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What To Wear ?

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Suitable or proper attire is defined largely in terms of specific social activities, but the degree of consensus as to what constitutes the going norm will vary with the group. Factors that interfere with the establishment of predictable clothing expectations include: (1) the influence of regional customs and local patterns, (2) the rapid and continuous social and technological change in American society, (3) inevitable distinctions between classes of people widely separated on the status continuum, and (4) qualifying circumstances peculiar to the situation. In spite of the high value that many Americans place on individuality, most people instinctively desire to conform to the expectations of the group.¹

Sometimes, often several times in one day, we use clothing to change ourselves. What we choose to wear is dependent upon many factors. Basically, these factors are:

- . There are *physical* needs to be met -- the football player wears different garments than does the swimmer.
- . There is a *sociological* aspect that affects choice -- clothing is a primary need of mankind. It is a means of satisfying basic needs such as group acceptance, assuming occupational roles, and social mobility.
- . There is a *psychological* significance of clothing -- clothing cues communicate to others impressions of one's personality; it conveys impressions of how a person feels about himself; it may be a cue to sex, age, occupation, and religious beliefs.

Every change in a significant life situation, birth, entering school, graduation, getting a job, marriage, parenthood, and even death -- requires a change of clothes.

¹Marilyn J. Horn, The Second Skin, Houghton Mifflin Co., New York, 1968, p. 143.

We have more social assurance when we know we are dressed properly. What we wear must be in harmony with:

- . customs of people in the community
- . our concept of ourselves
- . the occasion
- . the time of day or night
- . the activity we engage in
- . our age
- . the image we wish to project
- . the fashion of the time
- . our level of living
- . our physical attributes
- . individual taste in dress

Not one of us wants to appear dowdy, out-of-date, or dressed in poor taste. What we wear establishes in the eyes of others and in our own mind an image of what we are, our self respect, and our personal values.

As we dress each day, we work with the elements of line, form, space, texture, and color. These elements are not used alone but are combined in useful, appropriate ways to produce interesting and appealing effects.

Good taste in dress involves not only consideration of beauty, but critical judgments of suitability and appropriateness.

NOTE: A Leader's Guide giving suggestions for planning a program around the topic of the publication is available from Extension Specialist, Clothing and Textiles, VPI&SU, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061.

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