Clothing and You

Anna D. Walker

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Clothing and You

Since that far distant time reported in the third chapter of Genesis, when the purpose of clothing was to cover nakedness, clothes have assumed a variety of important roles in the lives of people. To add charm, grace, beauty and allure to the human form will always be an important function of clothing. Protection from the elements will always be important too.

Recognition is now being given to other significant roles which clothing plays in our lives in this modern world. Let us explore some of them in the light of some research which has been done in this field.

CLOTHING AIDS IN PERSONAL ACCEPTANCE

Clothes help us in our own personal acceptance, in how we get along with ourselves. The more able we are to choose clothing in which we feel mentally and physically comfortable, the closer we are to understanding ourselves. We all fall into a pattern of dress which needs to be changed frequently. Clothing generally helps mark the change from youth to adulthood, from school to career, from job to better job, from middle to old age. Sometimes we don’t recognize the need to change our clothing patterns. If it is hard for you to see your own pattern, try recognizing a pattern in other women you know and describe this impression in as few words as possible, such as; “like a little girl,” “a perpetual teen-ager,” “a poor little waif,” “a mouse,” “a fashion plate,” “a tom-boy,” “a siren,” “a clothes horse,” “a lady.”

by Anna D. Walker, Extension Clothing Specialist

The next step is to take a critical look into your full length mirror and into your mind and try to describe to yourself the pattern you think you are following. If you are honest, you may recognize desirable or undesirable features in your own pattern of dressing. Ask yourself if this is the pattern you want to follow. Maybe it is time for you to make a change.

CLOTHES EXPRESS VALUES

The way you dress is a part of your expression of values and of the way you feel about yourself. We want to conform to style trends but we are individuals and want to dress as such. If we were all told to wear barrels instead of clothing, it wouldn’t take long for us to develop some pretty individual looking barrels—as long as the paint and thumb tacks lasted we would have many colors, plaids, stripes, buttons and bows. Clothing helps us express our individuality. Choosing individual clothing is an important outlet for many of us for expressing creativity.

Appearance is a tool for personal development. A woman who was helped to dress in a more feminine fashion to help her recognize and appreciate her role as a woman said “All my life I suppose I knew I was a woman, but now for the first time I feel like one.”

Work done in the Napa State Hospital in San Francisco among mental patients who had been hospitalized with mental diseases for up to 15 years indicates that creating an interest in and providing attractive clothing suitable to each individual and giving lots of attention to personal grooming, actually contributed to the improvement and cure of some mental illnesses among the patients studied. This growing recognition of the part clothing plays in the lives of mental patients would seem to indicate that personal appearance, including the manner of dressing, may be an indication of the mental health of all of us.
Suitable clothes can help you approach your job with enthusiasm and courage. One young mother said that she could ease some of the burden of caring for her home and a brood of small children by wearing jeans or shorts and blouses or T-shirts as she worked around the house. To her this casual dress made her feel as care-free as her little girl when she was playing at keeping house. This same release from cares can be expressed when you change into a party dress.

**DRESS HELPS YOU RELATE TO OTHERS**

Our clothes help us to fit into groups of people whose friendship we value—help us relate to others and help tell others how we feel about them and the community in which we live. The dinner guest who dresses carefully and appropriately is honoring her hostess. The church-goer who dresses in an appropriate manner, according to local practice, when attending church is showing respect for the church and for other worshippers. Clothes can make you feel outgoing or retiring, i.e., like you'd like to hide in a corner or keep your coat on when you'd really be more comfortable with it off.

Clothing has special meanings for children too. It is never too early to set a good example for them. Suitable clothing helps children in the growing up process.

Clothing can help you fulfill your role as an individual, as a woman, as a homemaker and mother, as a club member and as a citizen of a community.

**YOUR CLOTHES TELL ON YOU**

Clothes talk. They are one of the ways you present yourself to the world. Sometimes clothes say things you don't want them to say. They may convey the idea that you are careless, thoughtless, snooty, overbearing, not interested in your family, your husband, or yourself as a person.

Do your clothes speak honestly about you? What do you want your clothes to say about you? A great many of the things your clothing says about you is within your control. Clothes can help tell the world about how you feel about your status in life—how you feel about your husband's place in the community. A famous designer of women's clothing says, "To feel comfortable and self-assured one must ask herself, 'Who am I? What do I want to convey to the world by my appearance?'" Even the casual trip to the grocery store is a public appearance.

It is each individual's job to rank clothing in his own personal scale of values. It is a question of what is important to you rather than always what is right or wrong. It is easy to excuse our appearance by saying, "I can't afford the clothes Mrs. X wears." It isn't the price you pay for clothes, or the size of the wardrobe that counts. It doesn't even depend upon how beautiful or personable you are. Rather, it has to do with how you understand yourself, how you plan and coordinate what you have and how you care for it and yourself.

**TO SUMMARIZE**

To summarize, we might say that clothing is a special form of communication which gives dignity at every stage and occasion of our lives. It isn't easy to decide which forces influence our clothing selection because they overlap and are so closely related. Perhaps the important thing is for us to understand the different meanings clothes have for people today and then to apply this understanding to help us dress with confidence regardless of the amount of money we have to spend.


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