

FASHION

Why clothes will always reveal our naked truths

'It's impossible to say nothing about your personality through your attire', say the authors of a new fashion book

It's a Sunday afternoon in late September, and Leanne Shapton and Heidi Julavits, the authors (together with Sheila Heti) of *Women in Clothes*, are sitting in Shapton's apartment in Greenwich Village, New York, holding true to their preference to under- rather than over-dress. Jeans, T-shirts and casual tops – nothing showy – are the order of this late summer's day.

Women in Clothes is their survey of the fashion preferences of 639 women, of different ages, social classes from around the world. While a small percentage of women professed not to care about clothes, says Julavits, "Most of us live in a world where we must wear clothes in order to leave the house and interact with other humans. So we wanted to look at what guides our decisions."

Celebrities and artists (including Kim Gordon, Molly Ringwald and Tavi Gevinson) contributed to this idiosyncratic book.

Shapton and Julavits argue that women in the public eye are judged harshly for what they wear. "In the case of politicians," Shapton says, "it's fair that so many have a uniform that, while potentially derided, allows them to not worry about it and get on with their jobs. I also love that the Duchess of Cambridge wears the same, relatively inexpensive things over and over again, and that a royal being seen in the same outfit two or three times these days can be admired and respected."



Heidi Julavits (left) and Leanne Shapton, photographed for the Observer New Review by Linus Sundahl-Djerf.

Yet fashion is often seen as trivial. "It depends on how meaningful it is to a person," says Shapton. "Many men and women don't want to be seen to care about clothes even when they do." The question then is, "If you don't care, why do you not care, and how does that inform your choice of clothes?"

It is "impossible", says Julavits, to say nothing about your personality through your attire. "I used to

frequent nude hot springs in northern California, and it was always so shocking to see people who I'd only known clothesless suddenly in their clothes, and how much more naked they seemed when dressed."

The range of testimonies in *Women in Clothes* is impressive. The transgender journalist Juliet Jacques speaks about how she learned to dress like a woman at 28, and there is an interview with Reba Sikder,

a Bangladeshi factory worker who survived the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse in which 1,100 garment workers died.

Girls creator Lena Dunham says that with clothes she tries to become a character: "schoolgirl, new lesbian, lapsed nun, Miami mistress". Shapton agrees that getting dressed can be a performance: "It might be a whispered one-liner, or a charade."

And clothes maketh the woman, every bit as they do the man.

"Clothing is a wonderful object to use as a prism through which one's personality can fall," adds co-author Sheila Heti in a later email exchange, "simply because it's an object everyone has to contend with. Everyone gets dressed." **Tim Teeman**

Women in Clothes is out on Thursday (Penguin, £24). To buy a copy for £19.20, including free UK p&tp, call 0330 333 6846 or visit guardianbookshop.co.uk

ON MY RADAR Yotam Ottolenghi's cultural highlights

Israeli-born chef Yotam Ottolenghi studied for an MA in philosophy and literature before training at Le Cordon Bleu in London. In 2002, he teamed up with Noam Bar and Sami Tamimi to open the first Ottolenghi deli in Notting Hill, followed by further branches in Islington, Kensington and Belgravia and the restaurant, NOPI. Ottolenghi has presented several TV series and seen his vegetarian



Theatre



NT Live: A Streetcar Named Desire
The performance of a lifetime from Gillian Anderson. The staging in the round, the energy of

Architecture



Granary Square, King's Cross, London
This is one of the most wonderful things that has happened to London since I've been here. It's very

TV



Homeland
Homeland has brilliant acting, great suspense – it's what you want from television. With *House of Cards*, I watched the whole

Restaurant



Spring
This is Skye Gyngell's new restaurant at Somerset House, which opens in October. Skye has been away from the food scene

Place



Northern cities
I've lived in the UK for many years but haven't explored the north as much as I want to. Sheffield, Liverpool and Edinburgh are all

Book



The Baking Bible by Rose Levy Beranbaum
The Baking Bible is out this October, and in my kitchen very soon after that. Rose Levy Beranbaum sets the