

Women & Clothes. Discuss.

What rules do you follow? Which do you break? And how do you know when you've nailed it? Three writers asked 600 women (and themselves) these questions for the buzzy new book *Women in Clothes*—excerpted exclusively here.

By Sheila Heti, Heidi Julavits, and Leanne Shapton

Photographs by **Tom Schirmacher**

Styled by **Jennifer Hitzges**

Sheila's story: I wanted to *think* like stylish women.

Until the past year, I never put much thought into what I wear. I bought my silk, 1930s ivory-colored wedding dress in about half an hour, made impatient by the task. I wore black shoes, which hardly matched but were in my closet already.

A few years after my divorce, I began living with a man who cares a lot about clothes. I had never seen what that looks like up close. I'd always assumed the well-dressed just happened to be that way. But living with my boyfriend, I began to see that dressing is like everything else: Those who do it well do so because they spend some time thinking about it.

One day I decided: Today is the day I'm going to figure out how to dress. I biked to a bookstore and went to the section where there were fashion and style books, looking for one that would tell me what women thought about as they got dressed. There were books about Audrey Hepburn and books filled with fashion photography, but nothing that felt useful; I wanted to think like stylish women, not simply imitate the way they appeared. I decided to email questions to some of the women I knew whose fashion sense interested me; questions like, "What is your process getting dressed in the morning?"

I loved reading the answers. Soon my friends Heidi and Leanne and I began to talk about making it all into a book. We decided to post a survey online for women in many countries to respond to—and we interviewed dozens more and asked others to con-

tribute photos, conversations, and artwork to illustrate their own thoughts on clothes.

After all that, I felt I approached shopping and dressing differently. Although I think that most women want to be unique—a creature unlike any other—the voices of these various women became part of me. They inspired me to approach how I dress in a way that makes me feel like I've started over—in the best possible way, and in the company of some amazing people. —*Sheila Heti*

Heidi's story: I found my look by watching others.

I don't check out men on the street; I check out women. I'm always checking out women because I love stories, and women in clothes tell stories. For years I watched other women in order to learn how I might someday be a woman with a story.

Even when I was very young, I knew I wanted to be a writer, and I wanted to be stylish. I grew up in a house that was adjacent to a private school I didn't attend. Those girls, and the clothing they wore, told stories about places I couldn't get to from my yard. To understand their style was to be a tourist in the habits and traditions of a strange world. To watch them was not terribly different from reading a book.

From them I learned that style isn't what you wear, it's *how* you wear it. I learned from watching one girl that I could wear my big wool sweaters inside out so that the threads and seams were revealed. I learned from another girl that instead of tying

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The women (and clothes!) behind *Women in Clothes*
From left: coauthors Shapton in Hellessy, Heti in Tory Burch and a Hirotaka necklace, and Julavits in Asos with Anna Sheffield bracelets. **See Glamour Shopper for more information.**

my anorak's arms around my waist when I wasn't wearing it, I could tie it with one arm over one shoulder and one arm under the other, so that the sleeves crossed my chest diagonally.

But style, I also learned, is not strictly about copying others, because style is nontransferable. There are simply too many variables. I once followed a woman down the street in New York. She wore white clogs and a flowered head scarf and a long skirt. She had high cheekbones and a long neck; she looked like an early-twentieth-century immigrant from Eastern Europe who'd just arrived at Ellis Island—though, of course, she was probably an artist who lived in Brooklyn. I loved this woman's style, but I knew I could never pull off a head scarf—my cheekbones aren't high enough, my neck is too short.

But the white clogs? Those could contribute a small and beneficial mutation to my existing wardrobe. I bought a pair. Twelve years later, I wear them still. —*Heidi Julavits*

Leanne's story: I realized, we all agonize.

I took my first cues on how to dress from my brother and drawings from children's books. When I got to be a teenager, I took ideas from movies. Other girls seemed to know more than I did. I had subscriptions to *Seventeen* and *Sassy* and loved them, but could not relate to what I saw inside. Then, at 28, I had a minor but memorable epiphany when I bought a bikini with a fellow tomboyish friend. A magazine never could have convinced me to buy a bikini, but the afternoon I shared with this friend did.

When I started dating my future husband, I was curious about why he was interested in me, because many of the women he had dated before were either fashion editors, models, or socialites, women who knew how to put themselves together. During our first years together, he bought me designer clothes, which I wore uneasily.

For the next seven years, I studied fashion magazines and met designers and muses and terrifically photogenic people and went to fashion parties and the Oscars and the Met Ball and places where what women wear is noticed, noted, and written about. At these parties there was constant gushing about style and beauty and power. But to me, only a handful of people looked truly great.

After those years of observation, I still dress as I always have—in used men's clothes and lots of vintage—but now I can afford better vintage and can appreciate great design after paying attention to it. I still cut up fashion magazines, responding to what I'm drawn to, and I paste these clippings into scrapbooks. We're surrounded by tons of imagery daily that says: Here are things you should admire, and things you can do to mask your insecurities and your body, and you should not admit to feeling weird about this stuff. But there's some relief in saying, "Yeah, I'm anxious about how I look." We've all felt intimidated or scared or nervous about what we're wearing; we've all felt judged by or judgmental of others. Admitting that is a relief. We can laugh about it. —*Leanne Shapton*

The Things They Said

Women of all shapes, sizes, and ages responded to the authors' survey. Here are some of Glamour's favorite answers.

Is there an **article of clothing or an accessory** that you carry or wear every day?

"My wedding rings."

"Liquid eyeliner."

"Red lipstick."

"Bobby pins. I have unruly red, curly hair that occasionally requires help!"

"Céline bag, Clé de Peau concealer."

"My medical bracelet."

"Underwear and my phone."

"A gold bracelet, my watch, and groomed eyebrows."

"Earrings. Without them, I feel bereft."

"A smile is the best accessory."

Who'd you learn **your style** from?

"My mother had me perpetually covered in tulle for the first two years of my life. When my father went to prison, she refused to adjust the way she dressed me and my brother. As a single mother, she sacrificed a lot of resources so her children never 'looked' poor—even if we were." —*Ashley Cassandra Ford*

"I remember as a little girl telling my dad I thought a friend's mom was beautiful. I told him how I loved her amazing green leather trousers. He rolled his eyes and said that green leather pants did not equal beauty." —*Sheila Ray Coleman*

"My mom says, 'If you see a cashmere sweater, buy it.' It's good advice. I wear my three cashmere sweaters more than anything else. She says the same thing about extension cords." —*Gillian Schwartz*

What's the **fashion rule** you live by?

"If it's over a hundred bucks, wait 24 hours. Money is freedom. Don't give away your freedom for assimilation." —*Amy Turner*

"You'll never look like you've fallen apart completely if you're wearing a good pair of shoes." —*Sasha Gora*

And the **everyday secret** that helps you get dressed?

"Curate rather than shop. Your wardrobe should be a collection of beloved pieces you wear for decades." —*Liane Balaban*

"The smartest thing I ever did was hang 24 hooks along my wall. That's where my most-worn clothes live. Sure, it looks like a hallway at a primary school, but it keeps my stuff off the floor." —*Trish Kaliciak*

"Wear whatever makes you feel right. Wear what you can wear on a bicycle. Wear what you can run in or survive in if necessary." —*Margaux Williamson*

"When wearing a skirt or slacks, I often tuck my shirt into my underwear. It's a trick my mother taught me to hold shirts in place." —*Audrey Gelman*

"I think it's helpful to take a picture of yourself in the clothing you plan to wear to a wedding or reunion, any event where you especially care about your appearance. What we see in the mirror is not how we really look." —*Nichole Delafield-Bromme*

How do you show your **style at work?**

"My world is hospice patients. I want to present professionalism, warmth, and cleanliness, but also a style that sets me apart from other nurses. Whether that means matching clogs or the latest scrubs, I hope they remember me not just for what I do but because I left a positive impression by the way I dressed. People do notice. Even very sick ones." —*Ana Zir*

"Sometimes I feel like no matter how I present myself, I look threatening. I think it's just because I'm a black woman. So sometimes I try to dress to seem more approachable. Like for job interviews, I tend to wear lighter colors, even though I don't really feel it in my soul." —*Alesia Pullins*

"I work in technology, where there are very few women in power positions. It's cool for dudes to wear flip-flops and T-shirts, but I've found that it really helps me project authority when I dress up slightly. It's strange that dressing down can signal power for men, but never for women." —*Rebecca Ackermann*

How do you approach **shopping?**

"I avoid buying clothes when I have a sense of desperate need, in the same way I avoid the supermarket on an empty stomach." —*Blaine Harper*

"Buy the dress. The place to wear it will follow." —*Amy Turner*

When was the first time you were **conscious of what you were wearing?**

"I was four, wearing a dress from my grandmother. I loved her but hated that dress." —*Claire Cottrell*


"As a kid, I tied a piece of a T-shirt to my shoe, thinking it was Pippi Longstocking-influenced shabby chic. Classmates made fun of me." —*Gabrielle Bell*

"I was four years old and unable to choose between a yellow and a pink pair of underwear, so I wore them right on top of each other. Now I'm an underwear designer." —*Daphne Javitch*

Complete this sentence: **I feel most attractive when...**

"I'm dirty from hard work. No matter how nicely I dress up, I never feel as attractive as I do when I'm covered with paint." —*Stephanie Avery*

"In the morning I walk to the bathroom in underpants and a T-shirt. I see my body in the mirror, and this thought always pops up: You are skinnier than you think." —*Petra Kruijt*

 Why'd you pick the outfit you have on today? Tell us at glamour.com/magazine.

Your Mom's Look

...and what it says to you



"This is a picture of my mother in Palm Beach, Queensland, in 1979. She is the brunette. Her sister, the blond, would die of cancer at age 16, soon after this picture was taken. The cancer metastasized from the thin brown right arm in the foreground. My mother sometimes looks at this picture and tries to find evidence of the cancer inside but can't. Every summer they would buy matching bikinis and flirt with surfers together." —*Madeline Stack, daughter of Claire Griffin*



"My mum is about 20 years old here, in the late 1960s. She looks so young, innocent, and carefree because she had just finished school; she hadn't even started work or met my father. Look at her fashionable flared pants matched with the stylish watch and groovy sandals. My mother is great at putting together an outfit. In this photo I see so much potential and a bright future for her." —*Chang Shin Yen, daughter of Bernadette Chee Gek Kheng*



"Here I see a woman who is confident in a way that doesn't require adornment. My mother looks like a woman who is not afraid to fall down and make mistakes, a woman who is confident and self-assured in a way that's evident in her dress. Her hair is pulled back, her earrings are simple clip-ons. She's beautiful without trying to be. You can see it in the dip of her clavicle, the angles of her jaw. Her life was just beginning; she looks like a woman ready to face the challenges and opportunities the world had to offer." —*Lydia Johnson, daughter of Lynne Harris*



"This is my mom in her twenties, during her hippie phase. She died in 1997, so this photo makes me feel a lot of complicated things—sad, admiring, curious. I mostly take after my dad, and my mom was always this glamorous figure to me growing up. When she was young, she resembled Brigitte Bardot; I resemble the nineties cartoon Daria. I'll never manage to re-create her beauty, but I do examine her photos for traces of me." —*Jenn Croll, daughter of Judy Campe*



"My mom was a dancer before she became an artist—and an artist before she became a mother. I love looking at this photo. Pure fancy and flight. She is literally flying through the air! I see so much joy as she uses her body. It also makes me feel a little jealous." —*Joana Avilez, daughter of Gwenn Thomas*



"When I look at this picture, I see a beautiful woman who spent her life completely unaware of that fact." —*Jeanie Kimber, daughter of Mildred Wolsky Steinbock*

Sheila Heti, Heidi Julavits, and Leanne Shapton are the authors of Women in Clothes, out from Blue Rider Press on September 4.