

Copycat

A copycat is a person who follows others, watching their behavior, speech, even dress as cues to his own behavior, speech, or dress. Celebrities and great athletes often become objects of copycat behavior: we want to wear our baseball cap the way Whitey Ford wore his, or our jeans the way Beyonce wears hers. Have you a copycat side to you? Can you think of some advantages to being a copycat?

Examples

1

I have been through at least one copycat phase. When I went to college at Harvard, where I was to remain for only a year and a half, I found myself surrounded by young men of my age, many of whom came from wealthy and socially pretentious families and prep schools. I came from a middle class academic family, and had never thought of myself as privileged. I was temporarily awe struck. I copied aspects of these youngsters' dress—sporty jackets; speech—a faint tinge of a British or Bostonian accent; or attitude—offhand amusement at vulgar behavior. I was, I thought, careful not to overdo these style tweaks, for I gathered that a true gentleman creates a seamless blend of characteristics. But I felt good inside, and in fact set a high personal bar for accomplishment at the time. But when I get home to the Midwest I was deflated. People made fun of my unnatural behavior. I was reminded that each of us is different and inimitable.

2

When I was in Graduate School, devoting all my time to my books, I formed a friendship with a highly intellectual colleague, Marcel, who was at the same time what we considered an Existentialist. He lived his studies through discussion of them, through exercise and sports, and through his big refusal—to let the struggles of the mind push aside the whole living context of the person. I was impressed. I lived his thoughts for a long while. I ate like him, fast but savoring what I ate, read like him, fast but quick but to question the reality of what I read. I copied his view of life for a while. I was a copycat, but I gained from it, eventually keeping my own style, while never tiring of his.