

Grace Nunekpeku

In the world of fashion a piece of garment that has been commodified is women's trousers. Before the late 1800s in the Western world, women predominantly only wore dresses while men wore trousers. During these times it was deemed inappropriate for women to wear trousers but this eventually changed as it became gradually and widely accepted. Although trousers for women in western countries did not become fashionable until the late 20th century, women started wearing them for outdoor work a hundred years earlier. Due to industrial work women started wearing pants, and continued wearing them during World War II when they took on various jobs. To make it suitable for their figure, women would take men's trousers and alter them. An example of this is the Wigan pit brow girls who shocked Victorian society by wearing pants as they worked in dangerous conditions in local mines. They would wear skirts over their trousers and roll them up to their waist to keep them out of the way as they worked.

Due to the rationing of clothing, many women wore their husbands' civilian clothes, including their pants to work while their husbands were at war. They did this because pants were dignified as a garment for workwear, and this allowed these women to use their clothing allowance for something else. Trousers became more widespread by the summer of 1944. They became more appropriate and accepted and it was reported that sales of women's trousers increased five times more than the year before.

By the 1960's Andre Courrges, a French designer introduced long trousers for women as a statement and fashion item. His designs were influenced by modernism and futurism using modern technology and new fabrics. In 1966 Yves Saint Laurent unveiled a tuxedo pantsuit for ladies called Le Smoking giving women a stylish, self assured, and in control look. Yves Saint Laurent merits a fair amount of credit for consistently advancing the acceptance of women wearing pants across various settings. His introduction of tuxedos for formal occasions, gowns and safari suits, was groundbreaking. His revolutionary approach involved refraining from feminizing pants, opting instead to place women directly in menswear. His importance also lies in challenging traditional gender norms and presenting distinct archetypes of both masculinity and femininity. These two designers led the era of the pantsuit and designer jeans which gradually put an end to the prohibitions against girls and women wearing trousers in school, work and fine restaurants.

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