# Dua Lipa's Met Gala gown reignites the pockets debate in women's fashion



Dua Lipa's appearance at the 2023 Met Gala has brought renewed attention to the contentious issue of pockets in women’s fashion. The vintage cream Chanel gown she wore was particularly notable for its inclusion of pockets, a feature that many women celebrated on social media. Observers highlighted how this classic garment allowed Lipa to slip her hands inside, emphasising a functionality that is often lacking in women's attire.

The lack of practical pockets in women's clothing has sparked a significant discourse, as evidenced by similar sentiments expressed by actress Emma Stone during the 50th anniversary of Saturday Night Live, where she cleverly utilised the exaggerated hip pockets of her red Louis Vuitton dress to stash popcorn. This behaviour resonates with a widespread demand for functionality within women’s fashion, as many garments frequently lack usable pockets.

Historically, pockets have been a contentious issue, with an often gendered narrative surrounding their existence. Hannah Carlson, an apparel design lecturer at the Rhode Island School of Design, discussed the historical context of pockets in a conversation with CNN. She explained that the evolution of pockets is closely tied to societal norms, with women historically facing limitations in their design. Carlson noted that since their inception, women have been “differently pocketed,” symbolising a form of gender inequality.

Pockets have undergone a transformative journey, originating in the 1550s as drawstring bags integrated into men’s breeches. As tailoring evolved, so too did the design and practicality of these features for men. Conversely, women's clothing has historically relegated women to using external handbags, with practical pockets in dresses being an infrequent addition.

Carlson pointed out that by the late 17th century, as men's fashion took on a systematic approach, women’s attire failed to progress in the same manner. For centuries, women utilised awkward alternatives, such as tied-on pockets or pouches sewn into skirts. These solutions were often impractical, leading to frustration, as was the case in the 1870s and '80s when pockets were even located in the back of the bustle of garments, necessitating an awkward reach for personal belongings.

Cultural perceptions regarding pockets further complicated their integration into women’s fashion. Pockets were often viewed as a symbol of resourcefulness and independence, characteristics predominantly associated with masculinity. In stark contrast, women's items were deemed decorative rather than necessitating functional features like pockets. Historical societal attitudes have maintained a bias whereby items designed for women were expected to be more ornamental.

As noted, pockets gained scarcity during pivotal moments such as the Suffragist movement when women’s limited ability to carry personal belongings was connected to their struggle for equal rights. Activists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton highlighted the experience of men who “walked down the street free as a lark,” whereas women were burdened by the need to hold their items, often unable to access them conveniently.

The 20th century saw a gradual shift towards the acceptance of pockets as women entered the workforce during wartime, necessitating more practical clothing options. Iconic designers like Elsa Schiaparelli began incorporating pockets into their designs, marking a significant move towards practicality in women's fashion.

However, even in the contemporary fashion landscape, disparities remain in the availability and practicality of pockets. A 2018 study revealed a marked difference between the pocket sizes in men's and women's jeans, with women's often being unable to accommodate basic personal items. The expanding influence of fast fashion has exacerbated these issues, leading to pockets being perceived as expendable features within women’s clothing.

Despite the resurgence of cargo pants and some designers reviving the use of pockets in their collections, the historic lack of practicality continues to plague modern women's fashion. Carlson asserted that the fashion industry often prioritises fit over utility, resulting in designs that neglect the functional aspect of pockets, with some garments featuring faux pockets or inadequate carrying space.

The portrayal of pockets highlights a small but palpable reminder of ongoing gender disparities in fashion, where one of the most basic functional elements has, for many, become emblematic of broader societal issues. The conversation surrounding pockets continues to evolve, paralleling shifts in attitudes towards gender equality and representation in the fashion industry.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://dovetailworkwear.com/blogs/news/the-sexist-history-of-pockets> - This article provides a comprehensive review of the sexist history of pockets, highlighting how women historically lacked practical pockets while men's clothing often included numerous functional ones. It also discusses the resurgence of functional pockets during World War I and II, before they were diminished by fashion trends post-war.
* <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/womens-tie-pockets> - This article details the history and use of women's tie-on pockets from the 17th century, discussing their practicality and eventual decline with changes in women's fashion over time. It highlights how these pockets served as an essential tool for women to carry personal items.
* <https://sartorialmagazine.com/fashion-1/2023/11/22/pocket-patriarchy> - Sartorial Magazine's piece delves into the societal implications of pockets, highlighting their historical gender bias and how they reflect broader gender inequalities. It also discusses the impact of fashion designs on the functionality of women's garments.
* <https://www.mdhistory.org/the-ongoing-evolution-of-the-pocket> - This article explores the evolution of pockets in women's fashion, focusing on how practicality has waxed and waned over time. It notes the importance of pockets during periods like the mid-19th century when working-class women benefited from them.
* <https://www.instagram.com/jvn/reel/Cw2p2Eext-s/> - Jonathan Van Ness's Instagram reel touches on the historical and contemporary struggles with pocket functionality in women's clothing. It highlights how pockets have become a symbol of change for women, reflecting broader discussions around equality.