

# PARIAH

the bleeding-edge fat fashion column

by Amanda Piasecki

**T**his is the first installment of *Size Queen's* fashion pages, named *PARIAH* after the author's one-installment fashion zine by the same name. The author is a fat clothing aficionado, who feels that when politics fail, fat people can often achieve solidarity around finding something cute to wear.



## Madam X's Dirty Little Secret

An illustrious colleague of the author, Madam X, has a dirty little secret. Madam X compulsively steals from Lane Bryant. *PARIAH* does not endorse shoplifting or Lane Bryant, but feels that Madam X's story bears repeating.

M. X began her questionable hobby in the early 1990s in the heart of America. During this period M. X filled out a job application at the local Lane Bryant, housed within a dingy strip mall that had replaced the town's steel mill in the 1970s. She was beginning to develop some fat consciousness, and secretly hoped that she'd land the Lane Bryant job so that she'd be able to spend some time with her fat sisters. She saw Lane Bryant as the site for the gathering of an underground sorority, the sacred site of the shame, denial, and grudging acceptance ritual practiced by women size 14-28. She wanted to face her demons, to the tune of \$6.25 an hour. Besides, her alternative was working at Wal-Mart.

Lane Bryant had all the trappings of a place of worship. The pungent odor of perfumed polyester, the meditative soundtrack of demographically-targeted top-40 hits repeating once every hour, the disciples' confessions, penance, and self-flagellation all led M. X to believe that she was some sort of fat retail priestess. She began to think she had special powers, and since her manager began leaving M. X to close the store every night, our heroine began taking the occasional piece of plus-sized merchandise without paying for it. It was easy to rationalize: she was stealing from a corporate monolith with questionable moral standards itself. The first thing M. X stole was a pair of gold satin thong underwear, but she soon moved up to acetate floral-printed blouses, and then to bootcut jeans, two-piece suits, and leather jackets.

Her theft escalated. She began stealing for friends, before the merchandise even made it to the racks, fancying herself a fat lady Robin Hood. She still had no qualms about her avocation, but began to have more and more visions of In-

donesian children sewing size-28 Easter dresses as she hung them from the store's rickety, faux-chrome racks. One night M. X decided she better quit while she was ahead. The fat sisterhood of Lane Bryant wasn't all she hoped it would be. M. X realized she was compulsively stealing to stave off the seething self-hatred practiced by most of Lane Bryant's worshipers, and that she better get out of there before she became a felon.

M. X moved to a large coastal city and began working at a non-profit. She still had few clothing options, so would still occasionally make a trip out to the suburbs to Lane Bryant. Her non-profit salary was less than adequate, which led M. X's thievery to return, especially once Lane Bryant started making more fashionable clothing. She once made it out of a store with \$325 worth of merchandise underneath an ankle-length black dress, completely unhindered.

M. X still makes the occasional run on Lane Bryant, but her activity has slowed


**PROS:**

- 1) Stealing from a corporate giant like The Limited, Inc. (which Lane Bryant is a subsidiary of), has some redeeming value. You can feel like you're working against the man while you escape with cute clothing, if you don't think too hard about it. (Important note: M. X admonishes you to NEVER, EVER steal from small, locally-owned businesses or from individuals.)
- 2) Shoplifting leads you to question capitalist hierarchies in a more visceral way than we are usually able to as American wage slaves.
- 3) Shoplifting gives you an intense adrenaline rush, and can give you caché in many alternative cultures. Shoplifting makes you feel muy macho.
- 4) When you steal clothing, you can own it without paying for it.



Four of Max's favorite monster femmes: (L to R) Deva, Cherry, Pariah author Amanda, and Melissa.



considerably since she has aged, and since the store closest to her now employs an armed security guard. (Yes, it's true. Our fascist police state uses firearms to protect plus-sized merchandise!) More significantly, M. X also has come to understand the conflicting politics of shoplifting. She urges you to consider the following points before following in her footsteps (of your own volition, of course). 



### CONS:

- 1) M. X is positive that the only reason she's been able to get away with shoplifting thousands of dollars in merchandise with only one mishap (She was caught stealing a \$3 makeup brush.) is because she is a white woman. In fact, M. X has been known to impersonate members of higher socio-economic classes than her own to even more abuse her white privilege in the service of successful and massive shoplifting. In this way, M. X has mimicked corporate CEOs who steal millions of dollars from those with less privilege. She no longer values cute clothes over being in solidarity with people of color.
- 2) Huge corporations budget in losses to theft, so the impact is truly minimal on the scale possible for one individual. Time and ingenuity is probably better spent on defeating global capitalism in other ways.
- 3) Compulsive stealing is a lot like drug abuse. You get high off it and then you keep needing more, whether you need the stuff you steal or not. M. X has come to realize that she is a person with many issues, shoplifting being the least of her problems, and has sought long-term therapeutic help.
- 4) Winona Ryder made shoplifting uncool and passé for truly talented thieves.