

# Bargain hunting: There's more than low prices motivating shoppers



Illustration by Sandy Calandra

By GINA CARROLL  
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There are few things American consumers hold as dear as they do sales — during times of prosperity or depression.

But sales seem to hold a stigma for some shoppers — they do not want their names known for one reason or another. Whether they are confirmed bargain shoppers who rarely pay full price for anything other than their taxes or utilities, or only every-so-often shoppers, most can say they have thought at least once, "Bargains, I love 'em!"

*"Money burns a hole in my pocket, so I get rid of it. . . . Buying on sales is like getting hand-me-downs."*

And if probed deeply enough, there are other ulterior motives.

"I'm a student. I'm at a high-cost state university. I'm poor. Buying clothes in fashion is not cheap, and how else are you going to meet people and make a good impression? You can't be like the people in the old days who only had one set of clothes for good. You can't wear the same clothes every weekend if you want to meet people," said one seventh term student.

"I might as well admit it, I came here to look for a husband and I want to catch a good one. That's why I want a college education and the decent clothes and that's why I frequent sales. I'll even skip class to come down," she said.

A little sister at what she described as a "status fraternity" said she went shopping during sales for similar reasons.

"I have to keep up my image. I don't want the brothers to see me in the same clothes every time there's a party. Sales like this one are just about the only time you can get name brands at reasonable, or close to reasonable, prices. You may think it's hard to see the label on a pair of pants or a shirt, but there are ways, and believe me, they are used," she said.

"I don't have to have the name brands

like a lot of people I know, but sometimes it is nice. I could buy stuff out at K-Mart or Gee Bee just as easily as down here, but I think the stuff you pay more for holds up better," said a male who said he wore the better clothes and after shave lotions to impress his dates.

"Imagine you were a guy and you were with a really nice chick, and things got a little heavy. Wouldn't you look at the label if you took off my shirt, if you were the girl?"

"Male chauvinist," said a girl who was near him. "I love shopping, and even if I get rich someday I don't think I'll ever give up shopping for bargains. I really get a lot out of shopping and getting bargains. If I get a shirt for half as much as the regular price, I feel great. And it beats shoplifting to get the things you want," she said.

"I need to save all I can, so I shop on sales," said a University administrator. "Please don't use my name, because this is for my wife's birthday and I don't want her to know about it," he said, holding up a sweater.

*"You can't be like the people in the old days who only had one set of clothes for good."*

"Money burns a hole in my pocket, so I get rid of it. My husband doesn't know how much I do spend. He gives me money to go to sales, so I bring out the stuff I buy normally (at regular price) and tell him the bargains I've found. But he never sees the price tags. Buying on sales is like getting hand-me-downs," said another woman.

"I've tried to tell my husband the dollar is shrinking and I can't get my size if I go to sales, but he just won't believe me. So I just do it this way. Sometimes I feel badly about it, but when you're a size three, the selection isn't that big anyway," she said.

The people on the receiving end of the money exchange have a different view of sales and their importance.

"A lot of people have the wrong idea about sales. They think of women tearing through tables and pulling out each others hair for the sake of a shirt. They don't want the hassle of something like that, so they don't come the first day of a sale and then they complain about the selection. But it's not at all like that," said a salesgirl in a local department store.

*"Do you know what they say about a fool and his money? . . . I think people are bigger fools on sales than any other time."*

"I do get really tired of doing the same thing and answering the same questions every day, and sometimes I think my arches must have fallen underground, but it is a nice feeling to know that the day's sales have brought a profit to me and to them," she said.

"Sales are nothing but a pain," said another. "All day long people ask if you've got this or that on sale when you know they just brought it over from another rack that wasn't on sale. They think you'll trip up and sell them something that wasn't marked down."

"That's practically stealing, but people don't realize it," she said.

"And you know what's really wrong? Sometimes I'm tempted to let them get away with it, because prices for clothes are so high and some of them are really shoddily constructed. Even the best names don't have deep hemis or seams that can be let out," she said.

"You'd think store owners would learn that these things don't sell and they have to eventually be put on sale, which cuts their profits. But the boss said they do it to attract people into the store so they'll buy more than they normally would if they were paying normal prices. And it works, too," she said.

"Do you know what they say about a fool and his money? They say they're soon parted. Sometimes I think people are bigger fools on sales than any other time," she said.

# Satisfying the need for status — it's all on the pocket for buyers

By SHAWN HUBLER  
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"You shouldn't buy them if you're uncomfortable in them, because it's a fashion thing, it's not a practical thing. You shouldn't buy them if you're really overweight. And I hate to sound snotty about it, but you shouldn't buy them if you can't afford it. If you don't want to pay, buy Levi's, you know? Don't come to me."

Susan Goldberg, who has sold them for over two years, is talking about "status jeans" — the chic, tight-fitting jeans that have brought a relatively expensive measure of snob appeal to the common work pants.

Hers was the first State College store to carry the \$35 Sassons, made in America, and the \$55 Weaver jeans, imported from France. Along with several other downtown merchants, she is riding the current wave of "designer" jeans, created for licensed manufacturers by big name fashion designers such as Calvin Klein, Giorgio Sant'Angelo, Ralph Lauren and Gloria Vanderbilt.

While status jeans range in price (from about \$30 for Calvin Klein straight-legs to Geoffrey Beene's \$220 leather Beene Jeans), the various styles share a central theme.

"They're all the same thing," said Bob Steinbach, Goldberg's partner. "Fourteen-ounce denim with a small leg and a tight fit." Each brand also sports a distinctive label, usually sewn to the right rear pocket.

"The logo is what sells them," Goldberg said. "It's a matter of status."

But the wrong brand of status jeans can make even the biggest wheel come off like a flat tire, Goldberg said. The finished look should be sleek, lean and leggy. Each brand is cut differently to drape a different type of figure. In short, each designer of status jeans is aiming at a specific market segment, so not all name jeans fit alike.

The customers' choice of status will depend on two boundaries — budget and body.

In general, the very fat and the very poor should look for another pair of pants. However, the variety of status jeans is wide enough to suit most people, even if they are not as famous as their jean makers.

Tall, thin women look good in almost every brand. However, those with especially slim hips and thighs should go for a unisex or European cut, like Fiorucci's \$43 denim "cigarette legs," made in Milan.

Sasson, another non-designer company, also makes less contoured jeans for featherweights. Made in America, Sasson jeans cost less than Fiorucci's (\$35 for denim straight-legs) and are available in several fabrics, including velvet and satin.

"Pegged" jeans and skin-tight capri pants, both tapered at the ankle, also flatter slim-hipped women, and are included in most lines of status jeans.

Women with more rounded figures should seek a straight line from hip to hem, and so look better in a less tapered 16- or 17-inch-wide leg.

They also should wear jeans made specifically for a woman's body. Some suggestions: Gloria Vanderbilt's \$31 denim straight-legs, designed for Murijsani; Calvin Klein's lower-cut jeans, sold by Puritan Industries for \$30-\$40 a pair; or Cacharel's jeans (\$35 in denim), which made their debut this fall.

Cathy Hardwick's blue denim line, designed for Best Manufacturing Company, is especially cut to fit women in the 30 to 35 age group. Her offbeat front-pleated jeans — which, incidentally, help conceal heavy thighs — cost \$35. Her straight-legs retail at \$30.

Liz Claiborne's brand, in linen, denim or corduroy, also has a fuller cut at the hip. All her jeans sell for \$38 or less.

Jeans with a high rise (distance from crotch to waist) make short legs look longer. Giorgio Sant'Angelo's \$35 brushed denims, made by Happy Legs, have a definite waistline, and come in 14- and 17-inch leg widths.

Most unisex jeans, like Sasson and Fiorucci, look as good on slim men as they do on slim women. For older or heavier men, however, Calvin Klein, Yves St. Laurent and Ralph Lauren each have designed a "gentlemen's jean" with a wider leg and looser fit. The denim versions sell for \$35-\$45 a pair.

When it comes to pure snobbery, imports are probably the ultimate jeans. As one shopper put it, however, "Status ain't gratis." At \$65 to \$75 a pair, imported French MacKees and Italian Clippers tend to lose something in the translation, especially if your budget is limited.

Within each brand, less trim and fewer pockets usually mean a lower price. Denims are also cheaper than velvet, leather or corduroy jeans.

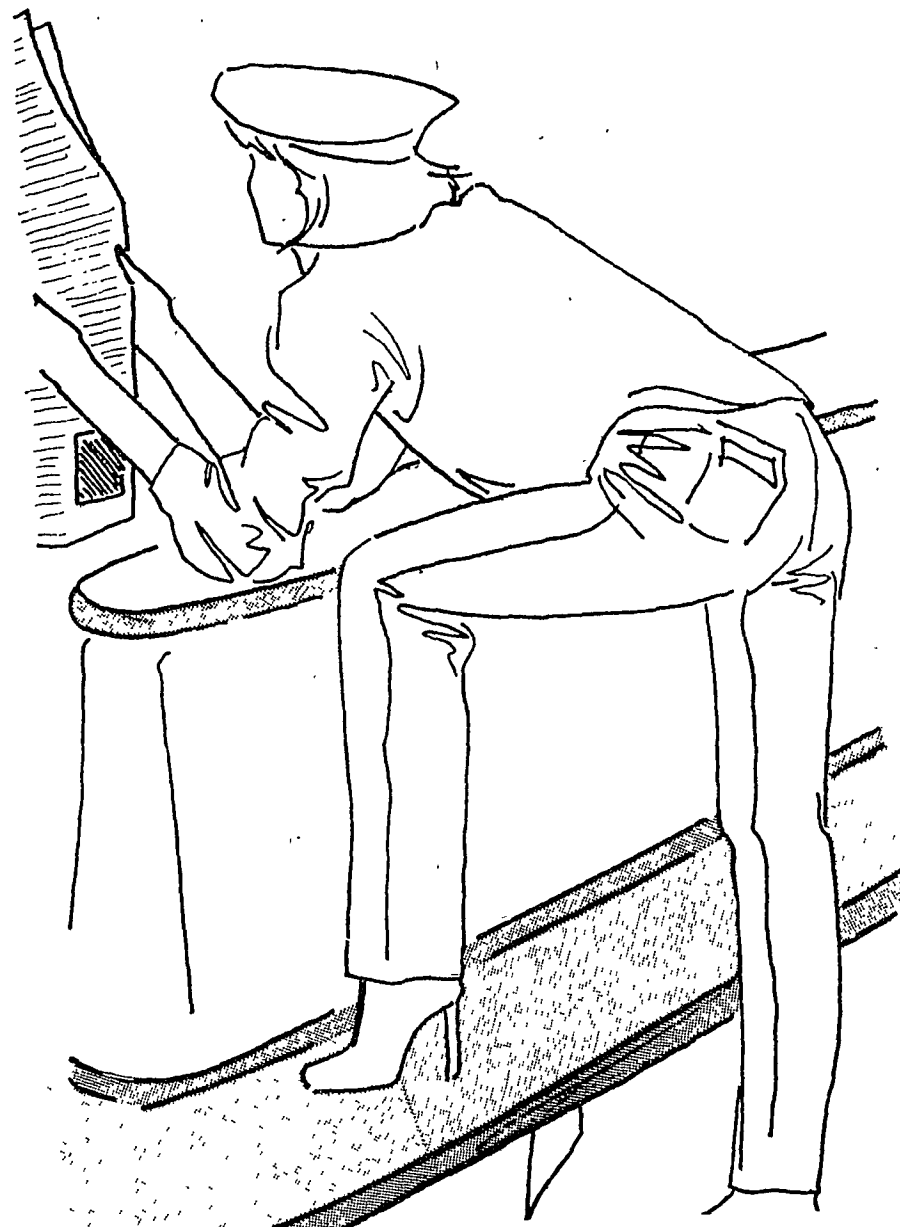
Copies are cheaper, too. Straight-legged denims by Sticky Fingers and St. Tropez have the same tight fit and slim line as designer jeans, but retail for less than \$30. They even have catchy back-pocket labels.

Overall, however, Cathy Hardwick's and Calvin Klein's are probably the least expensive status jeans. In "Vogue" magazine, Klein said, "I want the girls who can't afford to wear my clothes to wear my jeans."

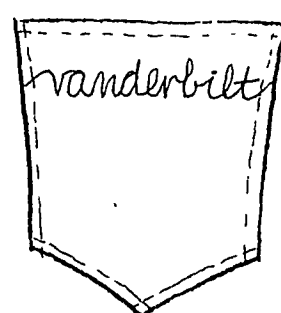
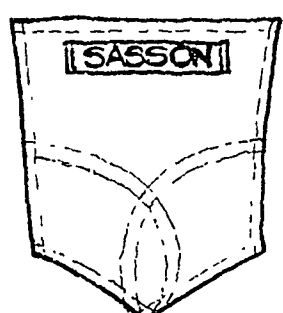
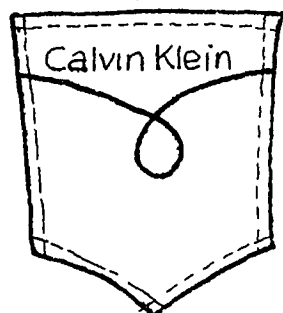
Finally, a word about quality: Don't expect any more (or less) durability from status jeans that you would from ordinary Levis or Wranglers. Basically, the materials are the same. The differences lie in the cut, the price and, most importantly, the name.

"Unmistakably, people (buying status jeans) are paying for the name," said a State College saleswoman.

And what's in a name? You are — from waist to ankles.



Illustrations by Sandy Calandra



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