

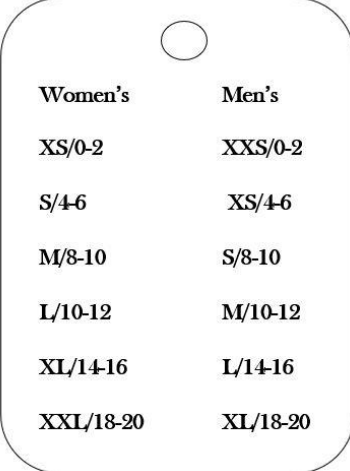
Gender Based-less

We all can relate to feeling either too heavy, too thin, too short, too tall, or having certain body parts feel oversized while other parts seem inadequate. The list might never end if we include feelings about our hair and skin tone. Everyone has felt the “ache” of not feeling good in what they wear and/or dreading people’s stares as they evaluate them. Amazingly, the fashion world has insufficiently addressed this universal problem and it starts with gender bias. Apparel retailers would attract more shoppers by providing them the opportunity to shop for what they want, where they can try it on, and understand the sizing unfettered by traditional gender based labeling.

One of the first things we do each day is select what to wear. What we select is determined by what is within our closets which we fill over time from the selection available in stores decided by people who try to determine our needs and wants. The outfits we wear speak volumes about us because they telegraph our mindset to people who see us before they even meet us. It projects how we feel about ourselves, how we want to be perceived, and it might even alert others to our beliefs. A keepah, turban, headscarf, hijab, or uniform identify us. Baggy clothing might convey the desire to hide our silhouette. This list could go on and on...

Many Americans shop in chain stores. Upon entering these stores, we unquestioningly follow the worn paths to either the men’s or women’s departments. However, what if you are a man who wants to wear a jumper or a skirt instead of a fitted suit or trouser? What if you are a woman who wants to wear loose swim trunks or board shorts approaching your knees? The options are almost nonexistent because of the restrictions placed on the selection available in the women’s versus the men’s departments. It feels awful to try to fit into clothing that does not reflect who we are. Yet, we make the most of it and hurry along on our way. If department stores and other large retailers would reorganize their floor plans or layouts offering clothing with labels that address sizing for both genders, consumers’ options would skyrocket as would their happiness. It is a win-win for retailers who would benefit from increased revenues. Yet, it feels unlikely given their dogged adherence to the outdated rules of gender specificity.

We are too fixated on labels, especially gender focused ones which starts the moment we enter a store. What if shoppers could enter a store in search of the type of clothing they seek and then be able to try it on without having to traverse an entire department to locate their assigned fitting room? Brick and mortar stores have much to learn from internet retailers while all retailers have much to learn about labeling. What if clothing carried some iteration of sizing in the newly designed label below?



Women's	Men's
XS/0-2	XXS/0-2
S/4-6	XS/4-6
M/8-10	S/8-10
L/10-12	M/10-12
XL/14-16	L/14-16
XXL/18-20	XL/18-20

As an aspiring fashion design student, I dream of creating clothing to fit the widest spectrum of sizes and shapes not limited by the traditional definition of gender. I hope, one day, to alleviate the “ache” too many of us feel. We can all learn from the popularity of Streetwear attracting an expanding gender unbiased customer base, which might explain why it is gaining increased global momentum. We all share the common desire to wear comfortable clothing that makes us feel and look good. Why limit our clothing choices to predefined gender-based labels in gender-based clothing departments?