

contemporary

Fashion in the Present tense

Women's tailoring today continues to act as a powerful site of negotiation between femininity, masculinity, and androgyny.

Building on disruptive historical moments, its contemporary forms are shaped by female designers like Stella McCartney; who reinterpret the suit through a lens of inclusivity and cultural hybridity.

Fashion media and digital platforms, ranging from Vogue Runway to Instagram and TikTok, now mediate how these garments are perceived, blurring boundaries between streetwear, couture, and gender expression. And ongoing debates about inclusivity, sustainability, and cultural identity.

Tailoring reflects succession from its radical past while also facing new challenges brought about by digital culture, globalisation, and the rise of social media.

For younger audiences seeking to explore identity through fashion, these dynamics are especially significant, as they shape how tailoring and androgyny are both practiced and understood today.

Several contemporary female designers have been central to reimagining tailoring across menswear, womenswear, and androgynous fashion.

Grace Wales Bonner draws on Black British and African diaspora identities, combining embroidery and suiting with a non-prescriptive vision of gender. She notes that her womenswear remains rooted in tailoring:

‘That’s the core element of the brand ... it’s about how to incorporate that onto a woman’s body’

(Doyle, 2024)



figure 64. Grace Wales Bonner



figure 66.



figure 67.



figure 68.



figure 69.

Similarly, Emily Adams Bode, the first woman to show at New York Fashion Week: Men’s, builds collections from upcycled “masculine” fabrics with feminine handcrafts, producing adjustable, playful designs that appeal across genders (Lake, 2023).



figure 65. Emily Adams Bode



figure 70.



figure 71.



figure 72.



figure 73.

figure 74.



figure 76.



figure 77.



figure 80.



figure 75.



figure 82.



figure 79.



figure 78.



figure 81. Bianca Saunders



Bianca Saunders challenges tailoring's traditional association with masculinity by integrating softness and fluidity into sharp silhouettes. "

'The clothes can be for men, but women can also look at them and think they can wear them'

(FHCM, 2025)

She explains, highlighting tailoring's usefulness across gendered categories (FHCM, 2025).

figure 83. Martine Rose



Martine Rose pushes hybridity further through exaggerated proportions and playful remixes of menswear codes, embraced by both men and women. As she notes:

'I love playing with gender lines ... I find men in women's clothes sexy and I find women in men's clothes very sexy'

(Toner, 2023)

Finally, Gabriela Hearst places sustainability at the centre of her label, using menswear fabrics and tailored structures while emphasising eco-conscious practices (Hunt, 2024).

Collectively, these designers demonstrate tailoring's capacity for hybridity, where gender, craft, and culture are continuously remixed. For young people encountering fashion as a language of identity, such figures model new possibilities for self-expression.

figure 84. Gabriela Hearst



figure 88.



figure 87.



figure 89.



figure 90.

Beyond individual designers, several brands have translated tailored androgyny into mainstream womenswear.

Racil reinterprets Saint Laurent's Le Smoking, Blazé Milano adapts Italian blazers with feminine detailing, and The Frankie Shop has popularised oversized suits within minimalist fashion culture.

Heritage houses like Huntsman Savile Row and Gormley & Gamble now produce bespoke women's suits with the same precision as menswear, signalling tailoring's gradual but significant shift toward inclusivity.



figure 85. Racil

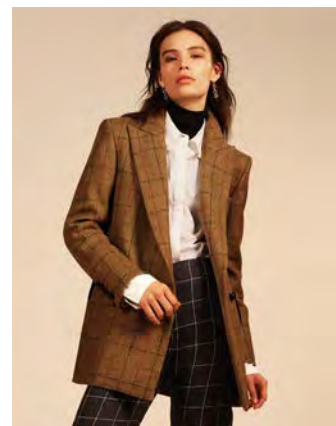


figure 86. Blazé Milano



figure 91. The Frankie Shop



figure 92. Huntsman

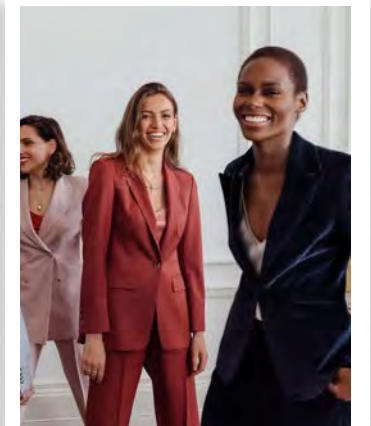


figure 93. Gormley and Gamble

Media representation continues to shape perceptions. Magazines such as Vogue and Harper's Bazaar regularly feature women in suits, but often reduce tailoring to "power dressing," framing it as a symbol of authority, success, or sexualised glamour.

Such portrayals narrow tailoring's possibilities, presenting androgyny as either ambition or subversion. By contrast, social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok democratise representation, amplifying trends such as "tomboy femme" a blend of masculine and feminine pieces into everyday outfits (Scott, 2024).

These platforms encourage fluid, playful approaches, though they also risk commodifying androgyny through fast-fashion cycles even as they promote thrift culture.

For younger audiences, this duality makes tailoring simultaneously more accessible and more vulnerable to commercial distortion.



figure 94. Victoria Beckham



figure 95. Lisa Vanderpump



figure 99. Elsa Hosk



figure 98. Amber Valletta



figure 96. Claudia Schiffer



figure 97. Kamala Harris



figure 100. Rosie Huntington-Whiteley

Contemporary debates highlight persistent challenges. Inclusivity remains a pressing concern: tailoring's precision fit often excludes diverse body types, while many "gender-fluid" collections are disproportionately designed for slim frames.

Social media activism has amplified demands for greater diversity, pushing global brands to adapt (Kent, 2024). Sustainability is another tension point.

Tailoring's reliance on wool and suiting fabrics carries significant environmental costs, and while designers like Hearst prioritise eco-conscious production, many brands continue to expand output while making vague promises about emissions (Hunt, 2024).

Cultural representation is also limited: mainstream narratives privilege European tailoring traditions, rarely acknowledging non-Western contributions. Addressing these debates is crucial if tailoring is to resonate with younger, socially conscious audiences.

figure 101. Tiktok trend - tomboy femme



Despite tailoring's enduring visibility, gaps remain in both research and practice. Scholarship has extensively analysed its historical role in negotiating gender norms, but its contemporary mediation in magazines and digital platforms is underexplored.

Little is known about how social media aesthetics, from influencer styling to TikTok microtrends, shape perceptions of tailoring, particularly among younger users. Similarly, tailoring's unique contribution to androgynous fashion is often overshadowed by broader discussions of gender-neutral style.

Finally, while inclusivity and sustainability dominate fashion discourse, few studies examine how these principles intersect with tailoring specifically.



figure 102. Tiktok trend - tomboy femme

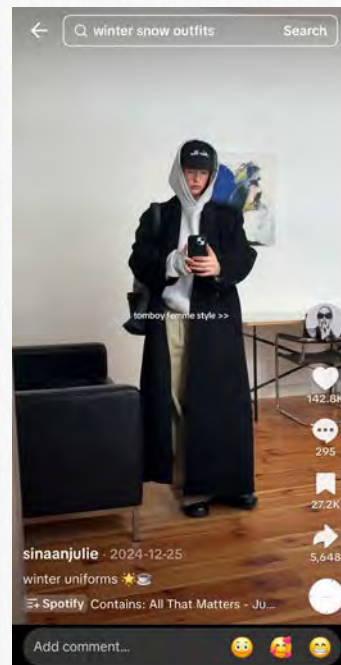


figure 103. Tiktok trend - tomboy femme

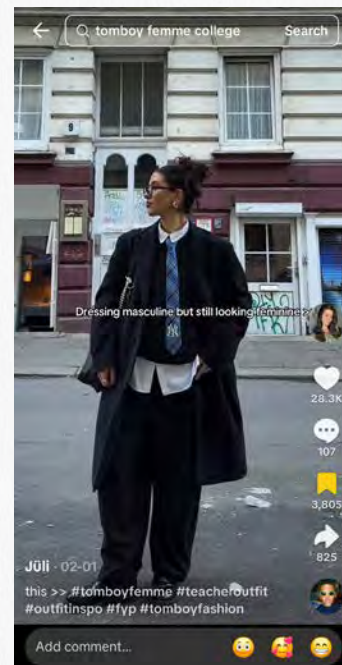


figure 104. Tiktok trend - tomboy femme

This project positions itself within these gaps. By reframing the history of women's tailoring for younger audiences, it highlights how tailoring has evolved from rebellion to mainstream influence, and how it continues to shape androgynous fashion today.

By drawing on both historical narratives and contemporary representations, the project seeks to make this history accessible, engaging, and relevant, empowering young people to see tailoring not only as clothing but as a cultural tool for self-expression and experimentation.



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This project draws upon theories of gender, identity, representation, and education to understand how tailoring has shaped the evolution of androgynous fashion. Fashion here is approached not simply as a material design practice but as a visual and cultural language that reflects and constructs identity.

The theoretical framework provides tools to examine tailoring as both liberation and constraint, while educational theories support the aim of making this history accessible to younger audiences, empowering them to experiment with style and question traditional gender norms.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is central to understanding femininity, masculinity, and androgyny. Butler argues that gender is enacted repeatedly through performative acts shaped and constrained by cultural norms.

'Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body'

(Butler, 1990)

A statement that resonates strongly with tailoring, where structured garments like suits have long carried coded meanings of authority and masculinity.

Butler's framework highlights how women's adoption of tailoring opens up new gender possibilities, showing that clothing is not neutral but an active force in constructing identity (Butler, 1998).

This perspective is particularly valuable for this project because it frames tailoring as more than a garment choice: it becomes a performative act that communicates power and redefines social expectations.

By translating this into accessible narratives, younger audiences can see how fashion both reflects and reshapes identity, making the history of tailoring and androgyny more relevant to their own lives.



figure 105. Judith Butler

Joanne Entwistle offers another key lens. In *The Fashioned Body*, she describes fashion as:

'a situated bodily practice'

emphasising that dressing is a daily, embodied activity through which individuals express and construct social identities. Clothing is therefore not a superficial layer but the very means by which bodies acquire social and cultural meaning (Tennent, 2016).

Women's tailoring exemplifies this claim: its adoption in the 20th century signalled independence, professionalism, and shifting gender expectations.

Entwistle's framework is crucial because it positions tailoring as an embodied negotiation of power, identity, and agency.

For this project, her perspective underscores why tailoring holds symbolic weight in androgynous fashion; it highlights the lived experience of wearing clothing and the cultural work garments perform in society.



figure 106. Joanne Entwistle

The project also draws on theories of learning to guide its pedagogical approach. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences emphasises that individuals process information in different ways: visual, bodily, linguistic, or interpersonal.

Applying this to fashion education suggests that history should not be presented through text alone but through multimodal engagement.

By using visual-spatial and bodily-kinesthetic forms such as illustrations, pattern-making activities, and styling guides; the project avoids passive reading and allows young people to connect with content in ways that suit their strengths (Richmond & Delorey, 2004).

Because fashion is inherently tactile and visual, Gardner's framework validates the choice of an interactive book as a medium that accommodates different learners while making abstract concepts like gender expression more concrete and memorable.

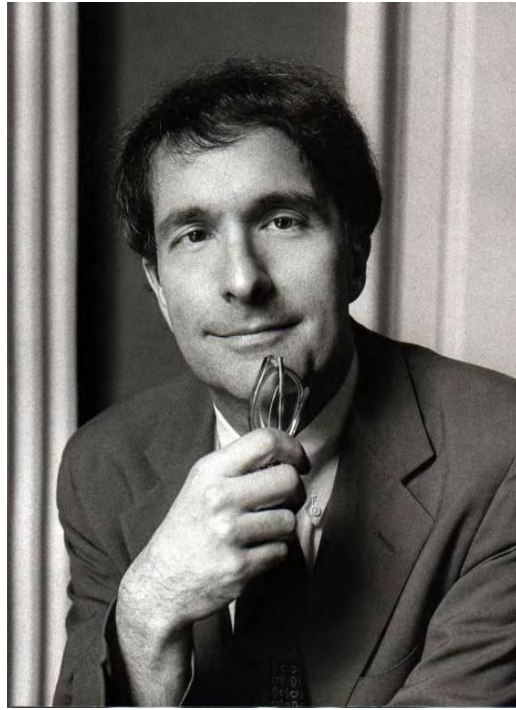


figure 107. Howard Gardner

Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy provides a further foundation by framing education as a practice of empowerment through critical awareness.

For Freire, learners should be encouraged to question dominant narratives, develop critical consciousness, and gain agency to transform their social reality (Giroux, 2025).

This resonates with the political role of fashion: tailoring has historically been portrayed by the media as either a fleeting trend or an act of rebellion, narratives that risk flattening its complexity.

By adopting a Freirean approach, the project seeks to position readers as active participants, prompting them to reflect on fashion's role in shaping identity and to engage critically with media portrayals.

Features such as discussion prompts, reflective questions, and comparative imagery help connect theory to practice, enabling young audiences to interrogate cultural norms rather than passively consume them.

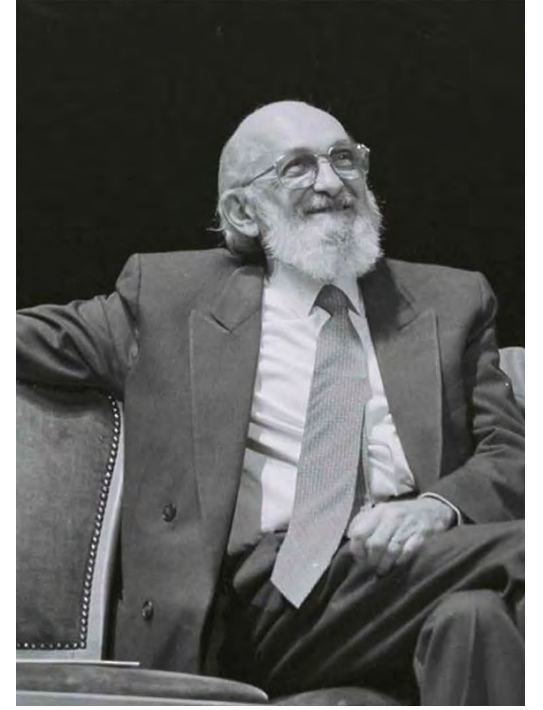


figure 108. Paulo Freire

Together, these theories provide a layered framework. Butler and Entwistle situate tailoring as a cultural and embodied practice that reshapes gender expression, while Gardner and Freire ensure that this history can be communicated in an inclusive, empowering way for younger audiences. The critical value lies in combining fashion theory with educational practice: not only analysing how tailoring has shaped androgynous fashion but also ensuring this knowledge is accessible, engaging, and transformative for its readers.

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question

All across the 20th century, from 1910s to 1990s; tailoring became a symbolic arena where women negotiated femininity and masculinity. From Chanel's reworking of the suit to Saint Laurent's Le Smoking and the power suits of the 1980s, tailored garments carried meanings of empowerment, resistance, and defiance. Yet in contemporary fashion media, tailoring is often reduced to narrow archetypes of professionalism, authority, or sexualised glamour, obscuring its radical history as a tool of hybridity and self-expression.

This project asks: How has women's tailoring influenced the development of androgynous fashion, and how can this history be made accessible to younger audiences today?

The hypothesis of this project is that tailoring has been central to androgynous fashion by destabilising binary gender codes. However, its cultural significance is rarely communicated in ways accessible to young people, who are at a formative stage of exploring identity. Reframing this history through engaging, visual, and educational strategies can empower them to connect fashion's past to their own self-expression.