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Pumps and Circumstance

Katia Jean Paul ruminates on the trends and the elements of style within the culture at large.



To Each His Own... Dress

by [Katia Jean Paul](#)
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Women routinely receive unsolicited opinions on their audacious sartorial choices from men. But when fashion-forward men dress in daring garb of their own, we are just as quick to judge. Pot, meet kettle.

8 Fashion Trends Guys Hate. Summer Fashion Trends that Turn Guys Off. 10 Things Women Wear that Men Hate. The wide expanse that is the Internet is replete with articles about the trends men despise, the sartorial currents that—we are told—are huge turn-offs for them. High-waisted anything, particularly bikini bottoms, are far too reminiscent of Grandma's knickers, they protest. Florals are no better because they evoke garish visions of the ghost of her curtains and tapestries past. And what of pantsuits, boyfriend jeans, button-up shirts, and just about anything straight out of men's own wardrobes? Well, they will have you know that these items don't belong anywhere near yours. Fashion-forward accoutrements like peplum, harem pants and the like aren't the only items causing men to furrow their brow. That "heavy" smoky eye, particularly the bright lipstick you've taken quite the liking to have got to go, they say, for fear **it might get all over them**. While **opinions are mixed**, there seems to be a shared vilification of the womenswear trends that defy one or both of the following ideals: youth and feminine beauty.

The idea that most—if not all—of our more daring sartorial choices don't appeal to the male sex is so pervasive, it inspired a blog: **the Man Repeller**. And that this same blog gained a massive following shortly after demonstrates an equally pervasive notion: we, as it turns out, don't dress for men, but rather for ourselves—and arguably other women—and therefore couldn't care less what the opposite sex thinks of our fashion inclinations.

It doesn't take much to realize that men opining on women's fashion choices and beauty tastes reeks of misogyny and old patriarchal mores. That some men believe your bright red lipstick will 'get on them' is presumptuous in that it presupposes that you engage in this beautifying ritual only to pander to the male gaze. Wanting women to show more skin (unbutton that button-up, will you!) while simultaneously showing none (a male friend once likened me wearing below-the-knee skirts to dressing like the Amish) is the Madonna-whore complex exemplified.

For all the time we spend rebuffing men's dictates about what we should and shouldn't wear, how baffling that we see no wrong in passing judgment on men's sartorial choices. Yet, with the increased popularity of unconventional menswear styles with fashion-forward gents of late, that's exactly what women have been doing.

A quick survey of street style blogs and fashion publications makes apparent that male fashion plates have taken to avant-garde dress: long shirts, **shorts over tights**, bold prints, ornamental detailing, bags and clutches, heeled shoes, and even skirts and kaftans. And no sooner did men adopt these dress-code-defying clothes that women voiced their disapproval.

"I prefer men who wear casual clothes and don't look like they've spent more than 10 minutes picking out what they're going to wear," Stephanie Trong, former Fashionista.com co-editor in chief, tells Lauren Sherman in the latest issue of *H&M* magazine. "If a guy dresses only to be admired, his sex appeal immediately dips to zero."



From left to right: A look from the Duckie Brown Spring-Summer 2014 collection; a man wears his coat draped over his shoulders, a popular womenswear trend; designer Marc Jacobs loves a good skirt.

Skirts, especially popular with fashionable men from Marc Jacobs to Kanye West, are especially contentious. But, ladies, a skirt is not and has never been the sole sartorial prerogative of women. "Men and women both wore skirts in ancient times," Valerie Steel, the director of the museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology told CBS news in 2006 when asked about the history of the skirt. "Once you had the initial idea of weaving a rectangle and tying it around yourself, you had basically the skirt. And if you look at say ancient, Egyptian paintings, you see men and women both wearing what's in effect a skirt."

Also, we should not be so quick to forget that men wore heels as much as women did as far back as 3500 B.C. And what of the emblematic Scottish kilt, a garment seeped in history and tradition, *and* a quintessential male insignia? If we go by historical and cultural accounts, **the skirt and other current sartorial markers of femininity are as masculine as they come**. "Akin to the Italian male kissing their brethren so affectionately on the cheek, there is something about men embracing traditions deemed feminine by North American standards that makes their machismo shine all the brighter," argues Zoe Lister-Jones in a Style.com piece titled, *Real Men Wear Skirts*.

We rightfully abhor the presumption that we dress to seduce the opposite sex. We justly object to being told how to dress. So why do we feel entitled to tell men what they can and cannot wear? Dressing to our hearts' content is our prerogative—and theirs.



Fashion, art, architecture, design, TV, and film: Katia Jean Paul is a Montreal-based writer who casts a critical eye on her many idées fixes, unearthing the aesthetic and cultural dimensions within each and every subject. / Follow Katia on Twitter: @KatiaJeanPaul

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