

RAIDING

HIS

WARDROBE

BY ANNA SAMONOVA

Meeting a wardrobe raider



PICTURE CREDIT @A.GUSEY

It has long been seen as a transgressive and exciting fashion statement when a celebrity indulges in 'cross-dressing', especially a male celebrity. Artists such as David Bowie, Young Thug and Boy George have raised eyebrows by adopting fashion and makeup more traditionally female in the public consciousness. Women, also, have caused a stir, albeit a lesser one due to the normalisation of men's clothes, by wearing traditionally 'male' outfits such as suits in situations where a dress is more expected, for example Rachel Wood or Janelle Monae. Major fashion brands like Prada and Tom Ford are running mixed catwalks de rigueur, and often fitting similar clothes on male and female models.

As gender roles blur, and fashion brands begin to trend more unisex, there is increasing scope for 'cross-dressing' being no longer shocking, but everyday. Indeed, it is perfectly possible to imagine people no longer dressing to a specific gender, but towards whichever look takes their fancy. Of course some people have their own view on the mixing up gender-specific clothes, but it is obvious that you just can't avoid the changes.

Owing to the persistence of traditional ideas of masculinity, one can imagine that, on the whole, men are usually far more reluctant than women to think outside the gender box, sartorially speaking. Nonetheless, I decided to construct a survey focusing on couples sharing their clothes, in order to see to what extent people are ready for unisex fashion. The results are unsurprising in some ways, but they do paint a picture of progress, and indicate that for women at least, an enormous range of styles are opening up.

First, though, I decided to interview an expert on the subject, *Anna Guseynova*, a fashion blogger originally from Russia, living in London. With nearly 5,000 Instagram followers and an ultra-modern wardrobe, Anna lives right on the cutting-edge of female fashion. Even more excitingly, she has a husband with similar body measurements to her, and a comparable fashion sense. I asked her all about her style, and her wardrobe-raiding prowess...

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How important is fashion in your relationship?

I would not say that it is the most important aspect of our relationship, but it is a good way of doing or discussing something together. We love to talk about fashion, new trends, looking forward to fashion shows and choosing the pieces which we like. It keeps us on the same page. I believe fashion makes us closer, as we always have an interest which both of us are equally involved in and passionate about. It is crucial in any relationship to have some of the same interests, and fashion is one of them for us.

Tell me about your style, and how it compares to your partner's style.

To be honest I do not know how to describe my style, probably streetstyle mixed with some tailoring and classic pieces. I mainly wear black clothing, but keep on trying to incorporate some colour into my outfits. I love trendy clothing, like huge-shoulder blazers, ugly sneakers, very oversized bombers and hoodies. For everyday life – comfort is everything for me. You will rarely see me wearing heels or a bodycon dress. Layering is one of my favorite trends; this is where I can incorporate a lot of my husband's pieces.

My husband's style is similar to mine but he loves tailoring mixed with sneakers. He is not a big fan of crazy pieces, such as oversized bombers, huge-shoulder clothing etc. I would say he has a more balanced sense of style, and I can go a bit crazy. However, he loves it on me. Moreover, he is much more selective and really cares about the quality of the item rather than the look, and I am the opposite.

Each of our wardrobes are reflections of both of us; we always choose pieces together and suggest to each other what looks good on us.

Why do you think it's important to share clothing for you and your partner?

First of all, why not? If clothing fits you and you love it, who cares if it is for men or women. The main thing is to feel good in what you are wearing. Nowadays, more and more brands are coming up with idea of menswear for women, for example Ami Paris (<https://www.amiparis.com/uk/menswearforwomen>).



Secondly, it will save money for couples; when both of you want to wear an expensive item, you end up saving money as you buy one instead of two. The only problem here might be the size; if your partner is completely opposite to your measurements, then this trick might not work. I can personally wear almost all the items from my husband's wardrobe. I just need a bit of imagination to make it work, sometimes; for example, if his pants are a little big in the waist, I will put a belt on and they are going to look super cool.

Last but not least it is very trendy. Sometimes, men's clothing looks even better on women than womenswear! Even before this trend was in, I would often go into the men's section of a brand collection first, as I loved how the items would fit me.

What are some of your favorite brands, in terms of chic unisex clothing?

I believe that the designer behind the brand is more important than the brand itself. So, my favorite designer is Demna Gvasalia; I believe he pioneered unisex fashion in both brands where he works: Vetements and Balenciaga. Vetements was a unisex brand from the start, where all genders can wear the same clothes - even sizes are very limited, as all items are oversized, which makes sense in unisex fashion. Balenciaga started to have the same items on the runway for men and women after Demna became the creative director of the brand.

I believe these two brands mostly stand out in unisex fashion because they never gender-segregate fashion shows, as more traditional brands such as Dior or Louis Vuitton usually do. Additionally, traditional brands tend to have two different in-house designers for male and female collections. Meanwhile Demna Gvasalia is the sole creative director of his brands.



New streetstyle brands such as Ambush, Y/Project, Heron Preston or Alyx are doing the same thing now, as it saves designers time as well as being a big trend. Additionally, there are a few brands which state that they are gender-neutral. The one that I love a lot is RAD HOURANI, which was established in 2007! So, unisex fashion was always here, even if not many understood it.

What makes a piece of clothing stand out to you?

How it fits. Fit and cut is everything in clothing. I love crazy details, padded shoulders, creative forms and unique design. It has to have something that screams "wow". Something that not everyone would wear.

Is there anything you or your partner wear that doesn't get worn by the other?

Mainly I wear his clothing, and I can put on everything from his wardrobe (pants, shirts, t-shirts, hoodies joggers, jackets, parkas, etc). He has very limited options to take from me - perhaps hoodies or oversized t-shirts - because of the size. Mostly we share hoodies, t-shirts and long-sleeve shirts, and a lot of them are from men's collections, as I love a loose fit on me and can go a few sizes up.

Do you ever suffer for fashion?

I would probably say no or never. For me, personally, fashion is a way to express yourself and enjoy it, not suffering from it in any way.

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Do you know any other couples with a similar arrangement?

Mainly guys are not into fashion, but I do know a few fashion couple bloggers, who do the same as us. Most of my friends' partners would not allow them to wear something from their wardrobe.

Do you think unisex fashion will be the norm in a few years?

Fashion always changes to keep us entertained. I do believe that it will be on the top of the game and then fade. However, true lovers of unisex style will always find ways to express themselves. We have to remember that fashion trends return every 25 years or so, therefore unisex fashion will be back soon or later. As mentioned earlier, unisex brands were always here and there's always been a market for them, but many people are now following the trends. It's just matter of time, advertisement and influence.





WHAT DO LONDONERS SAY?

And so to *SurveyMonkey*. With a few embellishments, I simply asked the public how often they would dip into their partners' wardrobes. Men, I found, were reluctant borrowers of female partners' clothing, but women were much more inclined to take their male partners' clothes and even wear them out of the house. I left the survey open to any adult respondent in order to make it seem less pointed, although I was much more interested in women's answers. I was, however, able to sort the answers by age, partner's gender and even clothing type.

Age	Male	Female
18-24	17	19
25-34	17	20
35-44	16	11
45-54	17	23
55-64	16	27
65+	12	6
Total	95	106

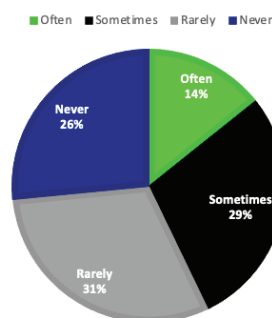
This is a fairly even spread of ages, with a slight comparative lack of female respondents from the 35-44 range, and it led to an interesting range of responses. As women were the focus of the survey it was good to have slightly more female responses than male ones!

Of the 95 male respondents, the declared partner was female 79 times, and male 16 times. Of the 106 female respondents, the partner was male 98 times, female 6 times, and other or gender-neutral twice. Our interest largely rests in the answers of women with male partners, as we are looking to see the extent to which women are wearing men's clothing in order to be fashionable, but there is also an interest in the men with female partner's answers (as there

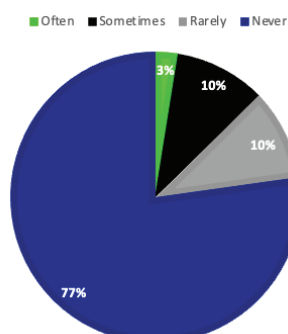
is much more of a social stigma in men wearing typical women's clothing than the reverse). The gay respondents will be looked at briefly, although of course there is less interest here as we are principally looking at inter-gender clothes wearing and especially women wearing men's clothes.

And so here was the big question: how often do you wear your partner's clothes? I decided to break it down by relationship type, with a focus on straight relationships. Here's what I found.

Female with male partner



Male with female partner



From this, we can determine a few things. Given the relatively even age demographic split of respondents, it would be appropriate to conclude that younger generations of women are clearly more inclined to wear their male partner's clothes on a regular basis, whereas men of all ages seem equally reluctant to wear their female partner's clothes at all. That said, excepting the highest age bracket, women of all ages did seem roughly equal in the 'Sometimes' and 'Rarely' categories, inviting the conclusion that gender, rather than age, is the biggest barrier to wearing partner's clothes at all. It will be interesting to examine whether there are definable lifestyle trends that have provoked such a comparatively large number of 'Often' answers amongst younger women.

In terms of gay relationships, one would expect a much higher prevalence of clothes-sharing, and for men it certainly proved so, with 4 of 16 respondents answering 'often', 5 'sometimes', 2 'rarely' and 5 'never' - a far higher positive response than their straight-relationship counterparts. Of 6 female-with-female-partner respondents, 2 said 'often', 1 'sometimes', 1 'rarely' and 2 'never', which correspond quite closely to what women as a whole were saying. This reveals what was suspected: that straight men, especially older straight men, are the demographic least likely to wear their partner's clothes, and women are generally far more open to doing so regardless of sexuality.

I then wanted to find out a bit more about the clothing types shared by respondents. These answers are more notable for their gender disparities than their age disparities, although it is certainly notable how younger women were more inclined to borrow fashion items like jackets, sportswear or sweatshirts as opposed to more practical items like t-shirts.

Women with male partners only:

Female age	T-shirts	Sweatshirts/hoodies	Jeans/pants	Shirts/flannels	Jackets	Sportswear
18-24	4	9	2	7	2	7
25-34	6	2	6	11	4	3
35-44	2	2	0	3	1	3
45-54	7	4	2	5	2	5
55-64	11	2	2	7	0	0
65+	2	1	1	1	0	2



Men with female partners only:

Male age	T-shirts	Sweatshirts/hoodies	Jeans/pants	Shirts/flannels	Jackets	Sportswear
18-24	3	1	2	1	0	4
25-34	3	3	3	3	1	5
35-44	2	2	2	1	1	2
45-54	1	2	6	0	0	0
55-64	0	0	3	0	0	0
65+	0	0	1	0	0	0

It is no surprise that the most-borrowed item for women was shirts and flannels, which arguably bridge the gap between fashion and practicality more than any other item on the list, and no surprise that of the men that did say they'd borrow women's clothes, jeans and pants were the most coveted item, being possibly the most naturally unisex on the list.

I then asked whether respondents would wear these borrowed clothes out of the house, which led to a curious disparity, as far more men than had said they would wear their partner's clothes at all answered 'Yes' to this question, perhaps misinterpreting the question as to whether they'd wear any clothes out of the house. A more charitable reading is that they were answering in the abstract and simply saying that if they could wear their partner's clothes out, they would; we cannot rule out the possibility that for a lot of these men, their failure to delve into their partners' wardrobes was not aesthetic but practical, as their partners would have frequently been much smaller than them. 51 men said they would wear their partner's clothes out of the house, as opposed to 60; 4 men said 'maybe', as opposed to 16 women, and 40 men said 'no', as opposed to only 30 women. A pattern emerges here - women slightly more likely than men to wear their partner's clothes out of the house.



When discussing the prevalence of unisex clothing, women mostly said that fashion did not influence their personal choices, that it was the comfort and loose fit of men's clothes that appealed to them, that it is often easier to choose between men's clothes, and that you can save money by sharing clothes with your partner. In addition, some of the women mentioned that men's clothes often have a higher quality of production.

Women were also much more likely to discuss unisex clothing as a means for gender-neutral or non-conforming people to find a way to express themselves through their clothes without feeling put into a box. One younger contributor who sometimes wore her partner's clothes stated how "fashion is not this or that; it is a combination of many things, and I think people are realizing that gender conformity is not in, confidence is". An older woman who often wears her partner's clothes added that "[unisex] clothes could be worn by both females and males without people judging them, and it's kinda sexy to wear your boyfriend's clothes." There were several other comments from women, and especially but not exclusively younger women, which celebrated unisex fashion both as a method of inclusion and one of hedonistic transgression. It was emphasised repeatedly that both gender is becoming increasingly blurred, and that clothes themselves need have no gender.

Men who answered the question were far less inclined to talk about gender-neutrality or the thrill of wearing a partner's clothing, seeming much more repressed and conservative in their responses.

The general reasons given for the spread of unisex clothing were practical and concerned the physical comfort of the garments; a few men also put it down to the fashion industry telling people what to wear, which is an unfortunate and slightly backward analysis. One younger man who even admitted to sometimes wearing his partner's clothes even said that "Tv tells us what's in", ignoring the wider cultural movements that have brought about this moment. Another slightly older man who never wears his partner's clothes (but would if they looked 'more gender neutral') expressed a common cynicism: that the clothing companies are releasing unisex ranges "to make more money and increase buying options for men". The duty to provide more choice for potentially marginalised demographics was not a common consideration here.

Overall, it seems that women go through their boy-friends' wardrobes far more often than the reverse, and while there are practical reasons for this, it may well be that if women start naturally wearing a lot more gender-neutral, loose-fitting garments, their partners will no longer be able to resist the allure of The Raid. And this is one area where fashion certainly seems to be catching up fast. Perhaps the next twenty years will see some remarkable developments in clothes-sharing norms; I certainly wouldn't bet against it. Although it must be said, my own partner is twice my size, so even if we wanted to share clothes, we really couldn't! We'll simply have to find our own unisex couturiers...

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