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Lensless eyeglasses provide 'geek chic' look to your style

By Martha Worboy, Canwest News Service October 6, 2009

When Maria Beamish wants to feel like a different person she puts on her black, circular, thick-framed glasses, even though the part-time student has perfect vision.

"When I put them on I feel like I get into a character," says the 20-year-old. Although she calls her fake glasses "jokey-looking," she says they do bring out a serious side in her. And conveniently, she says, they jazz up her outfits a little bit.

Beamish is not unique among her age group. Walk into the fashion department at Toronto's Ryerson University and you'd think the place was an eyewear clinic.

Wearing non-prescription or sans-lens glasses as a form of self-expression is especially

popular with the "hipster" set and fashion students, according to Melanie Sanderson, a first-year design student at Ryerson. Sanderson says she's seen how frames can change a persona.

"I know one person who wears lensless glasses and this hipster language comes out that goes hand-in-hand with the glasses. She says things like, 'Are you totally vibing?'"

At Galaxy Eyewear in downtown Vancouver, manager Miranda Yeung has seen teenagers spend up to \$200 on the right frames and pop out the lenses as they leave the store.

She says the look the young frame-buying public is seeking is geek chic.

"Big, nerdy, plastic frames -- everyone's going bigger and more nerdy."

It could be that eyewear is a necessary fashion accessory for our times.

"Given the recession, we're looking for a form of escape, and possibly a form of protection," says Tamara Glick, a stylist and owner of Trademark Image Consulting in Toronto.

She says frame-wearers are favouring a dark, plastic look with a heavier frame.

"It's a cross between Clark Kent and Buddy Holly. People see the frame, then they see you."

And young professionals in particular are turning to spectacles as a tool in the ever-competitive job market.

Marie-Claude Robert, owner of Style Impeccable, a Montreal image-consultant firm, says it's becoming more common for young professionals to use eyewear as an accessory to get noticed.

"Perhaps the boss at work isn't seeing them -- so they want to look smarter and get a glimpse from the employer," Robert says.

Hayden Chadee, a 29-year-old teacher in Whitby, Ont., can relate to this strategy.

He first started wearing non-prescription glasses at teachers' college because he felt he was never taken seriously.

Looking to develop an insightful and thoughtful image, he says, once he started wearing frames he was quickly perceived as a more serious person.

Chadee owns three pairs of fake frames and now wears them more for fashion reasons.

"It changes the look of my outfits and changes the way I look," Chadee says.

Whether for fashion or out of necessity, it's increasingly coming down to the right look.

"It's about the glasses wearing the person," Glick says, "not about the person wearing the glasses."

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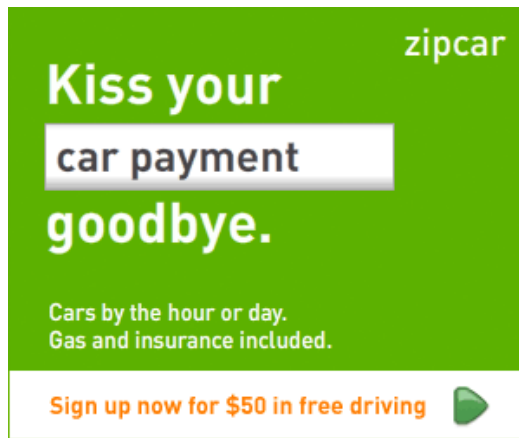
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