



Fetish - Fashion, Sex & Power

Valerie Steele

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Kinky boots, corsets, underwear as outerwear, second-skin garments of rubber and leather, uniforms, body piercing... Today everything from a fetishist's dream appears on the fashion runways.

Although some people regard fetish fashion as exploitative and misogynistic, others interpret it as a positive Amazonian statement--couture Catwoman. But the connection between fashion and fetishism goes far beyond a few couture collections.

For the past thirty years, the iconography of sexual fetishism has been increasingly assimilated into popular culture. Before Michelle Pfeiffer's Catwoman, there was Mrs. Peel, heroine of the 1960s television show "The Avengers," who wore a black leather catsuit modeled on a real fetish costume. Street styles like punk and the gay "leatherman" look also testify to the influence of fetishism.

The concept of fetishism has recently assumed a growing importance in critical thinking about the cultural construction of sexuality. Yet until now no scholar with an in-depth knowledge of fashion history has studied the actual clothing fetishes themselves. Nor has there been a serious exploration of the historical relationship between fashion and fetishism, although erotic styles have changed significantly and "sexual chic" has become increasingly conspicuous.

Cultural historian Valerie Steele has devoted much of her career to the study of the relationship between clothing and sexuality, and is uniquely qualified to write this book. Marshalling a dazzling array of evidence from pornography, psychology, and history, as well as interviews with individuals involved in sexual fetishism, sadomasochism, and cross-dressing, Steele illuminates the complex relationship between appearance and identity.

Based on years of research, her book *Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Power* explains how a paradigm shift in attitudes toward sex and gender has given rise to the phenomenon of fetish fashion.

"Steele is to fetish dressing what Anne Rice is to vampires," writes Christa Worthington of Elle magazine, "the intellectual interpreter of...wishes beyond our ken." According to Steele, fetishism shows how human sexuality is never just a matter of doing what comes naturally; fantasy always plays an important role.

Steele provides provocative answers to such questions as: Why is black regarded as the sexiest color? Is fetishizing the norm for males? Does fetish fashion reflect a fear of AIDS? And why do so many people love shoes?

Fetish - Fashion, Sex & Power Details

Date : Published January 4th 1996 by Oxford University Press, USA (first published November 2nd 1995)

ISBN : 9780195090444

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Format : Hardcover 280 pages

Genre : Couture, Fashion, Nonfiction, Sexuality, History, Adult Fiction, Erotica

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Anika says

There is certainly a lot of good stuff in this book - clearly Steele, who writes clearly and engagingly, has done a great deal of research. And yet, there's something ultimately frustrating about it - although she has done a lot of research on various fetish outfits, you don't feel like you've come any closer to understanding why people would have these fetishes - you just get a sense that many people do. Perhaps that's too much to ask - after all, it seems that nobody really knows why people develop the kinks they do - but you do wish she had gone a bit further into trying to figure out the why.

Jess says

A lot of good info/history and pics, but this author is the worst cishet norm other-ing pathologizing onlooker

Andrew says

This book is a nice introduction to a thick topic. With supplemental readings this book is a nice companion to a broader understanding of fetishism through out the ages. It briefly covers many different perspectives on digesting core theory, while the author retains a hint at their own opinion. She completely lets loose in the final chapter, only to leave the reader with information to formulate their own opinion. This is not a one stop shop. I would advise reading Tiger Sprung along with other writings by Valerie Steel to understand her conclusions. This book has merely opened the gates for me.

Niya says

As an academic Ms. Steele could have produced a dry tome about the complex and sometimes fraught relationship between fetishism and fashion and waxed on about the fact that each consumes the other to create something new and complex. Instead she explores the intersectionality of fashion, fetishism, sex, gender, power and the body in a care, but very surface level way. What she is careful and thoughtful about doing is presenting the fetishists she interacts with (or the case studies she quotes) in a way that retains both their humanity and vulnerability - instead of depicting them as deviant or other - which would have been easy to do. She manages to produce a palatable if teasing text that encourages the reader to take their own deep dive into whatever aspect they find most fascinating.

Tofu Fairy says

this was an interesting book but out of date in a lot of ways. written in 1996, a lot of the "fashion" and "style" tidbits are old. The psychology behind the fetish fashion is still relevant though. its a good read. reads a bit

like a textbook for my taste but I did enjoy it.

Alisa Cupcakeland says

AMADO. Igual soy consciente de que la autora confunde un libro de Jeanne Rejaunier con uno de Naomi Wolf pero se lo perdono.

Reseña completa en: <https://atcupcakeland.wordpress.com/2...>

Elizabeth says

Though this was a wonderful examination of fetish in fashion through the years and how it became a part of common society, it did not explain as much as I was looking for in how fetish "is". Much more focused on patterns in history, i suppose an anthropological view, but not one that included more of the psychology as I was looking for. Still a great place to start research in the culture of fetishism.

Lui Ramirez says

Loved how it considers several perspective on fetishism and fashion alike.

A little too much Freud thrown in there for my taste and my ideological inclinations.

Super interesting account of the intersections of fashion and fetish, and an excellent, accessible book for those of us who are nowhere near experts at neither.

Cat says

In *Fetish - Fashion, Sex & Power*, Steele deftly traces fetish fashion from its earliest appearances in niche markets to its counterculture appeal to its embrace in the mainstream. As fashion history's preeminent scholar, Steele navigates this history effortlessly and makes an incredibly complex topic accessible. She concisely weaves together political, social, and cultural influences in an attempt to make the abstract more tangible. While she does not shy away from the psychology or sexuality of fashion, nor does she exploit these things. This is not a study of fetish or fetishists, it is a study of the objects of fetish. The material, the garment, the textile itself is treated as a historical artifact - it is this approach that distinguishes Steele's work.

Adrien Green says

I've been working on this book for some time, but it's none-the-less a fascinating read. *Fetish* is an informed cultural examination of the evolution of sexual attitudes/values and their manifestation in the fashion of the times. The book further explores the commoditization of BDSM subculture in contemporary life.

?oincidental Dandy says

A fascinating look at the intersection of popular fashion & fetishism; some very interesting theories & points of view are proposed. Good read.

Fostergrants says

i got this book as a gift and loved the cover...but the book is not really about sex, but more about the history of clothing as a means to send sexual signals. it's the idea behind stiletto heels expanded to a wide variety of clothing. some of it's weird but i really enjoyed the psychology behind fetish fashion. lots of photos. not vulgar.

The Center for Sexual Pleasure & Health says

Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Power explores the link between fashion and the expression of sexuality—not only sexual behavior, but also gender identity.

The 19th century sexologist Richard Von Krafft-Ebing defined fetishism as “the association of lust with the idea of certain portions of female person, or with certain articles of female attire.” Rejecting the idea that only men can have fetishes, Steele believes that fetishism is best understood on a continuum: from a slight preference for certain kinds of partners, sexual stimuli, or sexual activity, all the way to specific stimuli being strictly necessary for arousal and even taking the place of a sex partner.

Steele begins by explaining the why of fetishes; she looks at fetishes from a Freudian, Foucaultian, Darwinian, and neurobiological perspective, though none are individually satisfying. And even after synthesizing these views, the big-picture that she gives feels incomplete. Sexual arousal is subtle and hard to entirely capture with a handful of broad ideological frameworks. Steele is much stronger when analyzing the appeal of specific fetishes, she explores the particular appeal of corsets, leather, high-heels, rubber, fur, and more. For example, she explains how specific clothing items can signify different things to their wearers. While noting that the corset “exaggerates the hourglass shape that attracts many heterosexual men,” she keenly observes that “the dominatrix wears her corset as armor, its extreme and rigid curvature the ultimate sexual taunt at the slave who may look but not touch.” Steele sees that in contrast, for the slave, the corset signifies and enforces a sense of discipline and bondage, and in the case of male slaves, a desire to toy around with gender identity.

However, Steele does not merely explain why specific people like certain fetishes, she also deeply explores the historical context and cultural significance of specific fetishes. For example, Steele provides an extended history and analysis of the appropriation of leather by the mainstream fashion community and how people with a leather fetish reacted to this. Or, when exploring why feet and shoes play such an important role in the erotic imagination, Steele takes us all the way to Renaissance Venice and Sung Dynasty China.

If you are at all interested in the relationship between fashion and kink, and how fetishized items trickle into mainstream fashion, this is a book for you. It is historically and philosophically rich and is packed with fun

and lurid photographs for either your kinky or educational pleasure.
