

CLOSET CASES

QUEERS ON WHAT WE WEAR

MEGAN VOLPERT



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sartorial: relating to tailoring, clothes, or style of dress

satori: sudden enlightenment

This book is dedicated to queers in closets everywhere.

Our boots have blood on them. Our struggle to find the perfect shirt is real. Our conflicting feelings about the color pink are valid. May our bodies not feel like emergencies. May our clothes not shrink in the wash. May the fierceness of these contributors help us all to open the closet door and step into a more fabulous future.



SUMMER OUTING

my mom told me to wear more pink
more jewelry: jīn;
to pray more to jesus
m o r e—
so i sent her this photo;
[Read 3:16pm]
[Read Yesterday 3:16pm]
[Read 07/04/18 3:16pm]

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pink, jīn, jesus, jender
i am m o r e of everything
and enough for me.

AIRIN YUNG is a queer, trans, non-binary individual passionate about diversifying the practice of law. Though their career is focused on health law and policy in Washington, D.C., they are, at heart, a musician and performer from the San Francisco Bay Area.



LUCAS WILDNER is a poet, essayist, and teacher in southern King County, Washington. His current project examines the relationships between internalized homophobia and white privilege. Recent and forthcoming work lives at *Night Music Journal*, *Honey and Lime*, *Nice Cage*, *birds piled loosely*, and elsewhere.

BIND

This started because I didn't want the hall monitors to ask me for my pass again. An incident after filling out paperwork that triggered imposter syndrome about my first school year. Until the final traces of boyhood burned away, leaving a white-collar professional in his wake, I would wear a tie to school. Every day.

The effects were widespread. I earned Sirs in the cereal aisle after work and polite handshakes from parents at conferences.

Was I attempting to pass as straight? I took advantage of a legible masculinity: once, students played matchmaker, discussing which of the three single women in the faculty I would be most compatible with. Success!

Yes, I hated myself. Worse, I feared being fired if I came out—an internalized homophobia that equated gays with pedophiles.

In class, we'd discuss how a speaker needed to set up a persona to engage their audience—to share belief in common values. I had reached for easy symbolism, a hetero-patriarchal costume. Anyone could walk in and find the teacher in seconds.

A baby gay, I hadn't yet examined why I felt normative masculinity was the prerequisite for respectability, for good teaching. Mr. Wildner was straight, cis, white. Safe.

Thankfully, the internet broke him. My poems—often glittery—began to float up to the surface whenever bored students typed in my name. A few reached out in appreciation. The haters—fearing an F or whatever other ludicrous punishment I would mete out—stayed quiet, or complained to administration, who did not bother to pass along their concerns. I got lucky.

In year three, I gave myself permission to buy a gay tie—cream with a hot pink unicorn. Not the subtlest choice, but liberation fills self-loathing's vacuum. It was a step toward queering my understanding of tricky pedagogical concepts—what allows different students to trust and respect a teacher? What ideas about adulthood/masculinity/sexuality was I modeling?

A master's tool with a half-Windsor knot is still a master's tool. These days, in my *Magneto* was *right* era, I wish I had bought a dress.

**MY GENDER IS**

Matching nail polish and bow tie
Power tool for jewelry making
Boyband choreography at sunset
Turquoise glitter eyebrows
Pinstripes and floral print
Suit vest under denim vest
Single earring on whichever side is the gayest
Suspenders worn like a harness
Ferns and passion flowers
Fae time traveler
Daddy in a skirt
Trinity knot and other fancy twists
Gold sequin high-waisted shorts with a bulge
Plaid on plaid on plaid
Backpack and newsies cap
Being mistaken for a 16-year-old boy by the small-town librarian
Houndstooth pants and purple hiking boots
Electric violin curled against my shoulder
Dyke Faggot Genderqueer
Stripy fingerless gloves
Flannel giraffe sheets
Banjolele strung on a rainbow
Spaceships and dinosaurs

90s Nickelodeon sweatpants
Tie clips and red slips
Flagging with fruit fabric to an interview for a fruit tree pruning company
Magenta wool fedora, cocky and cocked
Dapper dandy non-profit professional
Magical changeling
Lightning bolts and boner jokes
Writing a sci-fi musical about unicorns and capitalism
Well-earned silver glitter in hair flip and tails
Playroom of costumes and mirrors
Selfies for days
Coveralls on the weekends
Summer of mesh
Flogography and flowcharts
Infinity scarf made of recycled sweaters
Sandcastles decorated with wood, stone, shell, and feathers
Eyeliner and glitter beards
Aqua-lined suit from a production of *The Music Man*
Dandelion growing out of gravel

MAX VOLTAGE is a Portland-based genderqueer musician, writer, performer, choreographer, playwright, and producer. Max's queer camp artist sensibilities and radical politics were forged in the world of drag, but their fascination with gender, costumes, and performance has been lifelong. Max is the creator of *Reclaiming Pink*, a one-homo-show about gender; *Homomentum*, a satirical post-earth sci-fi musical; and *Turnback Boyz*, a time-traveling queer boyband, where they play Peter Pansy, a glam-dandy fiddler from the future. Max is a classically trained violinist and uses a loop station to compose and perform as a solo artist and with their band Sparkle & Truth.



WATCHDOG

Time is against us is how most queers feel. We're always waiting for the other shoe. Even watching a polite and tidy sitcom like *Will and Grace*, I catch myself thinking Jack's going to get the shit beat out of him any day now. Or AIDS, or jail, or homelessness. I have two openly queer friends who work in high schools like I do. They both retired this year. The way we counted those days down you'd think we were in NYC for NYE 1999. If you're queer and you finish out your career by natural means instead of getting fired, that's living the dream.

The Timex Weekender is a cheap dial that makes a big sound. Tick tick tick. All the time. Time was coming hard for me and I started running. Worked faster. Thought faster. Stopped for no one. Accomplishments as far as the eye could see. This ten-dollar watch ran me. I couldn't stand it and gave the watch away a few days after I put it on, by which time it had aged me several months. A lot of other things happened over many more moons and I survived them all. The person I am now meditates about twenty minutes a day. Every day, tapping the ancestors.

You know what they say? Tick tick tick. How precious it is to finally respect a few of one's elders. How invigorating to have lasted one more minute in this queer body in this strange life. How brave to simply keep showing up and how aggravating for the other bastards that one's accomplishments keep aggregating. Also accumulating are a diverse bunch of watch bands, because I ponied up another ten bucks to reclaim my Timex. The person I am now happily straps on this constant reminder to hold steady.

Sometimes in a contentious meeting my admin will sit back in his chair and I can almost see him calculating whether this is the hill I die on. It never has been so far. And while he's thinking about it in the hostile silence of the conference room, I'm telegraphing him that queer agenda: tick tick tick.

MEGAN VOLPERT is proud to have edited this anthology. She is the author of many books on popular culture, including two Lambda Literary Award finalists, a Georgia Author of the Year finalist, and an American Library Association honoree. Her newest work is *Boss Broad* (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2019). She has been teaching high school English in Atlanta for over a decade and was 2014 Teacher of the Year. She writes for *PopMatters* and has edited anthologies of philosophical essays on the music of Tom Petty and the television series *RuPaul's Drag Race*.



PARRISH TURNER is a queer essayist and editor who hails from Georgia. His writing focuses on gender, sexuality, spirituality, regionality, and more. Turner's work has been featured on *Buzzfeed*, *Slate*, *Culture Trip*, *Gertrude Press*, and *The Rumpus*. With his fellow playwrights, he was honored with the Metro Atlanta Theater award for his work on the musical *By Wheel and By Wing*. Turner was a 2014 Lambda Literary Fellow and received his MFA from The New School in 2017. He is currently working as a freelancer based in Brooklyn and is always on the lookout for a great cup of tea.

Photo by Juno Rosenhaus.

YES . . . I'M STILL A GIRL SCOUT

My best clothes come to me. I rarely shop for clothing and usually have an eye more for utility than style. But when something finds its way into my possession, I know it is serious. So when my roommate Jourdan burst into my room, excited from her thrifting trip, I was open.

"We found the perfect shirt for you. Well, it was between this and a yellow shirt with a cursive 'butch,' but we were on the fence about that one," she blurted as she pulled out a shapeless and worn blue t-shirt. Yes... *I'm still a girl scout!* the shirt read with a cartoon elderly woman.

It only took a few years on testosterone for people to begin looking surprised when I mentioned that I was transgender. Reactions ranged from utter shock to concern about any help I might need on this upcoming change, apparently forgetting that people go the "other" direction. While affirming, I felt something disappearing as I began to blend in.

I am either a member of the Scouts or the Girl Scouts, depending on who I talk to and how much I want them to know. I was a Girl Scout for 12 years, earning my Gold Award (significantly more difficult than the Eagle Scout Award), and was gifted a lifetime membership to the Girl Scouts of America for my efforts. This huge part of my life must be glossed over or navigated deftly, lest I misrepresent my current self to those not able to handle nuance.

But this t-shirt was the answer to my prayers. I lopped the sleeves off and found myself wearing the tank everywhere. It is a wink and a smile to those who bother to read it and a nod to those who pick up on its layers of meaning. Plus, it makes me feel sexy.



Jackets are my staple, my security blanket covering almost every favorite outfit that I style for myself. I put one on and slip into a dose of confidence. As a femme, I struggle with the in-between of feeling masculine and feminine the way I desire to. Jackets, to me, are essentially neutral and really can't be classified. I can put them with a dress and instantly make things comfier and more casual, and still have the sense of femininity. A good jacket find involves finding something that catches my eye and gets added to my mental wish list, at a thrift store or on clearance. I shop fairly green and those I like are pretty few and far between. That being said, I have been in a relationship with jackets for many years. They full on have their own closet in my house. I value them in my style more than any other item! And I am a woman of many clothes. Summers are hard for me as you can imagine. Torey in the summer feels strange, style-wise, a lot of the time, constantly wishing and waiting for that day the air drops a little cooler and I can take advantage to throw on one of my jackets, like this very loved denim!

TOREY TOMSOVIC is 26. Queer. Femme. Cis woman. Midwestern.



My mother loved to travel. In 1973, soon after Nixon opened the door to China, my parents went there. One of the things they brought back was this hand-embroidered silk coat. I have been wearing it on special occasions for more than 40 years. The coat may be in better shape than I am. In this photograph, I am wearing it on Christmas Eve, 2018, aboard a ship in the Gulf of Thailand.

By happenstance, there were at least forty-five LGBTQ+ people on this cruise ship. We found each other within a couple of days of leaving Singapore and met each evening for drinks and laughs. On Christmas Eve, we all sat together in the dining room.

I bought the pearls I'm wearing at the Ben Thanh Market in Saigon (that's what locals still seem to call it, not Ho Chi Minh City). Two of the couples and I had signed up for a one-day cooking course with a chef at the Rex Hotel. We were at the market selecting ingredients when I spotted the pearl dealers. I have a "thing" for pearls. I have nineteen pearl necklaces of various lengths, sizes, and quality. My fashion inspiration in this regard is Queen Elizabeth I. Now *those* are pearls.

ANNA SEQUOIA is the author of ten nonfiction books, including the animal rights classic *67 Ways to Save the Animals* (Harper Perennial), and the best-selling humor book, *The Official J.A.P. Handbook* (N.A.L.). Anna has appeared on more than one hundred radio and television programs. A recent article about her cooking/entertaining dubbed her "the Jewish Martha Stewart." She is married to Una Fahy.



Dressing as a non-binary person is incredibly powerful, yet also an act of defiance. You are admitting to yourself that you are in full control of your gender identity, and the freedom that realisation provides makes you feel light and joyous.

By choosing to dress like this I am subverting all the binary gender assumptions and behaviours that have held most civilisations together for millennia. It must be noted that the defiance in wearing a dress does not go unnoticed or unpunished. I am subjected to a barrage of stares, personal comments, and anger from complete strangers, which by now I am aware comes with the territory.

One of my favourite garments is a dress. It says an awful lot about my gender identity, which sits very happily in the middle of the mélange of predicted gender assumptions and behaviours. A dress is very freeing for me, as typically this piece of cloth is regarded as female only; thus in donning this garment I am expressing my stance on myself and the world around me.

Day to day, I am not making a political statement or even trying to cause a reaction; I am just having fun in dressing as I feel. I don't believe there to be a greater feeling than a joyous outfit making you smile all day long, which this dress really does. Essentially, this dress is an extension of my sense of self and my personality right now.

This dress, in particular, is like a Madonna mega-mix—all the best things thrown together. All at once, it is amazing and just a little bit too much. Bringing sequins galore, a chintzy floral pattern that I find comforting, a tie neck that makes me feel so secure, and finally the all-important leg slit.

I adore the way this dress, and all dresses, make me feel. A true sense of freedom cannot be bought, but to me, a dress unlocks the ability to feel truly free in my soul, and for that, it is genuinely priceless and precious!

BEN PECHEY is a freelance writer, fashion critic, proud Leo, and LGBTQ+ activist in the United Kingdom. Growing up, they never saw or knew anybody like themselves. Now they are incredibly comfortable with who they are and are visibly present in society. They are existing and thriving as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. They hope that they can be the representation for people just like them, giving all the chance to feel the acceptance that they so often struggled to feel growing up.



I discovered *RuPaul's Drag Race* before I went to kindergarten. I said, "I want to do that!" I used random items around the house to create "drag" outfits. I used bed sheets, towels, cardboard, paper, ribbon, old shirts, curtains, etc. Now, I am still creating art fashion out of unique materials. I've made a dress, coat, and hat—all out of bubble wrap! I've used a tube top as a skirt and mesh ribbon as a necklace. For this photo, I cut pieces of craft felt into triangles and applied them under my eyes to create a brand new, modern accessory to go with my outfit.

I believe there is no wrong way to do drag. It is an art you can't put limits on. It goes beyond boundaries such as age, race, gender, identity, orientation, status, abilities, or disabilities. I feel best in drag when wearing bright colors and creating from unique items. For me, anything has the potential to be a really fab outfit. I've done "drag creature" outfits inspired by horror films and Hello Kitty. Never let anyone limit what you want to wear and always have fun! I have a blast watching people's reactions to me walking down the street. If what you're wearing doesn't make you smile, it's not fashion. If it doesn't make others smile too, it's not good fashion.

DESMOND NAPOLES (stage name: Desmond is Amazing) is a 12-year-old drag kid and LGBTQ+ advocate.



This look is essential Jamie. Statement making, comfortable, and a nod to vintage. I dress to take up visual space and to attract other weirdos in my life. As a fat and tall person, there is a societal pressure to blend into the background. I embrace my aesthetic: tacky regal and a bit ugly. Pink sequin boots, bright blue teddy jacket with faux fur trim over an animal print set in contrast to my near makeup-less face except for a swipe of lipstick and messy, dyed hair.

A friend pointed out to me that David Bowie wore a similar coat in the 1970s. And I wasn't surprised as Bowie has been my style inspiration since I first studied my parents' Bowie record covers at age eleven. A lot of 70s glam with a dose of space alien.

Queer visionary and artist GB Jones drew a picture of teenage Jamie. I was eighteen. I remember what I was wearing: blue combat boots, blue vinyl jacket, and dyed orange hair. The pencil drawing, however, was devoid of color in classic Jones style. The illustration was published in a book where the author described me as the super girl next door, which was pretty cool, but I'd like to think I've evolved into an electrifying fat femme from outer space.

JAMIE HAMILTON is a plus size style creative director known as Jamie JeTaime. She was featured in *InStyle Magazine* for her street style and named by MTV UK as an influencer to look out for in 2019. She regularly hosts body positive swim parties and currently lives in Tucson, Arizona.



MINDY DAWN FRIEDMAN is a gender non-conforming visual activist, proud auntie to those in need, and the founder of #BowTieWednesday at her place of work. Her bold fashion transgressions have graced the runway at New York Fashion Week and appeared in a handful of national ad campaigns.

THE ART OF THE BOW TIE

I used to wear pre-tied bow ties. I admit it. They are easy and flawless every time. When friends started commenting on my impeccable knotting, I had to either admit the truth or divert the conversation. Authenticity demanded I learn how to ‘master’ the self-tie bow tie.

Bow ties are the cape, the shield, the removed-Clark-Kent-glasses of my visual activism superhero identity. They carry an air of intellectualism, formality, nerdiness, and style acumen. Wearing a bow tie can be perceived as an aggressive lack of concern for what other people think. A woman in a bow tie subverts the gender paradigms of fashion even further. I remember the awe I felt the first time I saw an image of Marlene Dietrich in a bow tie and top hat. The quote below the photo read, “I dress for myself. Not for the image, not for the public, not for the fashion, not for men.”

I am no Marlene Dietrich. While I dress for myself first and foremost, I do dress for the image, the public, and to be visible. My bow ties offer a symbolic optimism that frequently provoke dialogue and connections with others—driving visibility, awareness, and social change.

After significant practice and frustration, I’ve achieved mastery of the art. No need for a mirror. I take pride in teaching and inspiring others. Personally, I prefer an imperfect knot, mostly as evidence that it was self-tied. It also tends to engage an occasional observer to kindly point out the imperfection, and when appropriate, offer to adjust it.

It’s not about being brave. It’s about being myself. It is about breaking arbitrary rules to make it easier for those who come after—so that they can fully realize their own identity, voice, and style.



As a noun, fashion is defined as a popular trend and as a verb its synonyms are construct, create, fabricate, make, and build. No matter the definition, the LGBTQ+ community has continued to use fashion as a way of self-expression, PRIDE, and resistance against hate. As a community that has been told that who we are doesn't fit the "normal" society in which we live or that we are less than because of our sexuality, we've found ways to live unapologetically through fashion.

I was born in Nigeria, where I remember mostly wearing dresses and skirts growing up. I don't remember being told I couldn't wear pants, but I had the understanding that women didn't wear pants. As I got older and lived in Spain with my aunt, I remember a specific outfit that I chose for myself, which consisted of a pair of baggy pants and a cropped tank top. I remember being so happy. I felt like my true self.

As I get older, I have found a balance between expressing my masculinity and femininity through fashion. Some days I like to wear dresses and some days I like to wear more masculine presenting, affirming clothing. I am discovering that I like leather, which I like to add as accessories. I also love wearing prints that speak to my African background. It all depends on how I feel that day. Whatever I'm feeling on the inside is how I like to present on the outside. In this image I wanted to show my hard femme vibes with a leather choker and a leather harness while wearing an extended long print t-shirt with some jeans. Those details I feel elevate my look.

The queer community thrives on authenticity; therefore, it is equally important for us to use fashion to express our identity, which we hold so dear. As time passes, it's become increasingly inspiring to see the evolution of the queer community's stamp and influence on the fashion world. I see mainstream brands adapting to what the queer community is doing and creating, to follow the trend. What makes us light up as individuals is our desire to be seen as our true selves and we are able to communicate that through fashion. We are not interested in fitting in, especially not in a world that decided to label us as outsiders. The more expressive an outfit is, the better! The bolder an outfit is, the better! The more colorful an outfit is, the better!

"The category is . . . LIVE!!!"

UZO EJKEME was born in Nigeria, lived in Spain for 4 years, then in New York for over 15 years before moving to Los Angeles, where she currently lives. One of her fondest memories growing up was her first haircut; that was the first time she felt like her true self represented in physical form.