

Dear high school Sandra,

I know high school can be a frightening time, especially when it comes to self-image and the pursuit of an ideal body. As your future self, I want to share some insights and advice that I believe will help you navigate this journey. I remember being very conscious of what I wear. I felt very insecure about my clothing because they weren't from the popular brands all the kids were buying from. I constantly envy all the kids with the new Jordans, and designer bags, and the girls with Hollister jeans on. I became very timid in my classes because I didn't want to bring attention to myself, I hated being seen, and I hated compliments because I felt like they weren't true.

In high school, you changed your appearance once a month, you couldn't afford it. I used to beg my sister at the end of every month to do my hair, now looking back that cost me a lot of money. I used to buy cheap beauty supply extensions for fifteen dollars a pack, I needed four to fill my head. Black hair became too boring so I would have to add color, which cost five dollars more than the natural dyed hair. To keep my outfits interesting I spent a lot of money on cheap accessories that didn't last me long, if they didn't tarnish then I would lose them which made me have to keep buying more to replace them. Every new semester of high school my dad would give me \$100 to go shopping for clothes, but I did not spend the money wisely. I would go to cheap stores on Church Ave, Brooklyn to stack up on low-quality clothes thinking the more clothes I have the more outfits I can make since I hated wearing the same things together twice.

My low self-esteem in high school caused a lot of mental health issues. It stopped me from making friends with certain people, either I thought they didn't dress well, and I didn't want to be seen with them, or I thought they dressed better than me and wouldn't want to be my friend. I would also judge my friend's clothing if they weren't up to my "standards", I used to plan my friend's outfits the night before. Pursuing the "perfect ideal" body used to affect my attendance in school, I used to care more about making sure my wing liner was drawn on perfectly than catching the bus on time. Since I was late to school a lot, I would miss having breakfast with my friends before 1st period, my best friend at the time used to pick me up from my house when she could so our friend group could eat together.

Sandra, now that you're a young professional, so much has improved. Here is some advice I wish I had known back then. Practice self-compassion, speak highly of yourself, don't use negative language, and embrace all the good things done to and for you. Invest in your well-being, stop buying cheap makeup and clothes, and invest in skincare to enhance your natural beauty. Look deeper within yourself, there's more to you than your appearance, you're very intelligent. You have so many talents and interests you never pursue due to shyness, embarrassment isn't real, hope this helps and I love you.

Love,

Sandra