

On feeling different every day

Clothing studies scholar Isabel Mundigo-Moore discusses creating her own rituals, spotlighting women's mid-life experiences, and wearing symbols of love.

September 4, 2025 -

As told to Lauren Spear, 2385 words.

Tags: [Writing](#), [Fashion](#), [Family](#), [Multi-tasking](#), [Education](#), [Identity](#).

You run [The Loving Archive](#), a project that began as a newsletter and has since evolved into an Instagram account that shares clothing and love stories. In one post, you highlight Agnès Troublé, photographed in her Paris shop in 1976, alongside her quote: "I prefer clothes to fashion." What draws you to her and what does that quote mean to you?

Agnès is the founder of [agnès b.](#) I love both their cardigans and her ethos—she thinks about the people who actually wear the clothes. So much of the fashion industry is about the idea of what clothes can give us, which is beautiful and I love that fantasy, but what interests me is the reality of wearing garments—how the lives we lead impact the clothes we wear. Clothing is with us in really intimate moments, and that's the difference for me. It's about the people in the clothes, rather than the idea of what clothes can be.

I'm also interested in the fact that even people who don't care about fashion still have to wear clothes and make choices. As it turns out, there's an entire field of fashion scholars who consider these seemingly passive choices, which I didn't know, and I think that's so cool. I had no idea this could be my job.

One post from [The Loving Archive](#) that really stayed with me was when you paired a quote from [Tove Jansson and her partner Tuulikki Pietilä](#)—"I love you as if bewitched yet at the same time with profound calm..." with a photo of them in matching hats, noting how the hats resembled Tuulikki from the Moomin comics. Can you talk a bit about lovers and shared clothing, how people in love start to match or mirror each other?

What I love about the Instagram page is that I can post anything that captures that feeling of love and clothes. It's a broad idea, but when those elements come together, it gives me a place to put them, which I really enjoy. I love Tove, and appreciate when people talk or write about love in that kind of tender, thoughtful way—it's rare. But it's funny, because while I cherish seeing [matching] it in others, I find it embarrassing in myself. The other day, my partner Al and I accidentally matched, and I thought, *oh no*. But with Tove, it feels beautiful. I do think that matching or mirroring each other is a love language in itself. It's like teaching someone a new word and then hearing them use it. It's that subtle feeling of your influence and presence showing up in them.

Last year, you published an article titled "[Material Ambiguities of Losing a Parent: Time, Clothing, and Grief During Terminal Illness](#)." In it you explore how, in death, clothing shifts from valued possession to memento. You managed to blend academic research with your personal experience spending time with your father in his final days, reflecting on how his closet came to represent different stages of his life. How did you approach weaving those perspectives together?

My dad had many phases and personalities. Thinking about his multitudes through his clothes made me realize that they marked a lot of transformations. When he tried new hobbies or converted religions, I was always just trying

to keep up. His clothes reflected a constant movement, and I never really realized it until I spent time in his closet when he was ill. Because one does not often get the opportunity to spend time in people's wardrobes, looking through such an intimate space at what he accumulated was very profound. It allowed me to connect to memories of him.

In the essay, you mention being raised in a secular household. During your dad's illness, you struggled to find the language to process what was happening without the framework of rituals. Looking through his clothes helped you make sense of the reality of his decline, because in the liminal space of no longer wearable and not yet gone, the garments took on a new meaning. It became a personal ritual. I found that incredibly beautiful.

Thank you. I think because Judi, my stepmom, is Jewish, I had some access to some customs around death, which made me realize I didn't have those frameworks myself; I wasn't really raised that way. It struck me how profoundly beautiful it is that religion can offer rituals for grief, especially since I hadn't experienced a close death before. There's something comforting about having structure—whether through physically touching or arranging garments, or religion, or both—because when you feel loss, you don't know what to do with yourself. Going through and admiring or archiving a loved one's clothes is something we all do in some form or another when responsible for their effects in death. It's nice to think that clothes are inherently there helping us.

I want to know how you were able to turn something so intimate into an academic text.

While my dad was ill, I was also writing my PhD and deep in academic thinking. So making connections between his illness and my research felt like a safe, structured way to process what was happening. It gave me a place to put those thoughts and made them feel valid.

I originally came to this work by thinking about clothing and love in a romantic sense, but then expanded it, especially after reading All About Love by bell hooks. That book really impacted me. It frames love as something transformational and unknowable—something so present and obvious it's mysterious, much like clothing. That led me to explore more complicated aspects of love: ambivalence, disappointment, loss. Sharing clothes with ex-partners and not getting them back, or realizing they never cared about those items as you did, is just as emotional as the beautiful love stories. Some people I spoke to for my PhD said they didn't feel anything emotional about their clothing at all, which I also find fascinating.

I've just finished my PhD thesis—after spending three years mostly alone with my thoughts—where I interviewed four women in their 50s and 60s, simply asking them to talk about the clothes they connect to love. It led to so many rich, varied conversations. I'm excited by the idea that this lens can keep opening up dialogues with others, and that people interpret the material in their own way. Hopefully, the PhD will be well-received, but more than that, I hope the work continues to connect people.

What drew you to that age group?

I'm interested in how clothes move with us through life's transitions. While my article focused on the transition of dying and the active role clothes play in that process, my film explored mid-life as another significant period of change. At the time when I started doing that research, there wasn't a lot of fashion studies research that covered that period of life for women. The more I spoke with women in that age range, the more I realized their experiences are often seen as paradoxical [to fashion], when in reality, they're far more complex.

The women spoke about conflicting feelings, like feeling both invisible while aging into obsolescence and wanting to remain visible because losing relevance as an aging woman is an absurd patriarchal myth. I was interested in how clothing could bring nuance to those conversations and offer a way to talk about experiences that are often difficult. In the end, we had a really fun time, which felt meaningful because women in mid-life aren't always seen as having pleasurable experiences.

One woman in the film spoke about a black dress she owned. No matter what, putting it on always made her feel good. It made me think about how certain pieces of clothing can feel like extensions of ourselves. Do you have something like that right now in your closet?

I've been thinking about this a lot—it actually became a whole chapter in my PhD thesis: the idea of clothes that *feel* like us. What's complicated is the difference between feeling like yourself and looking like yourself. There's some [garments] that, when you put them on, feel correct, and that's really hard to explain. I've been doing a big wardrobe clear-out lately, and it's interesting to notice what stays. Often, it's not the things you'd predict, but the ones you look at and think, "I simply cannot part with you."

Recently I've been drawn to clothes that remind me of how I felt in the 1990s—soft, comfortable cottons that carry a sense of innocence or simplicity. Maybe it's something about growing into my 30s. I've been wearing this one sweater for six months straight. I just haven't taken it off. It makes me feel like myself, and it also brings a feeling of calm and simplicity. I think more than anything, after working in fashion and trying out so many trends, very few of those pieces have stayed with me. That feels telling.

How do you relate to the idea of personal identity or self-expression, especially when it comes to how you present yourself?

I have diverse versions of myself. Sometimes I want to be fancy, and sometimes I want to look like an old man. I have all of those parts in me. I think other people might have a firmer sense of who they are, but for me, it's always in flux. There's this writer named [Lucia Ruggerone](#) who talks about getting dressed through a philosophical idea from Deleuze, this notion of a constant state of becoming. I think that's where I land—I feel different every day.

The final garment in the film really stayed with me. It's a replica of a dress tied to a traumatic childhood memory, but the owner reclaimed it to see it as a symbol of her innocence. You mentioned that after your intense conversation, she decided she wanted to alter the dress completely. Can you talk more about that moment?

Yes, I think that's so interesting. We had this really powerful conversation about a dress she recreated from memory, one tied to a painful experience, and she wanted to transform it into something positive, to go back in time and protect her childhood self. It was a beautiful and difficult story, and we spent a lot of time afterward making sure she was okay. But in a follow-up interview, she told me, "Oh yeah, I'm ready to dye it navy," and I was surprised. She said she felt differently now, more at peace, and didn't need the dress to hold the same meaning anymore. I think that speaks to how deeply self-aware she is, and how she's able to express that awareness through her clothing. I don't always have the confidence to make those kinds of changes, but I found it so moving—the way her clothes reflect how she feels, more than how she looks. The shift from white to blue wasn't about aesthetic preference; it was about no longer needing the garment to represent something it once did.

I wouldn't be surprised if that conversation you had with her helped her get to that place—these interviews feel a bit like mini therapy sessions, or like going through old photo albums and reconnecting with different parts of yourself. Some of the women discuss articles of clothing that they kept but could no longer wear. Do you have anything like that in your own wardrobe?

I'm trying to think... I don't know that I have anything like that, but I did buy pieces recently because I'm getting married next month. I chose items I hope will grow and change with me, inspired by what I learned from speaking to these women. I want to be able to wear them throughout my life, so if my body changes, these pieces will go through time with me in whatever form I take. But I do have a sweatshirt I bought with my friend Hayley Brown years ago in Rockport—we had matching ones. I wore mine so much it's become thin and fragile, to the point where I'm almost afraid to wear it anymore for fear it'll fall apart. So I keep it but only wear it on special occasions. Hers is still in much better shape, but mine is faded, thin, and stretched out—not because of fit, but because of how worn it is. I feel like that's such a symbol of love.

Do you believe in a lucky item of clothing?

Yes. I also think there is lucky jewelry, as well as the ritual of applying certain scents or perfume. In 2023, when I was having a tough year, I wore necklaces from my mom for luck—one from my grandma and another heart necklace that my mom, sister, stepmom, and I all have and wear. It was a gift from my dad, and we all wore it.

Anni Albers once said, "We touch things to assure ourselves of reality." Do you agree with this?

I think the tactile sense is so important in how I understand getting dressed. For me, dressing up is less fussy than it used to be. It can be glamorous and fabulous but also needs to feel right on my body. From speaking with older women, I've learned there's a beautiful tactile knowledge—a kind of dialogue between your body and the clothes that's hard to explain, but your body just knows when something feels right or fabulous. As a kid, it was just like, "This works. I can squeeze into it." Now I realize comfort is everything. It really is, because then you can relax and be yourself. You can tell when someone knows that, and that's what I'm trying to achieve in my personal style—taking inspiration from icons like Tina Chow but always asking, "Does this feel good on me?" I love that tactile intimacy in that quote from Anni Albers because touch gives a kind of knowledge that visuals alone can't provide.

Isabel Mundigo-Moore recommends:

Love

Learning the names of the natural things around you

Spending time with animals

Out of Time: The Pleasures and Perils of Ageing by Lynne Segal

Putting things into perspective

Name

Isabel Mundigo-Moore

Vocation

clothing studies scholar, writer, filmmaker

□