

The Confidence Book

Extract from Confidence Toolkit: Clothes

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We tend to think about how our clothing make us appear to the world, how it makes us stand out or fit in, what 'message' it sends such as 'I am professional, relaxed, sexy, pragmatic, or indifferent.' There are plenty of books and television programmes that take the approach of 'a new you through new clothes', but I want to stress that the most important thing about the clothes we wear is not the affect they have on others, but how they make us feel, and following on from this, how they can boost our confidence. The two sides of the coin are linked of course (it would be a strange coin if they weren't), feeling confident about how others see us affects how we feel about ourselves but I think its essential to put ourselves first and not simply conform because everyone else does. Having said that, I think it would be fair to suggest that for most adolescents, these approaches do not apply. Many feel that they have to conform to this year's, month's, week's, day's or even minute's fashion for their culture, sub culture or even micro culture, for fear of getting picked on or bullied. There is also a pervasive and often pernicious value-judgment process for many young people concerning branding. It takes confidence to ignore the over priced, well marketed labels, and buy what you want rather than what they are telling you that you need.

We should also recognise that most adults will still carry these urges to conform within them but perhaps as adults we can work with them rather than be ruled by them.

Clothes are multifaceted, having characteristics of:

- practicality: an apron or a swimming costume for example,
- sexual allure: how much does this cover up or reveal and how provocatively?,
- body shaping: plenty of underwear options; mostly, but not exclusively for women,
- directing attention: the colour or detail that draws the eye, the hat that shouts, 'look at me',
- protecting from the elements: a thick jumper, a waterproof coat, a sun hat,
- identification: a uniform such as a police officer's, a nurse's, a fast food restaurant worker's,
- works of art: couture,
- disguise: costume for a play for example,
- carriers: pockets for small change etc.
- tradition: a tie (what is that scrap of material for?), a kilt, a grass skirt
- sexual display: *that's* what a tie is for!
- modesty: anything that covers any part of the body we are not comfortable with showing

Take a look at three items of clothing you have worn recently and, using the categories above, ask yourself: what functions does this have, and then what messages does it send to others?

Now the important part: how did wearing the clothes make you feel? Did they feel appropriate to you, to the situation and thus increase your confidence? We've all heard stories of people arriving for events wearing 'inappropriate' clothes: you're in fancy dress and no one else is or your dress is over formal

for a dinner party, or you're the only one not wearing a tie. In most cases wearing 'the wrong thing' merely means being different to everyone else. Admittedly if you turn up to fish without waders when everyone else has them, you're going to be at a disadvantage; similarly if you have sweaty clothes on when everyone else is dressed for the hot sun you're going to be in some difficulties but in the scheme of things, does it really matter if you've got the 'right colour for the season' or 'black tie'. In my view people who insist on such things ought to get a life as life is too short to be obsessed by style and conforming to other people's norms? I went to a Buckingham Palace garden party without wearing a tie and I was in excellent company as about 50% of the people there were similarly tie-less. They were all women of course but I figured if it's good enough for the queen...

I'm in good company as James Dyson the vacuum cleaner entrepreneur said of ties in a Daily Telegraph article in June 2000: 'They are ridiculous things, entirely to do with convention.'; and he's overtaken many a besuited executive with his creative thinking.

Feeling confident about our clothes can be expressed in the following ways:

- Confident that I'll fit in or stand out to the extent that I want to
- Confident that I'll be physically comfortable in these clothes
- Confident that I won't be banned for what I wear or confident that I want that confrontation
- Confident that the clothes are appropriate for the event/task
- Confident in the message that these clothes send out about me.

[This section goes on to offer tips for shopping for clothes.](#)