



THE IMPORTANCE OF CLOTHING AND ONE'S APPEARANCE

Some of the most common aspects of everyday life have a very subtle but important influence on our interactions with one another. One's own personal appearance is often taken for granted because it is so familiar, visible, and tangible. Many individuals overlook the fact that we all "read" clothing and grooming on a daily basis to judge the actions, thoughts, and behavior of other people. This is a form of nonverbal communication—the use of symbols instead of words.

As with verbal symbols, nonverbal communication is successful only if the symbols are interpreted the same way by both the person sending the message and the person receiving the message. If the symbols do not have the same meaning to the sender and receiver, a misinterpretation or misunderstanding of messages may occur.

A person's first impression of you is influenced by your appearance. This is why clothing and grooming can be so important in interviewing for jobs, making new friends, and many other life situations. The way you look may make another person or group want to know more about you or lose interest in you.

Your personal appearance can also call forth a variety of reactions from people who know you and are around you on a daily basis. Consciously or unconsciously, friends, family, teachers, fellow students, employers, and other employees respond or react to your appearance in positive or negative ways.

The clothing, accessories, hair styles, and grooming choices that you make communicate your self-concept and/or self-image. Your self-image is what you "see" in your mental picture of yourself. All of us have mental images of how we look and how we behave. Unfortunately, if your self-image results from an incorrect assessment of your physical and psychological self, the messages you send may cause confused or negative reactions.

The success of the appearance messages sent by an individual, and how that same individual reads the messages sent by others, is influenced by many factors. Each of us learns many values and attitudes about clothing and personal appearance. These values and attitudes affect not only our clothing choices but also other choices we must make regarding appearance and behavior.

The force of fashion is evident all around us every day. Styles and colors of automobiles, houses, and furniture change. Different foods and methods of preparing foods are more fashionable at one time than at another. Entertainment, such as music, movies, and television, has many fashion variations. Our lifestyles, values, social standards, and language are also shaped by fashion changes. These changes are reflected in family life, education, business, and government. In some areas, however, change evolves more slowly because of the restrictions imposed by costs, laws, or limited exposure to new people. Modern technology plays an important role in how quickly change occurs and how fast the population gains knowledge of the changes.

Source: Cooperative Extension Service, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, College of Agriculture.