

I. Dress and Identity

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A DEFINITION OF DRESS

...In 1965 we suggested that the word dress was broadly interchangeable with several other terms used by social scientists. Included in this list of terms were *appearance, clothing, ornament, adornment, and cosmetics*. Since then, we have opted to use the word *dress* in a more specific way than is possible with these other terms. We have also, through time, developed a definition of dress that is unambiguous, free of personal or social valuing or bias, usable in descriptions across national and cultural boundaries, and inclusive of all phenomena that can accurately be designated as dress. According to this definition, dress of an individual is an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992). Dress, so defined, includes a long list of possible direct modifications of the body such as coiffed hair, colored skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as an equally long list of garments, jewelry, accessories, and other categories of items added to the body as supplements.

The classification system (see Table 1) indicates sub-types of body modifications and supplements and provides a scheme for cross-referencing these sub-types with their properites. On the basis of this cross-referencing, a tatoo can be identified as a body modification that changes surface design and color of the skin and a permanent wave as a modification that transforms shape and texture of hair. Rhinoplasty is a transformation of shape and volume that involves the muscular-skeletal system. Trousers and a rigid bracelet are pre-shaped enclosures, each with specific properties. An A-line long coat, with patch pockets as structural sub-units, qualifies as an enclosure, with its overall shape dependent

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TABLE 1 *Classification system for types of dress and their properties^a*

Types of dress ^b	Properties							
	Color	Volume & proportion	Shape & structure	Surface design	Texture	Odor	Sound	Taste
<i>Body modifications</i>								
Transformations of								
a. Hair								
b. Skin								
c. Nails								
d. Muscular/skeletal system								
e. Teeth								
f. Breath								
<i>Body supplements</i>								
Enclosures								
a. Wrapped								
b. Suspended								
c. Pre-shaped								
d. ab, ac, bc, abc								
Attachments to body								
a. Inserted								
b. Clipped								
c. Adhered								
Attachments to body enclosures								
a. Inserted								
b. Clipped								
c. Adhered								
Hand-held objects								
a. By self								
b. By other								

^a Eicher & Roach-Higgins (1992). This system is based on previous work as follows: Roach & Eicher (1973); Roach & Musa (1980). We wish to acknowledge suggestions from various students and colleagues. Bruce Olds, University of Wisconsin-Madison journalism student, suggested the hand-held category. Gigi Bechir, University of Minnesota sociology student, suggest that breath can be modified. A discussion with colleagues at a Design, Housing and Apparel seminar at the University of Minnesota convinced us to use *types* rather than *forms of dress*.

^b Both body modifications and body supplements can be further classified according to (a) general body locus (e.g., head, neck, trunk, arms, legs) or (b) more specific locus (e.g., lips, nose, eyelids or lashes, ears, hands, ankles, feet, breasts, genitals).

on wrapping, suspension, and preshaping of fabric. Earrings of many shapes, textures, and colors are attachments that can be either inserted in ears or clipped on with pressure. Parasols and many purses are hand-held objects with innumerable variations in properties. Custom sometimes requires that a parasol be held in place by a person other than the one it shelters.

Our system for identifying dress imposes a somewhat arbitrary conceptual separation between biologically determined body characteristics and dress, each of which is always perceived in relation to, or potentially in relation to, the other as a gestalt. However, we believe that accurate identification of types of dress and their perceptually identifiable characteristics is an essential preliminary to analyses of dress in general and to our analysis of dress as a non-verbal means of communicating identity specifically.¹ Also, dress can be considered simultaneously from two viewpoints: as the total repertoire of body modifications and supplements that a particular social group makes available to its members (e.g., American dress, men's dress, adolescents' dress) or as a particular display of body modifications and supplements that a specific individual assembles from an available repertoire for a particular time and place.

THE TERM DRESS VERSUS OTHER TERMS

We have presented our definition of dress in order to compare the usefulness of the word dress, as a technical term, with other terms found in literature concerned with the social aspects of dress. We support dress as the best technical term because other terms do not identify all possible modifications and supplements to the body that we believe the term dress includes. In the sections that follow, we argue that each of several terms proffered as alternates (appearance, adornment, apparel, clothing, costume, and fashion) are neither as accurate nor as comprehensive as the term dress.

Dress Versus Appearance In one way, dress is less than appearance because it does not include, as appearance does, features of the undress body, such as its shape and color as well as expression through gesture and grimace. In another way, dress is more than appearance for it includes aspects of body modifications and supplements recorded by all the senses—not just sight alone as the term appearance implies. The blind, for example, though sightless, do have impressions of dress that depend on tactile, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory responses. Although the gustatorial experience of taste is not generally included in discussions of dress, our reference is not facetious. Instead it recognizes such behavior as the daily rituals of many Americans who go through cosmetic modification of taste as they use rinses, pastes, and gels in oral hygiene.

Dress Versus Adornment or Ornament Adornment and ornament fail as useful terms in explaining what the form of body modifications or supplements is and is not, because they impose restrictive value judgments regarding aesthetic quality which the term dress does not. Thus a modification or supplement is only eligible for classification as adornment or

ornament if the classifier assigns it some degree of positive value on the basis of his/her own interpretation of socially acquired cultural rules or standards for what can be considered beautiful or attractive. This restriction implies that a person who judges certain modifications and supplements as of no aesthetic value automatically drops them from any consideration of dress.

Dress Versus Clothing In the past, various writers have attempted to use clothing as a comprehensive term to include both body modifications and supplements. Despite these efforts to convert the word clothing into a usable technical term for identifying these broad categories of dress and various sub-categories within them, a major shortcoming remains: The word clothing is most frequently used to emphasize enclosures that cover the body and generally omits body modifications.² In addition, the word clothing, like adornment, almost inevitably introduces personal or social values. For example, if it covers, it surely must protect and be good. If it does not cover certain body parts, it may be immodest and bad, at least to some people.

Dress Versus Apparel The most serious limitation of the term apparel is that it does not include body modifications. In this regard it is similar to the word clothing.³

Dress Versus Costume The term costume frequently identifies the body supplements and modifications that indicate the "out-of-everyday" social role or activity. Thus we propose that the word costume be reserved for use in discussion of dress for the theater, folk or other festivals, ceremonies, and rituals.

Dress Versus Fashion The term fashion lacks the precision of the word dress for it refers to many different kinds of material and non-material cultural products (e.g., houses, music, automobiles, scientific theories, philosophy, recreation). Further, like ornament, it forces positive and negative value judgments on body modifications and supplements and their properties on the basis of their relative positions within a fashion cycle of introduction, mass acceptance, and obsolescence. In addition, not all types of dress qualify as fashions. For example, religious dress in many societies resists fashion change and is, therefore, automatically excluded from a study of fashion...

FUNCTIONS OF DRESS: ALTERANT OF BODY PROCESSES AND MEDIUM FOR COMMUNICATION

Body modifications and supplements, which constitute dress, function as alterants of body processes or as media for communication. Although the communicative function is our major concern in consideration of the social aspects of dress, we must balance this concern against the primacy of biological existence that precedes the social. Therefore, we first discuss ways in which types of dress act as alterants of body processes.

Body modifications may alter body processes in either positive or negative ways. Removal of teeth or plastic surgery for cosmetic reasons are examples of body

modifications that can directly put health at risk. On the positive side, removal of infected teeth or the use of tightly wrapped pressure bandages over certain wounds can be supportive to good health.

Body supplements act as alterants of body processes as they serve simultaneously as microphysical environment and as interface between body and the macrophysical environment. As a microenvironment, they interact with the body. Woolen socks or a nylon parka may, for example, alter ambient temperature and concentration of water vapor, hence temperature and water balance of the body, in ways that may be either helpful or harmful in regard to body processes. As interface, body supplements may deflect outside forces such as sunlight, the effect of cold wind, or the thrust of weapons or be extensions of the body that help in task performance. Gloves, pockets, shoes, and eyeglasses increase the body's capabilities as a mechanism for grasping intractable objects, as a beast of burden, as a moving object, or as a navigator through the limits of space provided by the macrophysical environment. Note should be made that some body supplements have dual usage. Tight wrappings of waist or feet are indeed enclosures, but they can also act as tools for modification of body shape.

~~The list of possible meanings communicated by type of dress is seemingly endless. Dress may, for example, make a statement about age, gender, social class, school affiliation, or religion. Ultimately the meanings communicated by the objectively discernible types and properties of dress depend on each person's subjective interpretations of them. Further, meanings that a person attributes to various outward characteristics of dress are based on his/her socialization within a particular cultural context as well as on the improvisations the person exercises when applying learned meanings of dress within specific social situations.~~ If we refer back to some of the valuing terms mentioned earlier, we find that the naming of a type of dress as ornament or adornment or a discussion of the aesthetic qualities of dress belongs with the discussion of the social function of dress as a means of communicating individual and social standards for aesthetically pleasing characteristics of dress. Likewise, designating a type of dress as protective clothing illustrates that certain examples of dress communicate that they are likely to have positive effects on body processes.

Finally, we emphasize that meanings communicated by dress may emanate from its basic type, one of its properties (e.g., color, shape), or a composite of its component types and/or properties. Thus the color (a single property) of a businessman's tie may be a more important indicator of his identity than is his total ensemble of suit, shirt, tie, socks, and shoes.

DRESS AS A COMMUNICATOR OF IDENTITY

Many authors cite Erikson's paper of 1946 as the document that sparked social scientists' interest in use of the term *identity* in interpreting human behavior. Following that time, the use of identity as a technical term has increased in the social sciences, and it has tended

to lose the psychoanalytic orientation characteristic of Erikson's work. By the 1960s it was being transformed and utilized by individuals interested in theories of symbolic interaction. Since we are using a symbolic interactionist perspective as we present our ideas on how dress—as a medium of communication—relates to identity, we are particularly interested in works in which aspects of both dress and identity have been discussed from this perspective. Writings by Stone (1962), Goffman (1963, 1971), Stryker (1980), and Weigert, Teitge, and Teitge (1986) fit into this category. Stone (1962) expanded the interactionist approach beyond communication via discourse to include communication via appearance (which he defined to include dress as well as gesture and location) and highlighted the fact that dress, because it may be seen in social encounters before conversation can be initiated, has a certain priority over discourse in the establishing of identity. Stryker (1980) also incorporated the concept of identity and appearance into a conceptual perspective based on tenets of symbolic interactionism. *Society and Identity, Toward a Sociological Psychology* (Weigert et al., 1986) is valuable as a resource because of its extensive review of literature on identity as well as its appraisal of both the meaning of identity and the relation of identity to the concept of self.

From the perspective of symbolic interaction theory individuals acquire identities through social interaction in various social, physical, and biological settings. So conceptualized, identities are communicated by dress as it announces social positions of wearer to both wearer and observers within a particular interaction situation. Some identities are assigned at birth. These identities include those associated with body variations according to sex, race, or deviations from average that a society may define as handicaps as well as ethnic category of kinship group. Through time the developing individual internalizes these and many other identities, and no individual can expect to acquire all conceivable identities. Also, no two people encounter exactly the same environmental circumstances, social and otherwise, for acquiring the ways of behaving that lead to establishing of identities. Therefore, the identities for any one person, including those communicated by dress, are uniquely personal. They are at the same time completely social because they are socially acquired "selections" from socially constructed ways of attributing identities on the basis of social positions individuals fill. Associated with these positions are expected behaviors called social roles, which are not elaborated upon in this paper.

IDENTITY, SELF, AND DRESS

We define self as a composite of an individual's identities communicated by dress, bodily aspects of appearance, and discourse, as well as the material and social objects (other people) that contribute meaning to situations for interaction. An individual can occupy a number of social positions and hence can have a number of identities that contribute to the total configuration of the self. The individual can reflect on these identities (self) and understand that they both connect and separate him/her from others. Overall, self is the cumulative result of socialization, which includes adopting observed behavior of those

who serve as social referents (role models), following rules or directives learned at the behest of others, and using trial and error in social situations.

Stone (1962) elaborated on the nature of the situation within which dress contributes to the acquisition of identities and the development of a sense of self. His position is that a self acquires identities when "situated—that is cast in the shape of a social object by the acknowledgement of his (sic) participation or membership in social relations" (p. 93). Further, dress helps announce (communicate) identities for persons who are socially situated. Stone labelled the communication of self through dress an individual's program. The appraisal by others of an individual's program he called review. On the basis of their experience through time with other people, individuals develop, in advance of interaction, notions of how other people are likely to react to their dress. If a person's predictions of reactions by others are accurate, the identity or identities this person intends to present via dress will coincide with that which others perceive. This coincidence in meaning is what Stone refers to as the validation of the self that leads to satisfactory social interaction. If, on the contrary, the meaning signalled by dress is different for presenter and reviewer, interaction may proceed with difficulty or be terminated. For example, an applicant for a white collar job who appears for an interview in blue jeans and sweat shirt, without an explanation of extenuating circumstances that prevented presentation of self in expected white collar garb, may be automatically deleted from consideration and have an interview cut short. In some cases, when program and review do not coincide, the presenter may be deliberately courting a negative review by some appraisers and positive by others. As example, the young (e.g., punkers in the 1980s) sometimes present programs in dress that they expect to be reviewed negatively by their elders but positively by their age peers.

IDENTITY, SOCIAL STRUCTURES, AND DRESS

An individual's self and the identities this self incorporates are linked to positions the individual is assigned to or achieves within social structures. Social structures typically arise within any society to integrate and direct kinship, economic, religious, and political activities.⁴ Dress confers identities on individuals as it communicates positions within these structures.

Within kinship groups, dress announces various identities. In many societies a wedding ring, but a small body supplement, is sufficient to communicate identity as a married person and to call forth expectations for behavior appropriate to a person so identified. In America sibling relationships, especially for twins, are sometimes indicated by identical dress. The idea of family identity is exemplified by the design and color of Scottish tartans and by the wearing of cloth matching designs by members of West African Yoruba families at weddings and birthday celebrations.

The economic structuring of a society often calls forth expressions of occupational identity via dress, particularly when division of labor is complex. In mass society such identities may be communicated by attachments as minimal as badges or name tags

or as all-encompassing as an astronaut's space suit. In between in volume are enclosures such as a butcher's apron, waitress' uniform, mechanic's coveralls, or a surgeon's gown and mask. Rank ordering of occupational identities on the basis of their perceived social value may also be made clear by dress, as in the case of the hospital orderly's white coat and pants versus the physician's street dress.

Political structures arise to organize and regulate power within societies. Leaders in a political structure like a monarchy take on public identities as representatives of their state when they present themselves in rituals with robes, crowns, and scepters. Political leaders in a democracy, by way of contrast, have no dress of state. Instead they wear body supplements and modifications similar to those of other citizens. Representatives of government in the judicial and military realm wear special dress such as robes and uniforms to verify their political identities in public and to declare their right to power as allocated to them by the nation-state or other governmental unit. Sometimes political affiliation may be an identity that for the most part remains unexpressed in dress, discourse, or other behavior. However, the fervor of a political campaign or a popular uprising in protest of some political act or policy may result in an individual's flaunting of political affiliation by use of pins, badges, armbands, unique hair arrangements, and other forms of identifying dress. Specific examples can be found in the dramatically changed dress that signalled and promoted the leveling of classes after the French revolution in the 18th century and the establishing of communist regimes in the U.S.S.R. and mainland China in the twentieth.

Rules of conduct within religious groups may include requirements for dress that clearly distinguish religious leaders from followers. If they do, special essemblages of body supplements and/or modifications establish identities that set leaders apart from their followers and from non-adherents to that particular faith. Followers who have no special dress for everyday may have dress for certain ceremonies and rituals that declares their religious affiliation at the same time that it differentiates them from their leaders. Among some religious groups, like the Hare Krishna, daily dress identifies a whole community of believers, visibly setting them apart from the general society and emphasizing the intensity of their beliefs and their rejection of doctrines of others. Identities of a deity may be objectified in descriptions of dress set forth in sacred texts or in icons executed in sculpture, drawings, and paintings. Sometimes, on being dressed in appropriate body modifications and supplements, such as facial paint, or in enclosing robes embellished with arcane symbols, a leader's identity may become that of living icon, as in the case of the Dalai Lama of Tibet.

IDENTITY, TECHNOLOGY, BELIEFS, AND DRESS

The characteristics of dress that communicate identities of an individual depend on materials available as well as on social structuring of a more abstract sort than that which organizes human activities related to kinship, economy, polity, and religion. This

structuring, which tends to extend society wide, includes belief systems that shape moral and aesthetic standards for dress and technologies used to produce body modifications and to convert materials from the physical and biological environment into body supplements. Human beings in every society develop ways for designing and fabricating supplements for the body out of materials from their environment, as well as products and tools for modifying their bodies in ways that identify them with or distinguish them from others. Since dress can only exist if ways for executing body modifications or making supplements exist, developments in technology precede placement of moral and aesthetic sanctions regarding types of dress. However, once the products of technology are available, their use may in turn be constrained by both moral and aesthetic beliefs of a society. Furthermore, moral and aesthetic evaluations of various types and properties of dress place the identities they communicate in a hierarchy of acceptability.

As the complexity of technology used by a group of people increases, so do alternatives for dressing their bodies and complexities in moral and aesthetic patterns that govern use of various alternatives in establishing the "right" identities. Moral issues regarding dress include the niceties of etiquette relating to what is considered proper and improper to wear and display as well as severe sanctions against breaking strongly held beliefs about covering the body. Strong sanctions against use of certain types of dress often relate to beliefs about modesty. What is believed to be modest dress, however, varies from society to society and between sub-groups within a society. Similarly, beliefs about the aesthetic qualities of dress (what is beautiful or ugly) can differ appreciably. For example, the body can be modified in many ways (e.g., by cutting, scarring, painting, piercing), and the technology for accomplishing each type of modification may be simple or complex. However, acceptability of cutting, scarring, painting, or piercing ranges considerably from society to society depending upon specific moral and aesthetic beliefs. Thus our conclusion must be that relationships among the interlinked systems of technology (involved in creating dress) and systems of aesthetic and moral beliefs, which limit how identities can be expressed, are both intricate and subject to alteration as change in one of the systems is likely to stimulate change in the others.

STABILITY AND CHANGE IN DRESS AND IDENTITY

The variable of time must be dealt with in analyses of relations between dress and identity for some types and properties of dress become obsolete as communicators of specific identities. Tendencies toward stability or change in types and properties of dress that declare individuals' identities vary from society to society; however, where changes in technology and social structures are ongoing, changes in specific characteristics of dress that declare particular identities are likely. The changes that occur relate to factors such as economic cycles, trade patterns, fashion, demographic shifts in age and racial/ethnic characteristics of consumers, and societal concern for conservation of natural resources, as well as changes in technology and beliefs. Any or all of these factors may promote or

constrain change in the particular characteristics of dress that communicate particular identities, although a phenomenon such as fashion more obviously stimulates change. Consequently, for any given individual the types or properties of dress that communicate certain identities may change in relation to changes stimulated by any of these factors. Thus, for individuals to maintain a stable communication of identities via dress may involve their abandoning of dress whose characteristics no longer serve as identity markers for positions in various social structures and making "correct" choices from among newly available options. In contemporary Western society, for example, an individual is expected to select from a constantly changing array of body enclosures varying in volume, shape, and texture as new technologies are introduced and old ones abandoned and as moral and aesthetic standards of the past yield to standards of the present.

CONCLUSION

We have formulated a conceptual definition of dress that allows us to identify, classify, and describe both modifications of and supplements to the body. ...Further, we have explored the relation of dress, as a means of communication, to the process whereby individuals establish identities and selves and attribute identities to others. We have noted that dress has a certain priority over verbal discourse in communicating identity since it ordinarily sets the stage for subsequent verbal communication.

We reiterate that our definition of dress has important implications for study of dress and identity because it is comprehensive, including not only body supplements but also body modifications that many scholars omit from consideration. This importance can be illustrated in analyses of the relation of gender to dress. Loose fitting body supplements such as jogging suits, for example, may not flaunt gender differentiation, but gender definitions are often made obvious by body modifications in shape and texture of hair or by applications of cosmetics that change the color of skin, lips, or eyebrows. Finally, we end with the observation that we must work toward a theory of dress that makes sense because it allows us to explain ourselves and others and because it allows us to reach beyond ourselves to "grapple with the unknown, the wide range of social facts, and bring order and coherence to it" (McNall, 1983, p. 485). We have taken steps to meet this challenge by offering a comprehensive definition of dress and a conceptual perspective for interpreting its significance in conveying identity.

NOTES

1. We use the word dress as a gender-neutral collective noun to designate either a social group's body modifications and supplements (e.g., American dress, military dress, occupational dress, human dress) or those of an individual (e.g., that boy's dress, that girl's dress). Colleagues have reported concern from male students that the word dress is gender specific. Although the word may carry either masculine or feminine meanings depending upon certain inflections (*dresses*), modifiers (*a dress*), or conversions to verb

form (dressing to the right or left), these usages do not conflict with the collective meaning. They are also consistent with English usage set forth in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed.), *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (2nd ed.), and *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*.

2. Although clothing is used more than any other term in the tables of contents of the *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal (CTRJ)* and books by individuals in the textiles and clothing area, its popularity may be somewhat misleading. Especially in regard to the *CTRJ*, emphasis is at least partly due to the inclusion of a number of articles on apparel design, textiles, and retailing where a custom for designating body enclosures that cover as clothing has been entrenched.
3. DeLong (1987) uses the term apparel in her concept of ABC (Apparel/Body/Construct). Her concept is primarily related to visual, aesthetic responses and therefore largely excludes other senses. Although similar to the idea of appearance, the ABC focuses on the visual total of body and dress. We refer to DeLong's definition as a model in clarity.
4. In technically complex societies, social structures related to provision of education, health care, and recreation also are influential in establishing identity of an individual.

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