two pairs, True Religions and Joe Jeans. The True Religions had more of a *straight legged* loose fitting style, they sagged off of my butt a bit.

Walking to school I felt like I was on top of the world, I felt accepted, like I finally fit in with the cool kids. But sitting across from one of my classmates that made fun of me everyday

made me want to disappear. He made a comment that my True Religions were fake, he made me feel so small. I have never been so happy to go home. I took them off and never wore them again. This made me realize that I should always strive to be myself, this was the start of my journey of being an individual and loving myself. I felt like this was a good lesson to learn early on.



Prom at the Marriott

(2011, 8th grade, 14 years old)

My 8th grade prom was at the Downtown, Brooklyn Marriott. Which was super exciting for me. I've always drove or walked by looking at it in admiration and finally I was going to be attending as a guest.

For my hair it was decided that I would go to the Dominican hair salon up the block from my home. Shirley temple curls was what I wanted, something very different from the typical blow out I would get most of the time. After removing the rollers and finishing up my hair I smelt of hairspray and A LOT of spritz which was very unpleasant. Of course I wanted my hair to be the freshest it could be so I got my hair down the day of. I shaved and lotioned my entire body with my mother's favorite lotion from Bed, Bath, and Body. She would always complain about me using it but this day she handed it over willingly. Taking a shower before I got my hair down seemed like the smartest thing to do, it would be faster for me to get ready when going home. But most importantly it would reduce frizz. I wasn't into makeup at this time so makeup to me was mascara and lipgloss. After putting on the Japanese Cherry Blossom perfume to match it was time to get dressed.

Just like everything else it was important that I found the perfect dress that embodied my personality and also wouldn't be seen on anyone else. My mother and I took a trip to Central Valley, NY to Woodbury Common Premium Outlets. We found ourselves in *Juicy Couture*, there I found this elegant *strapless*, *sleeveless* black dress. There was also this cute bunny headband with rhinestones on it. But it wouldn't be finished without a black Juicy Couture bag to go with it. We went to Aldo to get me a pair of shoes, we ended up finding the perfect pair. Black sparkly

6in *platform high heel* shoes. I've been walking in platform heels since I was 12 so walking in them was a piece of cake.

After getting fully dressed, putting on my head band, and manipulating my curls so they looked just right, I was officially ready to go. I remember looking in the mirror and feeling like a woman for the first time ever. I felt beautiful, relieved, and excited for the night ahead.



The Famous Peach Dress

(2011, 8th grade, 14 years old)

My 8th grade graduation was going to be at Brooklyn College. I remember feeling anxious and excited, this was the first time I was going to be inside of an actual college, it was surreal. Most of my family would be attending, it was going to be such a fulfilling celebration. A sad ending but a beautiful and glorious beginning.

On the morning of my graduation I woke up extremely early to make sure I would have ample time to get ready. I've always been known to be last to be ready but today I wanted to be the first. I took a shower and shaved as usual before lotioning my whole body. My cousin Karee promised me that she would do my makeup. This was going to be the first time I had on a full face of makeup and I couldn't wait. Part of me waking up so early to get ready was to be able to get my makeup done faster. After applying foundation, blush, mascara and a bit of lipstick I took off my scarf. The day prior I went to the Dominican hair salon up the block to get a blow out. My hair was wrapped in a scarf sense then; taking down my hair I parted it in the middle. Getting a wig brush I began to brush my hair into place making sure that there weren't any fly aways. Then finally I was ready to get dressed.

This *strapless*, *fitted*, peach H&M dress stopped just below my butt and hugged my body perfectly. It accentuated all of my curves but the reason why it was truly special was because my best friend also had it. We had chosen the same dress for our graduation without either one of us knowing. Which is why this peach dress was very dare to my heart. My mother and I went shopping and found these golden glitter Steve Madden *flats*. My cousin threw on some of her jewelry around my neck as well as adorned me with some press on earrings.

Being fully dressed I felt like a beautiful peach, although the dress was pretty, the color was very loud, bright. I felt myself already being the center of attention based on the color of the dress alone. Throughout the years I found myself liking the feeling of other people's attention when it came to clothing. I was ready to go although my dress would be covered with my yellow gown.



BCAM Cheerleader

(2012, 9th grade 14 years old)

Brooklyn Community of Arts & Media Highschool was the school I attended from 9th through 12th grade. It wasn't far from my home, just a 10 minute walk to 300 Willoughby Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11205. During 9th grade it was one of my ideal dreams to be a part of the cheerleading squad. I made the team with flying colors and the pep rally was one of the many performances to come. The pep rally was going to be the first time I would be introduced to my pairs as an official cheerleader.

The days leading up to the pep rally the captains on the squad voiced some concerns and rules. The main points that they brought up were to shave both our underarms and legs, properly moisturize and put on deodorant. All of which I did leading up to the big day, I made sure to get a fresh blow out from the hair salon as well. I've never had a sisterhood up to that point that seemed so concerned with one another. We all helped each other get ready, we even did each other's makeup.

BCAM's colors were blue, white and yellow, which is what our cheerleading uniforms consisted of. We all had on a blue *sleeveless cropped* shirt with a white and yellow "v" shaped design on the top portion. Our skirts varied in length depending on height but most stopped just below our butts. Our skirts were blue with yellow and white lines around the entire bottom of it; which consisted of small *pleats*. It was mandatory that we wore black shorts under our skirts as well as white shell toe adidas with socks that weren't too loud.

Being fully dressed with my new cheerleading team felt like I was finally a part of something that was bigger than myself. I've wanted this ever since i was a little girl, it was

always a dream of mine. This dream was finally coming true, I felt accomplished and seen for one of the first times.



The Bow

(2012, 9th grade, 15 years old)

Going to school on this day was going to be a little different than the days prior. I celebrated my birthday on February 3rd which was a Friday, my birthday would be Sunday.

BCAM was a uniform high school, it was mandatory that we wore our school's uniform shirts but we could wear any bottoms and sneakers we desired. On Fridays we got to wear whatever we pleased so this was my chance to come to school with the best birthday outfit. I was just starting to really step into fashion and create my own style at this point.

I woke up and showered just like any other day, but on this particular day I woke up a little earlier. I wanted to make sure that everything was perfect but I didn't want to be late for school. Unlike most days I was going to be putting on a full face of makeup, the weekend prior I made a trip with my cousin Karee, and little sister Takiyah to Macy's. I wanted to pick out a *MAC* foundation and they were the only two whose opinion I trusted. I was doing my own full face of makeup for the very first time without Karee's help. Adding foundation, bronzer, blush, lip gloss and mascara. I was ready for Karee to do my hair, the hairstyle I was going for was one that became popular from Lady Gaga's music video "Just Dance", A high ponytail in the shape of a bow.

I went to Forever 21 in Times Square to pick out my entire outfit, bright neon orange *trousers*, very vibrant fun colorful stockings with a *long sleeve wrapped* jean shirt. I went to a local boutique not that far away from my home and found some *pointed toe* brown chelsea boots. My outfit was complete with a black tank, a navy blue Old Navy dress jacket, and my yellow Long Champ bag. My *oversized* emerald green and gold press on earrings was my final touch.

Finally being able to express myself through fashion growing up was a big deal especially in schools where wearing uniform is mandatory. Navigating through high school and learning myself, what I like, who I am, and who I wanted to become were important to me. This moment was one of the first where I saw myself coming alive, where and when my clothes expressed what I wanted to portray in this world among my peers. It was a feeling of relief and finally arriving and welcoming my true self.





The Lace BodySuit

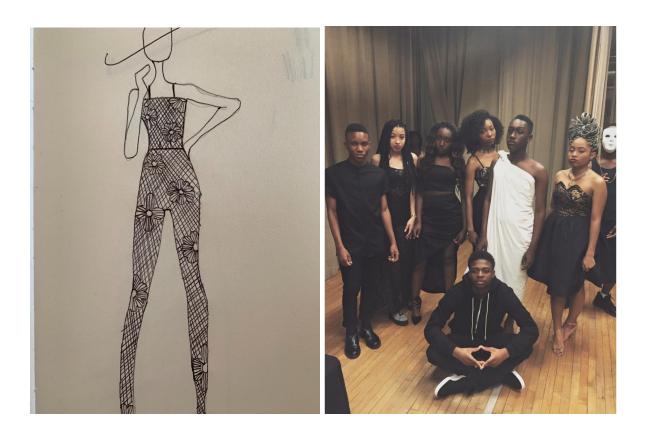
(2015, 12th grade, 18)

It was one of the many modeling shows I've done in BCAM for the past 4 years. But this particular show was going to be our last. This modeling team that I was the manager of was called "Model Material". This was the final time we would perform with one another and see each other in this setting, most I would never see again, so this night was particularly special.

My routine for every modeling show was the same and after 4 years it was a no brainer. Shave, lotion, makeup, and black under garments. After my hair began falling out I transitioned to not using heat at all or using limited heat. I was wearing my hair in its most natural form embracing how big and curly my hair could get. For the show I believe I either did a braid out or twist out which ultimately has the same results. I did my makeup at school right before the performance to ensure a fresh face of makeup. As well as putting on a little bit of extra deodorant and perfume before changing into my outfit for the show.

My opening outfit was a *spaghetti strap* all black lace bodysuit from Macy's. I had to hold my breath and suck what little I had in but it fit me perfectly. It was paired with these black *platform heels* that had a gold accent. I had on my silver coin necklace that I wore almost everyday with every outfit. I DIY'd it based on the necklace that Linsey LOhan's character wore in "Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen". It quickly grew to be my favorite piece of jewelry I owned.

Wearing this outfit brought sorrow, appreciation but also a sense of finality. I knew that this was a beautiful ending but also a beginning. I was excited that I was able to share this space with mentors and friends that I held and still do hold dear and true to my heart.



Silver Pants

(2015, 12th grade, 18)

This was going to be my last prom, I had to make it count. My prom was held at a venue on Wall Street in Manhattan. There was a lot of pressure being one of the best dressed people in my grade. As well as having the most popular relationship in the school. But nevertheless I was extremely excited to experience a night I would cherish for the rest of my life.

This was going to be a big day so I had to plan it accordingly. The days leading up to my prom were filled with different *grooming* techniques. This included a face mask to help with any pimples I had as well as help brighten my skin. I shaved my entire body with a five blade razor from CVS. I got my makeup done by a professional makeup artist for the first time, which was a very weird experience. The wait time was about 30 minutes, it was packed by a lot of other young girls eager to get to prom on time. When I got in the chair a was greeted by my makeup artist, who asked me to explain the look I was going for. After showing her a picture, she went to work on my face. When my mother, Michelle set eyes on me while I was walking in the front door she began crying. One of my most precious memories although it was very annoying in the moment. I got my hair blown out straight the day prior and kept my hair wrapped. My mother began combing my hair out and brushed it into a low ponytail. She gathered all of my hair and tied it together with a black scrunchie. She took the hair we purchased from the beauty supply store out of the package. She began to wrap it around my own hair, adding pins to keep the hair secure.

When thinking about what I wanted to wear being different and standing out was very important to me. So I chose to go with pants, not just any pants though, but Solace London pants. These extremely *wide legged high waisted* silver trousers were so divine. They resembled a skirt

if I didn't pull them apart, that is how wide they were. It was difficult to find a top to go with it because of how high waisted the trousers were. But my mother and I found a top at Urban Outfitters that went perfect. The top resembled a bra more than a shirt but it was a perfect fit. The black top and silver bottoms were paired with these block black Steve Madden heels. They had a 70's feel to them, it was perfect for the overall *aesthetic* of the outfit.

Finally getting to wear this outfit and execute it how I wanted to made me feel relieved. But most of all it made me trust myself and my vision. There were a lot of people questioning why I chose to wear pants. I still felt feminine and beautiful in my gorgeous flowy silver trousers.





A Family Affair

(2017, 20)

My sister didn't have a date for her 12th grade prom, so she asked me to go with. It was more like I forced her to take me. After my prom was over I wanted to go to another prom so bad. This was my chance to live out my fantasy again, but less dramatic. I didn't want to out shine my sister. My sister, Takiyah's prom was going to be at this beautiful venue in Queens.

I made sure to shave my legs, since that was the only part of my body that was going to be showing. I added a few more things to my skincare, to make sure my skin was the best it could be. My day started with making sure my sister was taken care of and didn't need anything. After I did her makeup and everything was good with her I began my makeup. Starting with my Black Radiance Foundation and ending with curling my eyelashes, putting on mascara, and setting my face with some setting spray.

My dress was one of luck, I wanted to pick a dress that complimented my sisters dress perfectly. But I didn't want it to be too loud that it out shined my sisters, she reiterated this multiple times.. I found my dress on a UK website called Missguided. It was a nude *frame fitting* dress that stopped right above my knee. It consisted of rhinestones on the surface of the entire dress. I paired it with my black Steve Madden heels that I wore for my prom.

Being able to be my sister's date and matching her was fun. I've always wanted to be a part of her prom in some way. I felt honored, and I felt like a bond to one another grew stronger.



The BIG 21

(2018)

I've been waiting to turn 21 for as long as I could remember. It was another step into adulthood. I couldn't wait to be able to finally shove my ID in the security's face when I wanted to get into the Club. I could finally experience the nightlife in New York that I've seen in some of my favorite movies. I didn't want to do too much for my birthday, just an intimate dinner with my closest friends.

I got my nails done on Fulton Street, a popular shopping area in my neighborhood. I had to rush and pack my clothes and makeup for the next few days. I was staying at Hotel for the weekend with my Boyfriend at the time. After checking in I took a shower and began to lotion my entire body. My hair was already done in long medium black and blonde box braids. I brushed my teeth and put my favorite Victoria Secret perfume behind both of my ears. I added some highlighter on my decollete as a finishing touch after doing my makeup.

I was working at Century 21 and could finally afford the taste that I had in clothes. There was this black DKNY dress I had my eyes on. At the top of it was a *deep V*, the bottom was a sweater material that had a *bodycon fit*. I paired it with some *pointed toe* sock heels from Zara. I also got some jewelry from Forever 21 to pull the look together.

This outfit made me feel like a grown woman. I finally felt like I was coming into my own. My style was emerging and I was very excited to see where my style was going to go in the future. My friends showered me with compliments at the dinner table, which made me feel myself even more.



Pink Out

(2019, 22)

This was my second time vacationing in Miami, Florida. The first time I couldn't really do anything so the second time was exciting. I ended up taking the trip with my best friend, Erika. Her coworker Miguel, and three other girls he was friends with. We would be staying for 5 days and 4 nights.

Getting ready on this particular night was quick. I already did my usual *body modifications*. I hopped in the shower to freshen up, moisturized my body, brushed my teeth, put my jewelry on from TAB and I was ready to do my makeup. I was going for a very light makeup look this particular night. The warm Miami nights didn't allow a very comfortable full face of makeup. I touched up my brows I did early that night, put my LA Girl concealer on my dark circles. Then ended my makeup look with some mascara and my favorite Fenty Lipgloss. Before I got dressed I put a few squirts of my perfume on.

My outfit was laid out on the bed when I got out of the shower. My American Apparel pink disco pants, my Fenty bra and Urban Outfitters floral sheer shirt. The pants were so tight that wearing undergarments would've been uncomfortable, so I was going out free that night. My white leather *round toe* high heeled boots, silver studded purse and pink shades completed my look. I was ready to conquer the night.

This outfit made me feel invincible, this was one of the few times I actually wore heels to the club. So I felt very tall, elongated and graceful. It was a beautiful night to say goodbye to Miami for the time being, an unforgettable time.





Gold Disco Princess

(2019, 22)

This was one of the many times I got all dressed up just to take Instagram pictures. One of my guilty pleasures. This particular day I was feeling down and wanted to get all dressed up. When I usually take pictures it's nothing special. Just me in my house or outside with my sister and her camera.

I took a shower shaved my under arms and my stomach. After I got out of the shower I brushed my teeth, and moisturized my entire upper body with African shea butter. Next was my hair, I had already washed, conditioned and deep conditioned my hair with my Shea Moisture products. My short hair was still in its twist drying from the previous night. I put Coconut Oil on the tips of my hands and proceeded to take out each twist one by one. After they were all out and separated I grabbed my pick to manipulate my curls to get my afro a little bigger. After it was how I wanted it for the time being I put it in a pineapple with a satin scrunchie to do my makeup. A pineapple sounds a little weird but it just means a ponytail that you put at the very top of your head. After doing some light makeup I was ready to get dressed.

This outfit was very special to me. I was trying to support more black sustainable businesses and this was one of the first outfits I bought that checked off both boxes. It was a gold set that had a very 70's aesthetic to it. It was also upcycled from an outfit she previously had. The designer's name was Megan and her brand was Lavtg. The top was *cropped*, the bottoms had a tight fit, similar to leggings but at the very bottom they *flared* out. I paired this set with some big gold hooped earrings and my white *round toe* leather boots from Zara.

This whole look was special to me; I was finally able to live out my disco fantasies through wearing this outfit. I felt like I was embarrassing another part of myself. I also received a lot of likes on Instagram, so that was an added bonus.



About Author



Asha is currently a senior at NYC College of Technology CUNY. She plans on graduating in the Spring of 2021 and continuing her jewelry business with her little sister Takiyah. She is the daughter of two loving parents and the sibling to 3 sisters and a brother. She is currently working on her modeling career and steadily uses fashion as a creative outlet.

Among these things she has hobbies that include, styling, drawing and designing jewelry. She plans on creating and building her own fashion empire one day.