

## Fashion Democracy

Alexandra Jacobs

*The world of virtual Anna Wintours.*



*Polyvore is a lot like playing paper dolls with pictures of real clothes. One user said, "It's the 'wow' that's the first priority to me."*

Late last summer, subscribers to Harper's Bazaar received slimmer than usual September issues with the androgynous British model Agyness Deyn on the cover. She was dressed in expensive designer homage to Michael Jackson, who had died in June: Balmain tuxedo pants with a matching sequined jacket; special-order Repetto oxfords—just the thing for a moonwalk; and a four-hundred-dollar black fedora by Albertus Swanepoel. Her right hand, gloved in glittering Givenchy, appeared to have knocked the first "A" in Bazaar jauntily askew. Within a few days, the image was copied from the Internet by a sixteen-year-old in Zagreb, Croatia, named Antonia, who stored it on the fashion Web site Polyvore.com, where she is known as tonka1. Antonia pasted the photo of Deyn into an online collage—or "set," as Polyvore calls it—she was making, layering on pictures of cheaper clothing, including a studded blazer (\$140 at Topshop), a purple leopard-print skirt from a store in Japan, and a Vanessa Bruno tank top. She finished by adding the vaguely Michael Jackson-inflected caption "Tomorrow can wait. Dance all through the night." Over in Indonesia, meanwhile, a student calling herself Fabz\_Reen had found the Bazaar cover similarly inspiring. Her Polyvore set included pictures of a Vivienne Westwood skull-print dress, an Alexander McQueen cuff bracelet, an Alexis Bittar bubble ring, strap-strangled Christian Louboutin Nitoinimoi ankle boots, a Victoria's Secret mascara wand, and a second image of Deyn taken from Brazilian Vogue, all under the headline "Think Black."

The Louboutin boots also caught the fancy of Gail Helmer, a forty-three-year-old marketing consultant and Polyvore user in Calgary, who put them in two different sets that season. For more than two years, since she discovered the site via Facebook, Helmer has visited Polyvore daily, and she has become one of the site's most popular creators, with thousands of followers. Before walking her collie each morning, she sits with her husband at their kitchen table over coffee, oatmeal, and laptops (he's a Web designer who owns a gaming site that does military simulations with jets and tanks), signing on as MyChanel. "He's been in awe of what I can do on Polyvore," she said.



*"I much prefer random acts of kindness to the habitual ones."*

*Illustration: Quickhoney; Set: Mychanel/ Polyvore*

Every set begins with an electronic scissor called the Clipper, saved to a browser's toolbar, which allows you to collect pictures of merchandise and other visuals from all over the Web. Helmer's preferred destinations are Farfetch.com, an Internet mall of forty boutiques; Collete.fr, the site of a Parisian department store famous for its high-end eclecticism; and Brownsfashion.com, the online outpost of the London luxury mini-chain, which is where she found the boots. Her choices are stored in her virtual closet, which is open to inspection by any of the 6.6 million people who visit Polyvore each month. Helmer's closet currently contains more than five thousand items, including accessories, jewelry, and cosmetics. Although she buys plenty of clothes after first spotting them on Polyvore, she told me, "making sets really feeds that shopping urge in me, without having to go and spend all that money. Because, seriously, I can't afford a thousand pairs of YSL shoes."

Polyvore is a lot like playing paper dolls with pictures of real clothes. Some people spend an hour on each set, glomming from scores of Web sites. It's the rare Internet pastime that feels productive—even if the product is just an online collage that you e-mail to a friend, with the message "Look, I made this outfit for you!" After dragging and dropping enough images to create an ensemble, a user might paste in a background pattern and then garnish the set with a lipstick or a bottle of perfume. A set can also be given a soundtrack, although Helmer doesn't go in for these sorts of bells and whistles. "I'm just so visual," she said. She calls herself a "fashion whisperer." "I'll find an item and it kind of tells me what it goes with. What shoes, what bags." Polyvore permits a maximum of fifty items in each set ("There has to be a limit," one of the company's software engineers told me. "If you put, like, a million items in there, that would basically kill the server"), but Helmer usually limits herself to a dozen, which she enlarges, shrinks, or rotates at her pleasure, adding perhaps a pithy phrase in a decorative typeface. Helmer says that she gave up print fashion magazines "when they stopped putting models on the cover" ("I don't care about celebrities"), and she likes to paste in a picture of a model, usually a blond one, like Lily Donaldson, Gemma Ward, or Kate Moss, as her set's final fillip—"the cherry on top," as she put it. (Polyvore creators generally avoid using pictures of themselves, preferring more glamorous avatars; the clothes tend to float, disembodied, next to the models rather than on them, as with paper dolls.) "I don't use anyone who doesn't look like me," she said.

"Think Black," the title of the set made by Fabz\_Reen, in Indonesia, is a reference to "Think Pink," the exuberant opening number from "Funny Face," the 1957 movie about the fashion world. The cadences of the film clearly still echo through the popular fantasy of what

constitutes a fashion magazine: a dictatorial matron sweeping through skyscraper offices, as Meryl Streep did in "The Devil Wears Prada," fifty years after Kay Thompson played a caricature of the legendary Vogue editor Diana Vreeland, fretting about failing the "American woman who stands out there naked waiting for me to tell her what to wear." In reality, the American woman has not waited to be told what to wear in some time. Vogue and Bazaar now compete with the more populist shopping magazines, like InStyle and Lucky, whose low-key editors have replaced lush, fantastical spreads with practical shopping advice and catalogue-style layouts. Polyvore's user-generated model abandons the queenly paradigm altogether. The site has 1.4 million registered users, two hundred thousand of whom are, like Helmer, dedicated "creators": amateur stylists who put together thirty thousand sets a day and post them on Facebook, Twitter, and their personal blogs. Kerry Diamond, an executive at Lancôme who has done business with Polyvore, describes sets as "the cyber equivalent of the inside of a school locker door."

**Fonte: The New Yorker Magazine. Disponível em: <[www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com)>. Acesso em: 29 mar. 2010.**

A utilização deste artigo é exclusiva para fins educacionais