

Who Are You Wearing Da'Shaun Harrison

Kiri 00:00

Hello, I'm stand up comedian Kiri Pritchard McLean here to tell you that I'm on tour, with my brand new show home truths. I'm going all over the country, wherever will have me. I'm touring right through the spring. And then because some of you lovely lot have bought so many tickets, I'm now getting to talk for the whole of autumn as well. If you would like to get tickets, they're all available on my website. Or you can go to littlewander.co.uk and get tickets there. I can't wait to see you. And I don't want to brag, but I've got one hell of an outfit. Welcome to the Who Are You Wearing? Podcast, I'm your host, Kiri Pritchard McLean. And each episode I chat to a style icon about their journey with clothes and fashion. This week's guest is activist and author to Da'Shaun Harrison, who is so thoughtful and smart when it comes to everything. But on this podcast, we get their wisdom when it comes to fashion. Such a good episode. It was recorded in January 2022. Da'Shaun was at home in America, so international. And I was in my wee cupboard in Wales, adding an international flair myself, I think this is a really fascinating episode because I feel Da'Shaun has done the reverse of lots of us in that they really found themselves and their style in lockdown. What I think so many of us, maybe just me, lost their way after being locked in their house, I think it's just a really interesting journey. And just a heads up, we do talk about weight loss. In this episode. We also talked about the intellectual theft that is rife in fashion. When it comes to black and queer creatives. I think it's a really interesting and important chat. There's plenty of joy in this conversation as well. And I honestly think that I could listen to Da'Shaun talk about anything for hours. And I'm excited for you to listen to it. Please have a lovely time listening to me asking Da'Shaun Harrison, who are you wearing?

Da'Shaun 02:37

I grew up as a fat kid. And so I remember always being so excited about being able to find clothes that I could wear that I thought were stylish, but I also grew up poor, right. So I was like, you know, I'm this fat kid who doesn't have a lot of money. And so I had to sort of make things work and I would be jealous often of my thin counterparts, because they would have like these nice clothes and would look like, to me like they were putting, they put their clothes together very well. And I was like really jealous of them. And I remember this one moment in middle school, I believe I was in the sixth grade. And I remember thinking like I don't like I think some denim jeans and some old Nike Air Maxes and like a sweatshirt. And I remember thinking like, 'wow, everyone around me just looks so nice enough, like I just have thrown something random on.' And I think the first time I started feeling nice in my, like in what I wore was when at the time I was Christian and in church that no longer is true. But at the time, I was like very heavily involved in my church. And so I would wear dress clothes a lot. And I remember every time I will put on like a suit and a tie. I felt like a brand new person. And I just loved like not necessarily what it felt like to put the outfit on. But the response that I got from people making me feel like you know, I look good. And that was like a first for me. So I would oftentimes start wearing more dressier clothes to feel like I was getting the affirmation and validation that I wanted. But I don't think it was really honestly until 2020 When I started to explore more with my clothes because I was stuck inside the house so I could buy clothes and play around with things as I wanted to, where I really started to like find my style, things that made me feel good in my body, that made me feel good with what I was wearing and that I was

excited about putting on. And so now it's like you can't get me to shut up and put on clothes every day almost just because I can.

Kiri 04:38

You know when you're sort of, I guess, I guess you're putting on these formal clothes because you're receiving praise then and it validates your sense of self. So did you have separate to that, a sense of what your style was? Or was your style? Was it that formal style or what are you going 'Oh, hold on if I dress formally in and sort of turn out, I getting the intention of validation I need', but it wasn't necessarily you're like, 'oh, that's what I want to like, anyway, it was just a way of getting that validation'.

Da'Shaun 05:10

Yes. So I never really felt at home in clothing that necessarily assigned to men, right? I'm, I'm a non binary trans person. And that's always been true for me, even when I couldn't name it. So when I was like, wearing those clothes, it was like, you know, like, this isn't necessarily my style, per se. But it felt good for people to validate me in a very particular way. So it became sort of my style for a while until I learned like, Okay, well, this isn't actually what my style is or where I want it to be. But it's what I went with because of how I felt. So now I can sort of gravitate towards something else and wear things that feel more affirming for me. But yeah, for a long time, it was what I... it was what I put on, because it felt comfortable. It felt like that was what I was supposed to wear to get validated in my body.

Kiri 05:57

Wow, that's a lot. That's so much to be like your existence in your upbringing, I just can't even imagine how you navigate the intersectionality of living in a fat body, a black body and a trans body like all those things happening. And then in a world that rejects all those, trying to build a sense of self, that that must be a huge thing as a young person, right to try and build yourself in a brand new image. Because who... Who do you aspire to?

Da'Shaun 06:25

Who Exactly, which is why I think there's no one who I can really point to right now and say, Yes, I want to look like them when I've dressed like them. And so yeah, I was growing up and was trying to find my own identity for myself and trying to build a look that felt affirming for me, and I was starting from ground zero. And that's not true for a lot of people. So I sort of went with or got into what I found would lead me to affirmations and validation from other people. And that lasted up until I was a sophomore in college. And then I stopped wearing the suits and start putting on a lot of formal wear. And actually I haven't really dressed up since then in so many ways. And I had to find what felt good for me what actually worked for me, and I think I found it. I'd agree.

Kiri 07:10

I'd agree. But I want to ask, I'm so sorry, you're just so interesting. I just want to ask a million questions. Being a young person growing up with these, you with all this stuff going on, Is it liberating that there's no that there's no mould? Or is it actually isolating?

Da'Shaun 07:29

I think it's a little bit of all right, it's like, it's comforting, because I get to create my own blueprint in so many ways. And that, to me feels great. It's like, you know, you can't really say like, Oh, they're looking like someone else, or they're trying to be someone else, there is no one else for me to try to be like. And so I get to create my own blueprint and build my own style in a way that works for me without having to be... without having to have my judgement clouded by other people's thoughts and other comparisons. But in that same way, it's like sometimes if I'm looking to try to build a particular outfit, and I'm like on Google, like, Hey, I'm going to type this in to see if I can find something that that maybe in my closet that could work for the look that I'm trying to put together. And all you see are thin white people or, or like thin black women, it's like, okay, well, I don't know what to do with this, because I know that what they're wearing will not look the same on my body. So I think it's a little bit of both. I love the idea of being able to build and create my own sort of foundation and doing so in a way that just feels comforting and comfortable. And also, I think it would be cool if there was not so much to have to do, not so much heavy lifting that had to be done by me as an individual.

Kiri 08:39

And of course, I think the exciting thing now that with your visibility your platform, you're going to be that to young people, right?

Da'Shaun 08:45

I hope so. I mean, that would be nice, right? Like, I don't know if that's true or not, but I think that it would be cool, right? Like I do a lot of work around a lot of theory writing, right I do a lot of heavy work and so to be able to be inspiration for other folks in terms of fashion things that are not as heavy but that do play a huge role in making us feel cared for and seen and affirmed is a very exciting thought for me so if so I will take it.

Kiri 09:13

You're an icon, I've said it. As you're growing up then who is dressing you? Are you trying to piece it together from the bits that you have? Or maybe you've got older siblings and you're putting it together? Or is it like a parent or guardian?

Da'Shaun 09:30

As I was growing up, My mom dressed me a lot as, as we were kids, I'm a twin and so my twin brother and I we dressed in the same clothes for years. My mom was like one of those parents to twins who made us dress in the same clothes and we would like... it was from head to toe, the same thing, and so that was like really cool. Growing up in Ireland, I look back at old pictures like 'oh my god, what were we doing?' But then after I like got a little bit older I want to say maybe into the latter half of elementary school, definitely middle school, I was dressing myself, but I was dressing myself with a lot of hand me downs. So I would either get clothes from my older brother who... I was in middle school, I'm pretty sure he was later in high school, I think or maybe even off to college. So I would get like some of his old clothes or I would wear some of my stepdads really old clothes or clothes given to me by my, my mom's friends or whomever like it was a lot of Hand me downs that were given to me, a lot of goodwill shopping, a lot of thrift shopping that happened because again, I grew up poor and so there was not a lot of going to the store to buy new clothes for me. And I would have to make those clothes work for years. I remember even up until college, right? Like I had one pair of Nike Air Maxes, and I got those

Air Maxes brand new when I was in like ninth or 10th grade high school, and I never got rid of those shoes until after college I think. I had those shoes for a long time because I just couldn't buy new shoes, combined the clothes a lot, and then I stopped even considering that I could buy new things. So I just didn't go buy new shoes. Then when I started being able to buy new clothes, I was like, wow, I want to buy new clothes. But also I can't buy clothes because they don't make clothes for people my size. So... so now I'm struggling to be able to get clothes that fit even though I can now maybe afford to get a new pair of jeans. And then I discovered ASOS and that changed my whole life. And now it sucks because ASOS is always out of stock on everything now, so that's a bummer. But that really did change my life. And after college I found ASOS really. in 2019/2020 when I was like able to finally buy new clothes. Yeah, so I did a lot of dressing of myself growing up. But it came from hand me downs from a lot of people and a lot of clothes sharing.

Kiri 11:45

And to make a pair of trainers last that long, You must have had such an appreciation and be really taking care of the stuff that you have. Yes. And is that something that now you have more freedom, whether it's financially or access or both? Is that something that... is that like a hangover, you keep your stuff in like good nick?

Da'Shaun 12:03

My mom always raised us to take very good care of our clothes, particularly because of the fact that you know, they were given to us. So we had to be smart about how we care for our clothes, I think the clothes that I have now are going to be clothes that will last me for a long time. And that I probably won't want to get rid of for a long time. Because I also have this sense of like, I have to hold on to this because you know, I don't want to lose it. It's mine now, you know, the the sort of possessiveness that comes with being able to get things for yourself? Yes, okay, I'm working with my therapist.

Kiri 12:40

That should be the subtitle of this podcast. Also, that, you know, there's, there's an argument to be said that the way that you interact with your clothing is actually far more sustainable, and what we should all be, you know, all be looking to do to take care of what we have and have less.

Da'Shaun 12:59

Yes, I absolutely agree. I think, you know, there's a lot of critiques around fast fashion. And, you know, like, the unsustainability of it, in so many ways its harmful for our environment. I think that's true. And also, you know, fast fashion is the only place right now where a lot of fat folks can get our clothes, but to be able to acquire those clothes, and then have the skill and the discipline to hold on to them, and take care of them for as long as you can really does help to create, I think, a much more sustainable model. So yeah, I agree wholeheartedly.

Kiri 13:30

Now, you mentioned being a twin and being dressed the same, were you ever made to wear anything growing up that you absolutely hated?

Da'Shaun 13:38

Nothing I could think of like, I look at my old pictures. And I'm like, I mean, we've been kind of stylish, but like, when I look at pictures from middle school, when I was dressing myself when I was like, what were you thinking like? Where were you going? Why did you have this on? Like I used to own several different pairs of Dickey shorts, and they were all different colours. So I'll be walking around with like, fully orange shorts on like bright orange, or like these blue shorts on or like these green. I'm like, why were you ever wearing this? What even is this? I remember there was a time period, like for a while. And I don't know if it was outside of the US or not. But there were these hoodies that were made that built in like headphones, and I used to wear that a lot all the time. We had them! Did Ya'll? Okay, so I'm like, I don't know why I wore any of these things. But like, I just looked back at some of my old pictures from middle school and I'm like, Where were you going? And why did you wear this?

Kiri 14:34

Did you ever have a nightmare closing then or an outfit that you just never wanted to take off that you felt like okay, this is, this is me?

Da'Shaun 14:43

I don't think that I did, not growing up. I think about like that's really sad. But no, I think that I never really like felt, at least for what I can remember. I've never really felt at home in my clothes. I think there was this one shirt that I loved and this shirt. It was like this chequered. plaid shirt, it was like blue, grey, black and white. And it's not even that I just love the shirt that much, it was that it was one of the only shirts that I felt fit me, so well, and I was in high school at the time of this, I think I was in my senior year, I remember pictures that I took in my honours English course. But I used to love this shirt. And then I found like a pair of pants, these athletic pants. And those are like the first pair of pants that I remember having as I got fatter, where they really fit me I was where like, I was like, Oh, wow, these pants actually fit. I don't feel like I'm dying in here trying to breathe because I can't, I can't button them. And I love those. But I never had like a particular outfit. But now whenever I put an outfit on, I never want to get out of it. So...

Kiri 15:46

That's so great. When you were a teenager, I think you're a little bit younger than me. What were the big trends when you were growing up? And were you able to indulge them? Or was it just at the point that like existing in, in a fat body they were not making any room for you to follow the trends anyway?

Da'Shaun 16:03

I think when I was a teenager, I'm trying to remember like all of the trends, but like the Heelys trend. And I think that there was a moment in time when oh my god, I remember the skinny jeans when they first came out. And I was like obsessed because I was growing up as this black kid in the south where everyone was like doing this whole new way. This, this jerk era, this like dance era, this dance crew era type thing that was happening. And I remember wanting so bad to be able to fit into some skinny jeans, and I could not fit into them. And I was like, 'my life is over. This sucks. I don't want I want to be a part of the wave. And I can't be.' I remember that like so clearly. And now they make skinny jeans for me to fit in. So now I'm like, a couple pair of skinny jeans that I own. And I'm like, you know, the hype was not worth it. But at the time, at the time, it was like something that I really desperately wanted to be a part of and I couldn't be and yeah, I think that there were like just so many trends that happened

growing up. And I think the skinny jeans part for me is just sticking out at the front of my head right now. I was like obsessed. Because my favourite rapper was Little Wayne at the time. And you know, you had in this era you have like, you know, your B.O.B's and the jerk boys, and just so many of like, this hip hop culture that's influencing fashion, that I just could not be a part of. And I was just so upset. I hated it.

Kiri 17:27

Yeah, so difficult, especially as a teenager, I think people experiment ledger, their style, I think as a teenager, because it's when you're working out who you are. And I think most people who don't exist in a fat body, they don't realise, it clips the wings of you expressing who you are. It's like everyone else has 20 colours to paint with. And you're given three and you're meant to paint this masterpiece with it.

Da'Shaun 17:47

Absolutely. And for me at the time, it was, I was also growing up in a very Christian household and skinny jeans at the time. Like, it's just so interesting the ways that like culture is, is so influenced by Christianity, and and vice versa. But I remember like, everyone was like, No, you know, boys don't wear pants like that, boys you know, men don't, don't wear clothes like that, you know, that's gay, or that's for women, that sort of idea. And so even if I could fix any jeans, I probably wouldn't be able to wear them because I didn't grow up in a home where that was allowed. And now it's part of everyday culture where it's like, oh, we you know, we don't try, we don't bat our eyes at it. Going from the 90s, where everything was super baggy, and then to the 2000s, where everything was super baggy, like super baggy. Like you sort of go from these tall tees and way oversized jeans to skinny jeans and shirts that really fit and it's like what's happened, this is a change that's very different. So yeah, I think that like reflecting on what my childhood was like in the 90s and in the 2000s. And then that sort of shifts into my teenage years in the twoth, in the 2010s. and whatnot is like just a very interesting difference. And now where we are in this 2020s period, clothes continued to change. But I love this question, because it's really causing me to reflect on one, house style has changed, but also how quickly style has changed. And I'm wondering now, like how style changed in the last two years? Like I don't know, things have just moved so quickly.

Kiri 19:13

It is so interesting. And you know what I actually think that because the last two years the world's been on a pause. I think fashion kind of has as well, I think so. And fashion hasn't found its way again, because fashion is led by usually, I would say queer people because they are on the fringes, they're more creative. They're, you know, fashion steals from those on the outside and then monetizes it and sells it to the masses. So perhaps, while those people are locked in their houses, and not being as visible, where do these people steal from? I think...

Da'Shaun 19:45

It's very much influenced by black folks that we would say are, you know, in the hood type thing, right? Or queer folks who are in the ballroom scene or who are in you know, like the underground scene. So, essentially what I'm saying is so many black creators have made such great brilliant pieces of work and have showcased it online through TikTok, through Twitter. And you know, like I remember just recently seeing Cardi B, for example, hiring this one black creator. I wish I remember her, her name, but I don't

at the moment, who has like, transformed old sneakers into like, a core set, and have been like, showcasing that on TikTok and on, and on Twitter for like the past year or so. And Cardi B hired her to like, make an outfit for her. And it's just like, you know, that sort of thing that's happening. And for that to be on someone like Cardi B who really is right now like such a huge trendsetter, who is doing such amazing fashion risks, who the fashion industry has their eyes glued on. It's like, this is the type of thing that happens when you find innovative ways to show up, showcase your work and who you are to continue to influence culture. So yeah, I think that fashion is on a pause more largely, but I think that those folks who have their ears to the ground, you know, like Cardi B, who was really watching smaller businesses, and like black business owners and black creators, I think they are going to continue to push the field forward.

Kiri 21:07

Yeah, that was my only thing. I was like, Oh, it's so exciting. But I know the flip side of having any raised visibility for small businesses is oh, it's is she ain't gonna come and steal my, you know, just knock off my designs. So powerless against huge organisations like that. Yeah, it's really tough. And black creators especially seem to be, you know, just pillaged basically by people who couldn't afford to waste their time with lawsuits or just ignore them. Exactly.

Da'Shaun 21:32

It's very unfortunate. It really is.

Kiri 21:34

But it's so nice that you have artists like Cardi B, who are cutting out the middleman and reaching straight to the creatives.

Da'Shaun 21:41

Exactly. It's beautiful to witness because, you know, it's very uncommon. It doesn't happen very often. And I think about like, you know, something that Beyonce did last year, where she put up like a sort of directory of small black businesses, where she was purchasing things from and where, and she wanted folks to support, that sort of thing is huge for an artist to do, especially one of Beyonce's calibre, I mean, it's Beyonce. And so like, just, you know, seeing that sort of thing happening, in the midst of the pandemic is, to me a little bit encouraging, because it feels like okay, maybe there is a shift, a small one, but maybe, but maybe still a shift. And people are trying to credit folks who are, who are creating things for themselves that have, you know, like you said, going through a middleman to do

Kiri 22:28

Did you have, because it's interesting. You talk about the church in the past tense, like that's not part of your world, necessarily. So I wondered if you had like a rebellious phase? And if so, did it ever show up in your style?

Da'Shaun 22:39

I think that I am in my rebellious stage. No, yes. I never really had a rebellious stage per se. I was very outspoken as a kid like as a younger child, I was super quiet. But I also didn't allow for anyone to outright disrespect me. And that was not something that would ever fly for me that went for students

and teachers and principals alike, and whoever, whomever else, because I always understood myself as a full being who deserved the same level of respect that authority figures deserved. So that was like a thing for me. It's, I don't necessarily see that as like a rebellious stage because that's always been who I am. But in terms of separating myself from the church, yes, I stopped even being part of the church, stop being Christian. All of that, in around 2016-ish. I started questioning things a lot in 2014 when I got to college, ever since then, yeah, I've been in my, my rebellious stage, you know, living my best queer and trans life. And I think it does show in my clothes, right? I never before would have worn heels. Never before would have worn makeup. Right? Never before but I have worn clothes that were tighter fitting or, you know, jewellery that, that wasn't like just one ring on a finger type of thing, right? Like, I have completely dressed up who I am, I have my hair dyed and, and I'm wearing like, a different styles, and I'm wearing colours that I wouldn't have worn before. And yeah, it's fun to feel like a doll and dressing myself up in the ways that I want to. It's enjoyable. It's great. And this, this is a... I'm in my rebellious stage, but it's also a stage that does not end for me, because this is it.

Kiri 24:20

Oh, gorgeous, this style that we see now, which I think is someone who is fluent in fashion and trends and manages to be on trend but never trendy. That's what I think when I see you, is someone who understands their own body and their own style, and goes okay, I'll have some of you and I have some of the unlike and also has such a good understanding of colour. I think when I, I see the outfits that you've put together, so when did that style start showing up? Is it 2020 or is it 2014? Like I'm wearing the journey?

Da'Shaun 24:53

I think that. So the way that I dress now is the way I've always wanted to dress, right? Like there are still, there are still things that I want to do that I just simply cannot afford. But, like, one reason why I love Cardi B too is because, she made a statement years ago where she was like, I've always known how to dress. I just never could afford it. And that's me, I'm like, You know what, if I can ever afford the way I really want to dress, you all know it. But right now, the way that I'm dressing is the way that I really, really, really want to dress it up, always wanted to dress, but it didn't actually, like start showcasing for me until yeah, around the end of 2019, beginning of 2020. So I'm also disabled. And like I said, I've been chronically homeless for most of my life and poor for most of my life. And so I didn't get work until 2019 into 2020 was the first time I like had my two real jobs and like my adult life. And from there, I was like, Whoa, I have a job, I have two jobs. So I can, you know, buy things with my own money and, and try to figure out what it is that I want to do with my style. I decided that, you know, I was going to run with it, make it work for me and do what I wanted to do. And I've always been someone who, you know, like, I see what's the mainstream, I see what's, like you said trendy. And I can pull some of those things from it so that I feel like on trend, like you said, but I also have a very individual style, I know what my body is, I know what I want my body to look like, I know how I want to dress my body and I don't want it to look like you know, like it came straight off of a magazine, I want to feel like I have put together something of my own that feels like me that feels authentic, that feels true to who I am. And that allows me to, to, you know, fulfil that piece of myself that my inner child has always wanted, which is to feel like I could dress in a very stylish way that I've always felt deprived of. So I love that you said that you can like see like this, you know, on trend, but not trendy person when you look at me and also I love that you name, colour, I've always loved colour and I've always loved

putting together different colours. Colour blocking is something that I've always loved even when I was like dressing up in suits and whatnot. I remember like my friends and I will always talk about like colour blocking with my ties or not wearing like a full suit, but wearing like a blazer and a different like pair of pants so that we were like colour blocking in that way. Just like trying to find ways to put colours together in a way that you really wouldn't think of that feels so nice and so good. And that, and that looks new and fresh and authentic. And that's what I'm always going for with that. Whether it's bright colours or really neutral colours.

Kiri 27:36

I think you've hinted that you do, but do you think of hair and makeup as part of the outfit as well?

Da'Shaun 27:41

Absolutely. Yes. I feel like whenever I put clothes on, my outfit is not complete unless I've considered what hair, makeup and jewellery will also look like, and you know sometimes it means rings on all five of my fingers like you can sometimes it means you know like one ring here, one ring there. Sometimes it means wearing a big necklace. Sometimes it means just wearing like a little small chain. Right? Sometimes it means wearing lip gloss, sometimes it doesn't. And yes, my hair like you know sometimes I wear a turban or do rag or like having it up like this or I'll you know take my hair down and or put it up in a ponytail. You know, just depending on what the mood of the outfit is. And so yes, whenever I get dressed, it literally for me, it's a head to toe situation even down to what underwear I'm wearing. They also have to like be a part of the outfit.

Kiri 28:27

Oh I love it. You are I mean this in the nicest possible way. You always wanted to get hit by a bus. The underwear is on point!

Da'Shaun 28:36

I do like the underwear I find and that's actually one thing my mom always taught us anyway like, you know, always go out in your best underwear but you just never know.

Kiri 28:47

I also saw some pictures of you, I just thought they're beautiful and I don't necessarily know like the right term for it. But you have like jewellery in your hair as well. Yes, it looks so stunning and so beautiful. Thank You. And I audibly gasped looking at pictures of you. it looked just Fantastic.

Da'Shaun 29:04

Yeah, they're called, It's called Lock jewellery. And it's jewellery literally made specifically for people with locks. And I love it. its whenever I want to feel like maybe a little bit more regal and like the rings and the necklace just don't do enough. I put that in my hair because it feels like it goes more along with my outfit. So like if I have like a presentation or I'm doing something like more formal, I'll put that in my hair because I feel like it just brings the whole thing together so thank you.

Kiri 29:32

That is a beautiful, I'm used to the word regal because there's like a sense of sort of like states person about it is like a... I don't know there is just like this extra level of, I don't know if it's a thought but it's like amid a mix of authority and Grace that this jewellery was bringing that was really... Yeah I loved it Absolutely. Are there any trends that you've repeatedly tried to pull off? but it's just not happening.

Da'Shaun 30:01

I'm going to say no, again. I'm trying to figure out the tricks. And I've tried that I can't pull it off. And I think that, you know, or that I haven't been able to pull off. And I think that there aren't but also that may just mean that there are trends that I know I can't pull off. And I just haven't tried. I don't know.

Kiri 30:18

Well, that was my, that was my next question is, do you think it's because you have a strong, especially with considering how you grew up? And how much you must know, your, your body and how the world sees you? And who you want to see yourself? Do you already know? Like, you don't need to flirt with stuff and try it out? Because you like, not for me babe?

Da'Shaun 30:35

Not for me. No, Yeah, I think so. I but I also think that like, I like risks, when it comes to fashion, I want to take big risks, I want to, you know, do something that that is out of there, right? Like, one of my latest pictures on Instagram is I have on this long, like plaid shirt. And I have on this like, this coat or this jacket that has like a different print with leather pants and these like Converse boots. And for me, I'm like, I always grew up here, you know, you cannot mix patterns. You can't wear different patterns. And also like, you can't wear these different types of fabrics. And I'm like, I'm going to do that. I don't care. Right. Like, I think that these rules are so arbitrary, and they don't actually make for good fashion. And so yeah, within, within my, my budget, I like to take risks with what I wear, because I think that it matters. And I think that you know, like, I want to push the bounds of what I think I will look good in, right. So if I feel like, oh, this can't look good on me, I will try it anyway. Because I want to push what I feel will and will not work for me because I actually don't think that anything is necessarily unworkable for me or for anyone. I think that it's about how we work and also about how you wear it. I think, you know, for me, when I went from having the clothes wear me, to me wanting to wear the clothes, everything changed. I was like, Oh, I'm wearing these clothes, right? Like this is about me, not, not necessarily about the clothes, I have to wear it with a particular level of confidence. And when I started to do that, for me, I didn't really care, I thought I looked good in everything. I agree. I agree. Do you know what I think is so fascinating, the timeline of things sort of you getting these jobs and having a disposable income that you can then turn to how you look kind of coincides with the pandemic. So what's interesting to me is, most of us or I think lots of us lost our style over the pandemic and what we were and our influences and have different relationships with our bodies, which change. And it felt like you hit the ground running. Because you'd almost, I guess made this is quite clumsy, but the situation of like a lack of choice. And you know, financial restrictions that often people are encountering the pandemic is how you were living prior. And then you get this kind of change of, you know, through your own ability, but change your fortunes. And then you're like, Guys, I'm living my best major. Literally, I'm like, in 2020, I was like, I have moved into my very first apartment by myself, I this was my first time ever living alone. My first time ever, like having being housed by myself in a way that was stable, I just did my first time experiencing like stability. And I moved in in January. So of course I didn't know this

then. But then March came March 2020, when everything hit the fan in the US. And I was like, I get it, ya'll like, I know that this sucks, and it really does suck, I hate it. But also, I'm gonna post pictures everyday now. Because now I can I get to explore like with myself, and also it helped a lot because I got to get comfortable with what I was wearing within the confines of my home first, before I decided to step outside, now I wear whatever I want to wear outside because I feel confident in it and feel good in it. But before it gave me the space to be like, Okay, I'll try this, post this on the internet, see what people like about it, see how they respond and, and go from there. And that for me just felt so good. It gave me so much room to just be able to, to be and to explore and to find what feels good for me. And to get feedback in a way that I wouldn't have been able to do if I just you know, was living my best life before 2020. So, yeah, it has been a very, you know, obviously, the pandemic sucks. And in this regard, like this has been very, very, very good for me to where I will go outside now in my heels and go out in my makeup and wear whatever I want to wear because I can and because I feel good in it. And that to me is the most important part about all of this. And honestly it has been one of the greatest lessons that I've gotten from the pandemic so far.

Kiri 34:48

I think it's so interesting what you're saying because I think your experience of, I guess of the pandemic of being able to kind of express yourself in the safety and confines of your home where hopefully everyone feels their best and safest in their home, that's what we all aspire to right? And then have that interaction with the outside world through social media. And that then gives you the validation and confidence to go into the 'real world' in inverted commas. I think that's such an interesting point that I never hear being made, especially when people kind of critique the generation below mind for just purely living on the internet. But like, actually, if you're, you're a creative kid, and you're an outsider, or you're different or other, that actually outside is quite scary space, and you can learn to self actualize on the internet, and then that can take you into the real world, although you might not ever need to do that. Right. I just think that's such an interesting point I'd never thought about.

Da'Shaun 35:44

Yes, so I'm on like, the lower end of the ladder and the millennial generation. So you know, for me, social media growing up was your AOL chat rooms, or MySpace and things like that. So when I guess, quote, unquote, came out in 2016, as queer to my family, I had already been living in such a way online and with my friends, because at the time I was in college, and all of my friends were queer and trans. And so this was just part of who I already was, and sort of gave me like a lot of room and safety, in a sense to be able to explore myself and fill out what I wanted and who I wanted to be and who I needed to be for myself, before I had to ever really live that out loud in a very particular way. As I experienced that, you know, I realised like, a lot of folks get a lot of validation from the internet. And, you know, Gen Z is antagonised a lot for the ways that they use the internet, especially tiktok, but I love it, I think that they have found such a great way of being able to do what so many of us wish we could have done, and wish we could have had the space to do. And also what so many of us did do on MySpace and did do on Facebook, I remember being on Facebook and MySpace and like having like my little intimate conversations with people that I would have never talked to in real life, because I was too afraid. It's just it's cool to see that happening. Now that honestly, it's a lot. Of course, it's not foolproof, and not completely safe. But it's a lot more safer than it was when we were doing these things behind our parents backs because we didn't want them to know. And so we had to, like, live in a way where there

was no, no sense of safety amongst community for us. So I love it. And yes, that was a tool for me, it was a way for me to be like, you know, I have these people who are wanting to affirm me who are wanting to care for me, or wanting to show up for me in a very particular way. And I want to show it for myself in a very particular way in this moment. And now I have the time to do that, you know, I didn't really have the time I was writing a book and working two jobs, but in 2020, but I gave myself the space to be able to explore more with that aspect that was important for me to be able to have the space to be like yeah, this is fashion is actually important for me and always has been and I've never felt like I had room to be a part of that. And now I do and so now I'm gonna find a way to become comfortable with who I am in that way and then go out into the world. I remember my first time wearing heels outside and my first time wearing like heeled boots and and wearing lip gloss and makeup outside it just was nice and freeing and liberating and of course scary you know, you know the dangers that come along with existing in these ways in public, especially in the West, but it's something that I would never choose to give up again.

Kiri 38:53

What's the oldest item of clothing that you've got that you still love?

Da'Shaun 38:58

I still love... Oh my God, I don't know if I'm gonna like be dating myself when I say this or not. But I'm saying like I'm old. I'm not but I have this American Eagle cardigan in my closet, two actually, I don't even know if people still wear American Eagle. I have no idea. But I have this American Eagle cardigan in my closet that actually was a hand me down from my oldest brother. And I love those sweaters. I refuse to throw them away. I haven't worn them in ages. But I used to have an obsession with cardigans. And they were my first cardigans that felt like I wasn't Mr. Rogers. But I was like actually a cool kid. And so I would like wear those all the time whenever I want to, like put on like a cool outfit. And so I have this in my closet hanging out with the rest of my sweaters. And I refuse to get rid of them. In fact, I've been trying to find ways honestly to repurpose them while I'm like, maybe I don't have to wear them on completely or I'm gonna find a way to make them work because I love them and I think at this point it gives vintage.

Kiri 40:04

I can't wait to see the journey, the reincarnation of the cardigan. I'm so excited. I'm looking forward to it. I'm like, ready. Is there an era that you would love to have existed in just for the fashion? I understand that politically, there are not many safe areas for you to travel to. But fashion wise...

Da'Shaun 40:23

Yes, you know, I think I would have to go with the 70s and the 80s. I think it would be so cool to be walking around in bill bottoms calling people job turkey? Like, that would be like, I think that would be just the coolest thing. And I would, I would absolutely have an afro walking around with a pick in my hair. And I don't know, I think yeah, like, I love the fashion since of those times. I also will say, of course, you know, barring the political aspect of this, the 50s I think were fashion wise, were just really cool. There was something like really cool about the way that folks dressed in the 50s. And if I'm thinking of this in the right timeframe, I just think about you know, like going to a bar in that time would have just been really cool to be able to put on that style of clothes and bar hop or something. So yeah, I

think like those are the the time periods that I would have loved to just well, not love but but would have, but those like those fashion styles at the time, were I think really, really cool. Definitely not the 60s, Definitely not the 60s, there was just a lot of suit wearing that I've already gone through. I don't want to do that again. So yeah, I think the 50s and the, and the 70s and 80s. And of course, I was born in the 90s. So a lot of that fashion for me is already feels home.

Kiri 41:45

Love it. Have you got an item of clothing that you put on and you just instantly feel amazing in it?

Da'Shaun 41:51

Okay, yes, I have this weird obsession. I'm saying weird because I live in the south. It does not get cold enough for most of these coats that I own. But I have this obsession with these coats. And there's one coat that I have. That's wool and I am obsessed and recently I bought this like puffer jacket that again you would only wear in like New York but I bought it because it was so cute. And I'm just obsessed with jackets, I'm obsessed with layers so like whenever I put those those coats on or those jackets on it feels very nice. I love it. It's comforting. I think that I would definitely say that I also have a huge obsession with tapered pants now, like now I tie my pants one length shorter than they are supposed to be, okay, because I'm just obsessed with like this style right now where you know like your pants sit on the top of your shoe or like they like sit just above your shoe instead of sort of weighing on them. And they're tapered and they're like pressed a particular way. For me the ones that I really love are not the ones that button but they have like the drawstrings in the front. I'm, I'm obsessed with those. And so I have like two or three pairs of those in my closet. And when I put them on, I feel like you can't tell me anything so, so yes, I think those are my two answers for sure. Also anything the drawstring I respect because it's giving me a level of comfort that says it cares about me. Exactly, it's like the rest of this is cute. And I don't have to worry about unbuttoning my pants after I eat or something. So Yeah.

Kiri 43:20

The driving knot just my friend calls on his belt that you know when you sit down to drive you have to undo your belt.

Da'Shaun 43:28

So uncomfortable you're like, I would sit down and like would have just like, it may as well be a stamp of my button. And my stuff. Like this is not how life should be.

Kiri 43:39

I wanted to ask you about your relationship with shopping? Are you someone that enjoys it? Like is it online for you? Are you in person? You want to touch stuff? You mentioned you sort of touched on sustainability and things earlier, I wonder how much of a part that plays in your shopping I absolutely understand that when it comes to shopping in like plus size or curve ranges that then sustainability and affordability never ever intersect. So this isn't, this is not me being like, let me check your credentials. It's just a chat about shopping.

Da'Shaun 44:10

I would, I would actually really love to be able to shop in person, but I have yet to find a store that makes clothes or that sells clothes that are my size that are also fashionable. You know, like you have some of those like big and tall or extra large stores that are I don't know if they're anywhere outside of the South, but they have stores that are specific to that. But the clothes are some of the ugliest clothes I've ever seen. And I'm like, I'm not wearing this like this is the most unflattering piece of clothing I've ever seen. So I don't go in stores anymore because I get so self conscious and insecure about my body because there's just no clothes for me. All of my shopping happens online now. Of course I used to do a lot of thrift shopping but that has of course completely stopped since the pandemic. I don't want to touch anyone's clothes at all. I would love to one day just be able to just go into several different stores. But I after going into H&M enough times and you know all these stores that just sell clothes for the surfer, I don't go into stores anymore.

Kiri 45:09

Yeah, what's the best thing you've ever thrifted got secondhand or vintage?

Da'Shaun 45:14

I think one of the best things I've ever gotten thrifting is a sweater. I am obsessed with sweaters. Again, I don't know why this is the case I live in the south, its rarely ever cold enough for me to like be so obsessed with all these sweaters and coats and stuff. But I am, I can't design it. And I don't remember like the exact sweater anymore because I don't have it. But I just remember like going home watching all the things and like putting it on, it being one of the softest sweaters I've ever worn. And it just felt so good and looked really good. And I was obsessed with it for a very long time. But I'm pretty sure that was in like high school. That was one of the I think the best things I've ever gotten thrifting and also I want to say maybe I found a really great pair of dress pants there once right like, you know, you can go thrifting and find Burberry and Versace and all these brand name clothes for \$2. Because people are giving it away.

Kiri 46:04

It's so great when that happens when you're the person who's living on the Thrift or we would say like charity shop budget. And then you managed to snag something designer. And then you're suddenly playing in the same leagues as those kids in school who make you believe that labels everything.

Da'Shaun 46:18

Exactly. For me, like from seventh grade to 12th grade, I was in school with a lot of white middle class students in high school in particular, from ninth to 12th grade. I was like so removed from, from so much because all of my, I was in marching band, I was a band kid. So you know, as I'm sure you probably can imagine, majority of the band were white. And they were all from like these middle class homes. And so I was like, I don't know how I'm going to keep up like, I am poor. You know, my best friend and I. She grew up in like these trailer parks and I grew up having to move every two business days, I mean, dramatic because we couldn't afford to live where we lived. I mean, we were evicted and things like that. So but she dressed so beautifully. I was always admiring how beautifully she dressed despite where she was growing up. And for me, I was like, I have to like, try to keep up with the rest of the band, because they're all middle class. And their, their families are, are doctors and professionals, which to me was a profession of great dignity and whatnot for them, they were like, professors don't

make anything and I was like, okay, my mom's a bus driver so I don't know. So I would like to have to keep up with them. And so whenever I would find those snags at thrift stores, I was like, This is it. I get to, I get to be in the big leagues for a moment. So yes, for sure.

Kiri 47:33

With your style now, because I think you have such a clear sense of style. And it's so beautiful to hear you talk about that blossoming, especially over the past couple of years, do you think you're only going to get more experimental? Or have you found like, No, this is it. I've nailed my style. And now it's just playing with the trends and the colours and the innovations that come in? Are you like, No, I'm going to have a phase where I do this. And I do that? Like what's the future like?

Da'Shaun 47:57

No, I'm excited about exploring more, I want to become more experimental for sure. I don't know what that looks like quite yet. But the more I'm able to find spaces that make clothes that are catered to fat folks, the more I'm going to want to explore it. The only thing stopping me from doing that is the limited space for fat folks and my money. So if I can find more spaces for fat folks that are sustainable, and also that don't require me to be rich, because I don't want to be rich, I'm going to experiment and I'm going to explore it. For me, That's what fashion is about. It's about exploring and being experimental always and always taking those risks, and never settling with where you are in your fashion sense in finding more ways to sort of showcase who you are as time changes. For me, I think people are always growing and I'm always growing. And I want my style to always grow with me.

Kiri 48:49

That's gorgeous. I've never, just as you're talking then, it was like the thought I was having you perfectly crystallised because I was like Yeah, it's weird that I've always been like, No, I think I found my style, but I'm like, God if I thought I know, I think I know everything about the world. I would hate anyone who thought I pride myself on evolving but like it's so weird that I haven't looked at that with my style. Of course my style should keep evolving. I've had a revelation. Is there an item of clothing you can always see yourself wearing? And whether that's a specific item like oh, this jacket or this? Or is it like I, You're, you're always gonna find me in a sweater?

Da'Shaun 49:28

You will always find me in a sweater. You will always find me in like either a sweater or like a cardigan or a light jacket. I will like you, no matter where my style takes me. I will be in that for sure. I also think that actually I'll become unnecessarily married to anything else besides that. No, that's not true. You will also always find me in a boot. I love boots. A lot and the style of boot may change and like the type of boot may change, but you will always find several pairs of boots in my closet always.

Kiri 50:00

The boots that I saw, I think you have them in brown and black, but they've got like a heel, and they've got that perfect shape toe. That's like a point but round at the same time. So when points come in fashion and when rounds come in fashion, they'll always going to see through that they are so beautiful, the brown pair, especially that colour Brown is like mwah chefs kiss.

Da'Shaun 50:20

Thank you so much. I have three pair of those one is leather that pair is black, the brown pair, I think that you're referring to is suede. And then the third pair, it's like, to me I feel like it's a cowboy boot because it has like a steel plate at the front. Those are dark brown. They're my favourite pair, pairs of boots, all three of those. I love them. So yes, you will always find a pair of boots in my closet.

Kiri 50:43

Well, one of the things I'd say, I hope I'm not too clumsy when I try and express this. So the boots that you're wearing to me, they have that like cowboy edge to them. But there's this really interesting thing when I look at cowboy boots and I think of kind of people in the South who would wear cowboy boots for work etc. I think of them a very traditionalist, small and big C conservative. I guess you don't have big C conservative but like Republican I guess I'm being very broad strokes here. They're incredibly glamorous, they have a heel, there's often loads of colours, there's often stones on them. There's you know, like amazing leathers. And I think it is so great to see like, some, someone like you in them, because you just see how barking glamorous they are. Thank you. And it's such a great subversion of this traditional shoe. And then you pair it in such a fashion way with stuff. You just go Oh, of course, that's the like, that's how great they can look. And you're like, it feels like you're owning something that could, In some ways, Maybe I'm jumping too far here, but be symbolic of a group of people who could be hostile to someone like...

Da'Shaun 51:50

Yeah no, I think that you're absolutely right. I think that it's like this style of boot is very much associated with this American idea. And this American idea really is typically the white, thin cowboy, male typically and their wives, but one, black cowboys in black, like farm farmers and black families on farms and whatnot, have existed for a long time in the South. Since we have arrived here, since we were brought here. You know, that's our style. And I think that it's been repurposed and repackaged in many ways. And it's unfortunate because, yeah, I think that we look damn good in what we wear. So yes, I love that. And I, that's part of the reason why I'm sort of like, you know, I wear them. I'm like, you know, I think that these boots are cute, I don't really care what they're supposed to, or who they're typically associated with. I think they're really cute. And I think I look cute in them. And so I'm going to wear them so yeah, I love that. And that's always a goal for me. I, for me, it's like if I like it, I'm going to wear it. I don't really care what it's associated with so long as it's not associated with something that is bad or that is anti me, right? Like I'm not going to walk around and wear like a Jeff Bezos T-shirt. But like, But if I want to wear something that is typically associated with people who are not, you know, for me or are typically hostile towards people like me, but I think it's cute. I'm gonna wear it, because I can.

Kiri 53:15

I've got two more questions for you. So the penultimate one is are there any trends that you're hoping never come back?

Da'Shaun 53:21

I hope we never have to see gauchos ever again. You know those like those like Capri, Capri used to, but the gauchos are like the, like the capri's that are like really flowy. The Disney Channel stars to wear them a lot. I never want to see that again. Honestly. And the, the trend, the 2000s trend where people

wore like skirts over their jeans and then big belts. And I never want to see that again. Like I just, none of that like this 2000s fashion that was happening. None of that. I don't want to see the tall tees and big pants.

Kiri 53:59

There's a whole Instagram account that's about sort of British naughties culture in that fashion called Huns net and it looks at all the girl bands at the time and they're all like low rise jeans with a skirt over it and those big sort of ply their belt things and oh my god, it just hideous, hideous, hideous time for fashion.

Da'Shaun 54:18

So bad! And it's like, I mean, they were great outfits for the time, but you look back and it's like, what was ever happening with this? I don't know.

Kiri 54:30

Do you know what it is, is a thing for me. And this is, this is almost definitely entrenched in snobbery. What I'm about to say, is that even though I know that they weren't, everyone looked cheap. Like everyone looked inexpensive. Everyone looked flammable. Everyone was like everything was about to fall apart. Like everything looked like fast fashion. And it wasn't these are pop stars. Yes. But it was just the look was like, Oh, cheap.

Da'Shaun 54:54

Yes. No, seriously that, that was the thing. I never want to see it again.

Kiri 55:01

Final question. It could be perceived as a sad one, but I want it to be a celebratory one. So you've reached the end of your glorious life as a visible, queer icon that has inspired lots of young people to be their authentic selves. It's time to bury you or cremate you. What are you going to wear in the coffin?

Da'Shaun 55:24

Well, so I actually want to be turned into a tree. But for the viewing before all that happens, I don't know what I would wear but I gotta think about it because, because I have to, but you and I do not want to, I don't want to be in the traditional suit that people will usually do. When they are like burying their loved ones. I want to be in something that is like, flashy, like semi off in style. Put a boot on me. I know a lot of funeral homes don't put like shoes or things the lower half of people because they typically don't open a full casket for some folks. I want to be fully dressed, put boots on me, some nice boots. Put like a nice pair of like, pants. Maybe there's like flare pants, I don't know. But like a nice pair of pants, and put me in something that really represents who I am and how I show up. That's what I want. I want that and I want to look like I'm about to post pictures on Instagram.

Kiri 56:18

Ready for the gram in the casket?

Da'Shaun 56:21

Exactly. So me.

Kiri 56:25

Da'Shaun ready for the gram in the casket? What a thought, also, matching underwear to your outfit. I mean, that is a level of finish and polish that I can only aspire to. Do you know what I find particularly fascinating about this episode. There was so much, so much about this episode. But I suppose I had never considered how people's online presentation can inform their journey towards living more authentically. What a beautiful thing because I think I as a snap judgement, just think about social media and the internet as well, I'll say, a poison and something to be sort of like a necessary evil that's in my life because of my work. But of course, there's whole groups of people who've been able to find their tribe and themselves online because of how they use social media. That's a really beautiful thing, isn't it? Now then, last week, we got a DM from EJ, who was looking for maternity wear. That is ethical. Well, a word that I've had a grub round, I asked on my Instagram. And I would say that ethical is available, affordable, not so much. But here are some recommendations for you. So turtle dove is apparently absolutely brilliant, and fruity as well. But someone messaged to say that fruity is not very affordable, but that there's lots of secondhand resale sites dedicated to not just baby's clothes, but also maternity wear. So there's some specialist as well seek them out. There's also a French brand called, okay im going to say this wrong, I want to say Tajeen banane. But it's TAJINEBANANE. That stuff is really cool, ethical sustainable. It's on the dear side deffo. But apparently, they've got slamming sales. If you've got the time. Keep an eye I would say. And there's stuff specifically for breastfeeding in it as well, which is great. So I hope that's helpful. Thank you so much for the people who've got in contact with the recommendations. It's great to have a little network out there of people who love clothes. I can just be like, Where can I get this from, I should be using that resource more often. And if you've got any messages, love to hear them. You can follow us on Instagram, at Who Are You Wearing pod. Also got some great pictures of Da'Shaun that gonna go up this week. And also you can pop us an email you can write to us on whoareyouwearingpod@gmail.com. Now every week I talk about a small business that I think is great that relates to the guests I had on and I've got to say I've nailed this this is such a perfect fit this week. It's a business I've wanted to talk about for ages as well. So it's amazing brilliant black owned business that I bought stuff from and they make affordable, of course that term is relative I'm very aware of that. Affordable plus size clothes and what clothes they make please meet if you don't already know, Dear Curves, and can I just say off the bat something I appreciate the sales they have are unbelievable and I've got a stunning emerald green. I'm looking at it now it's right behind me in my little cupboard and green circle skirt from them. I wore it on an episode of guessable. Got so many messages about it. It's 40 quid at the moment, which is mad considering how well made it is, their stuff is beautiful. It's really sort of premium. It's, you know, like it's incredibly well made. It's a great fabric. There's masses of it as well. Oh god, it's so beautiful. If I wasn't sworn off buying new clothes at the moment, they've got a pink one and a blue one, I would absolutely buy them, the owner and founder is Ajomo Adegá. And she is an x plus size model herself, and has always kept an eye on providing plus size clothes that are good quality, that last because that is a really good way of making things sustainable with a reasonable price tag. Now, this is a small business who have worked so hard to hustle and pivot and survive through the pandemic. I'm just endlessly impressed with the Germans work ethic and creativity. And it's no wonder that her pieces are made onto the red carpet as well. So please, go and check out Adegá because oh my god, there's like a tall leopard print skirt is also absolutely amazing. Yeah, go to their website and their insta, if you want a beautifully made high impact

statement piece, and they go up to size 30. Oh, also, I've just seen, I've been on the website like a little creep because I'm not buying new clothes at the moment. And there's a, there's a gorgeous green velvet maxi dress that's new in, it's a work of art, please someone buy it and send me a picture of you in it. Because I will not allow to at the moment. But if I could, I would absolutely buy that. And thank you so much for listening to this episode. Have you enjoyed it? the feedbacks been gorgeous. If you do enjoy the podcast, Can you sling us a nice review? wherever you listen to it, because it does make a big difference with more people finding it and that's what I want. I just want the people I've had on are so honest and open. And important. That's what's amazed me about this podcast is every conversation is really poignant. And they've been so gracious to be so open I just want as many people to listen, I guess and find it and maybe find solace and inspiration from it. And so yeah, give it a nice review please. And thank you so much for listening. We've got a cracking episode next week and a good pal of mine as well. It is the wonderful Suzie Ruffell. What a woman, What a style icon. Who I genuinely told that I banned from the podcast in the most serious way and it's the only good bit of acting I've done she believed me because she put a picture of software and Crocs. So see you next week, bye! Who Are You Wearing is produced by Jo Southerd the artwork is by Mary Phillips and the music is by Annie glass. This has been a Little Wander production.