

The End of Missy: What Today's Female Consumer Really Looks Like

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7/22/2015

Missy—the term once used to define a category of clothing for the “mature” woman has become a bit of a defunct descriptor—there’s more to ladies today than the Missy label allows.

When Sharon Graubard, creative director, fashion forecaster and leader of the Mintmoda trend tracking team was first tasked with presenting on the dying category for a Premiere Vision New York seminar, she was confounded.

“I hate the term and I just don’t think the missy customer exists anymore,” she said.

But when Graubard gave the presentation at Premiere Vision’s opening day Tuesday, following considerable research and pondering, she was very clear that today’s female customer falls into four categories: Femme, Sophisticate, Classic and Individualist.

Femme.

Female femmes fall into two categories, ladylike and romantic.

And Anna Wintour, American Vogue editor-in-chief is the muse behind the trend. Wintour is rapt in fashion but always makes the clothing fit her ladylike look.

“This customer mixes fast fashion pieces with designer things that are in their closet,” Graubard explained. She goes to Zara and is comfortable there. Her handbags provide color pops and often come with top handled. “The ladylike customer loves a ladylike shoe and her silhouette is body skimming, its neither too tight or too loose.”

Garments that are “timeless’y lovely” like blouses and skirts are key and coats are more for style than warmth and this customer is amassing a collection of them.

“The ‘it’ coat has replaced the ‘it’ bag,” according to Graubard.

On the romantic side of this femme, fashion writer Tavi Gevinson is representative of the look.

Lace or ruffle trims abound and silhouettes are often feature soft details like flounces at the waist. Sheers are seasonless, apparent whether winter or summer.

“It’s florals anytime, dresses, skirts, mixing florals with stripes, pretty pastels,” Graubard said.

Sophisticate.

Then there’s the sophisticate. And she specializes in elegance a la American Vogue creative director Grace Coddington, or she opts for edgy.

Clothing is simple and streamlined for the elegant side of this customer—staid and timeless. Colors are always

neutral, silhouettes graceful and elongated and experimental cuts are key, the customer understands shape and design. Here, leopard is a neutral and never comes across trashy as some think it to be.

“The curated wardrobe is the ultimate luxury,” Graubard explained. “We used to think bulging closets were the ultimate luxury. But the more sophisticated people have a very curated closet.”

On the edgy side of the sophisticate, black leather is a staple, perusing vintage for authentic items is a pastime and silhouettes are “lean and mean” with slim bottoms, jeans, leggings or pencil skirts.

Model Kate Moss and former editor-in-chief of Vogue Paris Carine Roitfeld are icons for this customer.

Looks are a little undone, but toppers, like jackets are always tailored. The fur is an everyday staple, “the idea of something luxurious thrown over these rougher looks,” Graubard said.

Skin is shown in offhand ways, backs are bared as evening wear for daytime clothing. “The formula for this lady: skinny pants + tee + blazer or tailored jacket. She’s stiletto-chic.”

Classic.

The classic customer falls into the neotrad and neutrois categories.

Duchess of Cambridge Kate Middleton and American socialite Olivia Palermo define the NeoTrad look.

The classic customer shops, but values fit and quality over labels. Her pieces air on the traditional side, but she may mix them up in unexpected ways.

“It’s taking these classic pieces and re-contexting them, making them sing, making them be a statement,” Graubard said. “It’s about the force of the personality infusing these clothes with character. It’s inhabiting the clothes, it’s offering the customer clothes they can make their own.”

The neutrois classic consumer is gender neutral, she sees gender as something fluid.

“I think it’s very important for fashion because fashion is a place where you can play with identity,” according to Graubard.

Model Cara Delevingne and British actress Tilda Swinton are two who define the trend.

Boyfriend sweaters are big, as are gym clothes as streetwear. “We don’t need to change after the gym anymore,” Graubard said. This customer loves drab and denim as a combo and roomy coats and menswear trousers are must-haves.

Individualist.

The fourth category that today’s female falls into is defined two ways: as a curator and as a freestyler.

The curator calls up American businesswoman Iris Apfel, who maintains an individual style but does it in a sophisticated, considered way.

Falling in love with each piece is vital for this shopper, and sometimes she dresses from the ground up, picking pieces based on a pair of shoes. She mixes patterns and textures, jacquards and tweeds. Artisanal touches and appliqués adorn her clothing as do special hand-done techniques that make the wearer feel connected with the clothing.

“It’s about a passion for fashion. Putting any two things together. That special piece,” Graubard said.

The freestyler, on the other hand, is more of a wild child, wearing whatever she likes whenever she wants.

Suzie Lau, the U.K. fashion blogger behind Style Bubble manifests the trend, as does Leandra Medine, the self-dubbed Man Repeller.

“Clothes and accessories are her playthings. She collects one of a kind pieces, whether vintage, ethnic or designer,” Graubard explained.

The novelty coat is a staple, she wears bohemian layers and personalized denim. “Denim is almost like fur or leather, it’s this unbelievable material that can be reworked and patched and given new character.”

This shopper might wear a kimono over everything—incongruity is irrelevant—she will make looks work.

Missy may be no more, but women now fall into new style categories that better define today’s consumer. And according to Graubard, “People don’t dress in trends, people dress to express an inner self. Fashion is self made visible.”