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PSYCHOLOGY

New Ideas on Clothing Advanced by Psychologist

By EMILY C. DAVIS

Why are so many women wearing short skirts? Why do so many other women object violently to short skirts? And why do human beings wear clothes at all, anyway?

These difficult questions have at last been answered by a well known psychologist, Dr. Knight Dunlap, professor of psychology at Johns Hopkins University, who has just reported new theories on clothing to the *Journal of General Psychology*.

Dr. Dunlap ignores the usual superficial idea that styles are made in Paris. Master minds working in mysterious sanctums of fashion may invent novelties of costume, but the psychologist goes deeper into the subject and shows how our fashions in dress become established according to a few simple principles of human nature.

Clothes, it seems, are designed

sometimes to set off personal attractiveness and sometimes to conceal personal defects. Modern dresses, knee length, often sleeveless, are fine examples of the type of style that gives a well formed girl a chance to show off her good points, while the billowing, trailing skirts of the Victorian era are the concealing type of style that is kind to knock-knees and thick ankles. So far as men are concerned, knee breeches and silk stockings once played up shapely legs for men fortunate enough to possess them, whereas since Colonial days stovepipe trousers, representing the concealing type of garment, have encased masculine legs good and bad alike for more than a century.

Which kind of clothes happens to be seen on the streets in any decade depends on the strength of the forces that favor personal display or person-

al concealment. And the struggle for the balance of power, Dr. Dunlap shows, is one of the keenest and most remarkable contests in the human drama.

Men and women, seeking to make themselves attractive to the opposite sex, must always measure up as best they can to standards of what is considered beautiful and desirable. The standards of African natives are not those of the Chinese, nor the American, but for practical purposes they may be reduced to the following items, Dr. Dunlap concludes:

The points, chiefly points of beauty, by which a man judges women are: Form and proportion of body; coloration of skin, hair, and eyes; nutrition and general health; coordination in movement and posture; and certain minor factors such as texture of hair

(Just turn the page)



THESE STYLES have been fought over: (left to right)—1. 15th century—extravagant headdresses bitterly denounced. 2. 16th century—the huge, bell-shaped farthingale shocked Elizabeth's court. 3. 17th century—V-shaped necks alarmed the clergy. 4. 18th century—Greek style and very little of that—more alarm. 5. 19th century—wasp waists and dust trailers were declared rumous to health. 6, 7, 8. 20th century. From hobble skirt to backless gown to knee length skirt, endless criticism.

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New Ideas of Clothing

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and skin, form of eye, mouth, and other features, quality of voice, and temperament.

The standards of attractiveness by which women judge men are: Stature above the average; muscular development for both strength and agility; lung development for endurance; racially normal features; thick hair, preferably curly; and aggressiveness and economic ability.

Considering each item, it is easily seen that few people rank high by these standards. Consequently, in the competition for the attention of the opposite sex clothes play a strategic role by accenting charm or concealing the lack of it.

In past centuries, kings and queens were powerful enough in the fashionable world to set the styles to fit their own personal peculiarities. When Marie Antoinette stuck two tall peacock feathers in her hair and found the exotic effect becoming to her, feathers immediately became the last touch to every fashionable headdress in the French court. It is said that Catherine the Great made the carrying of handkerchiefs popular because her defective teeth were less noticeable when she held a kerchief before her face. And because Henry IV of France had gray hair the courtiers tactfully powdered their brown or golden hair and liked it, or pretended they did.

But this privilege of royalty to steer the fashions has been practically lost since fashions began to be followed by all ranks instead of by people of wealth and leisure alone. Nowadays, whether styles are to be of the revealing type, as in the present epoch of the knee length skirt, or of the concealing type, as in the days of the crinoline, depends on a delicate balance of power among men and women in general, Dr. Dunlap shows.

Taking the much discussed item of legs, he points out that we can readily

satisfy ourselves at any bathing beach that only a small percentage of legs for either sex are presentable.

"A few years ago, competition in women's legs was non-existent, except for positions on the stage," he says. "Now it is open and impressive. If the possessors of the more shapely legs expose them, those afflicted with the more unfortunate limbs must expose them also, or else be suspected of being more unfortunate than perhaps they really are.

"It is no accident that the opening up of this competition has been fought every inch of the way by certain types of women as well as by moralist males. The competition has been forced, however, by the group of women who have been confident that they would not suffer in open comparison, and the others have fallen resentfully in line. The powers urging a return to longer and more voluminous skirts are not made up exclusively of cotton and wool growers and manufacturers."

While the battle of the skirts has been won by the faction of women in favor of freedom of the knees, there has been a concession made to less attractive women by covering up facial defects.

"It is a noteworthy fact," Dr. Dunlap declares, "that as the competition in figures opened up, women began to cover their faces with masks of paint and powder, so that the earlier specific significance of the term 'painted woman' was completely lost. It would seem that as one union rule in restraint of competition was broken down another compensating restriction was set up. A mask, like other disguises, reduces competitors to a more equal basis. The advantages of the fresh and blooming complexion as compared with the sallow, spotted, and leathery maps of older or less favored females, are lost when all are hidden by the enameling and calcining process. It is possible that the proponents of the short and skimpy

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New Ideas of Clothing

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skirt would not have won so easily if the defeated majority had not been allowed to compensate for this loss by a facial gain."

Among the effective "union weapons" which women of average and less than average attractiveness have forced into fashion to level feminine charm he cites the parasol and fan, plucking of eyebrows, henna, hoops and bustles, gloves, and corsets. And among the men natural defects and advantages have been leveled by coats which hide feeble biceps, trousers which conceal unathletic legs, and beards, which in other decades have served as a camouflage of features good or otherwise.

The energy in the attack of the one-piece bathing suit was supplied by women who had good reason to distrust their ratings in a bathing beauty contest, the psychologist points out, even though the attack on bathing costumes may have been headed by male moralists.

The question of modesty, which is so often dragged into discussions of dress and which is used as the basis of attack by clothes reformers of every age really has little to do with the case, Dr. Dunlap shows:

"The falsity of the theory that clothing is modest should have been evident long ago from the fact that oriental women have had to conceal their faces to be modest, while western women have not been under similar necessity; and the fact that naked savages are often more modest than clothed Europeans.

"The Greek girl cast off her garments in public when they became inconvenient. Modesty of clothing seems to have appeared only when, through the invention of elaborate and costly materials and expensive dyes, it became possible to display one's wealth and indicate one's social position by the mere quantity of valuable clothing worn. Then began the practice of completely enveloping the person in expensive cloths, laces, velvets, feathers, and gold work. That women are as modest now in knee length skimpiness as they ever were in hoop skirts or in sidewalk sweepers, should be apparent even to those whose knowledge extends no farther than their village boundaries.

"Any degree of clothing, including complete nudity, is perfectly modest as soon as we become thoroughly accustomed to it. Conversely, any change in clothing suddenly effected, may be immodest if it is of such a nature as to be conspicuous. This is

particularly true for men of limited intelligence and low education. The more highly cultured and educated individuals adjust themselves to new conditions with less shock.

"Clothing itself has no modesty or immodesty. It is merely the breaking of the established convention which makes it immodest."

So far as modern clothes go, Dr. Dunlap believes that people in civilized countries today are over-dressed rather than under-dressed. We wear too much clothing and the wrong kinds of clothing. And women, who have for so many centuries been the worst offenders in the matter of making racks of themselves on which to hang yards of silks and velvets, are now outstripping the men both literally and in the line of progress.

In this respect of clothes the savages have been wiser than civilized man, for they wore just enough clothing to serve as protection, and the kind of clothing they made for themselves was extremely practical. Reasoning along this line, this psychologist has come to a conclusion as to why primitive people first put on clothing.

This question of the origin of clothes has puzzled anthropologists considerably. Three solutions have been advanced, and each one has its advocates. One suggestion is that men and women began wearing clothes because they wanted protection from the cold. The second is that clothing was invented to make a man or woman more attractive to the opposite sex. The third is that at some stage of his development man began to feel that not wearing clothes was immodest.

Dr. Dunlap believes that clothing was invented for a very simple and heretofore unrecognized reason. The first clothes, he says, were flychasers, just like the fly nets with flapping tassels put on horses in the days of buggy riding, and just like the bunch of flapping leaves fastened behind the ears of the dray horse.

The fact that flapping, rustling things keep insects from settling down to sting and bite was a great discovery made by our ancestors thousands of years ago, according to this theory, and they must have discovered it through urgent necessity, for insects were their closest and most numerous enemies. None of our modern equipment of screens and fly paper, poisons and sanitary devices was available for warfare against insect pests. Primitive men had to meet the flea, fly, mosquito, cootie, and ant problem by keeping the creatures on the move. Hence the evolution of the grass skirt,

which rustles effectively; also the belt made of tails of animals dangling from the waist, strips of hide, and hanging strings. These light-weight garments are still seen among savages of the warm regions of the earth, which are just the localities where our prehistoric ancestors are believed to have developed their human traits.

African tribes today grease themselves and grease their skin cloaks to protect themselves from pests. They even move out of their huts after a time and build new ones to escape the increasing swarms of creatures that insist on living with them. But all this is not enough, and so they fall back on typical fly chasing garments as their best defensive armor.

There are other minor factors that figure in the origin of certain kinds of clothing, the psychologist adds. Thorns and other jungle annoyances led to the use of sandals, leggings, and arm protectors. But the whole clothes list of primitive men and women is practical in its origin, and its chief use was as a protection, not from cold as has been previously declared, but from small and tantalizing irritations.

Even ornaments, which must be accounted for in a separate and distinct manner, were highly practical when first worn, according to this theory. Ornaments were first worn as badges to show the wearer's status in society, so that as the savage walked about, his neighbors could look at him and know just how important he was. This same use of badges to indicate social standing is still widespread among savages.

"The expert can tell at a glance," says Dr. Dunlap, "from the earrings, nose rings, haircut, headdress, tattoos, scars, and other badges of the savage in full regalia, to what tribe the savage belongs, whether he is a warrior or counselor, whether married, and if so the number of his wives, how many sons he has and whether these are warriors or not, how many cows he owns, and so on throughout the savage's complete Bradstreet and social register."

From that stage, ornaments have come to be worn largely as a matter of habit. The useful beads and other decorations later become desirable as pure ornaments. High heeled shoes, originally the badge of the lady, indicating that she did not work, became "stylish" and working women today teeter around in them because of this earlier prestige of high heels.

Until the days of machine-made clothing, many points about an in-

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New Ideas of Clothing

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dividual's costume were badges of social status. In very recent centuries, high caste women wore skirts so heavy and clumsy that they had to be supported by attendants when they appeared in a court ball room. They wore their hair dressed in such extravagance that any one would know that much time and money had been expended on a coiffure. But now, the shop girl and the stenographer can wear the same, or apparently the same, fabrics in the same colors and made by the same patterns as the daughter of the oil king.

Clothes have lost most of their usefulness as badges of social rank. And, as has already been mentioned, clothing is not important as a protection most of the time in the countries where civilization is advanced. Dr. Dunlap believes that man could profit by reducing his winter attire as woman has reduced hers, and that in warm weather both sexes would be better off hygienically if they completely discarded clothing the greater part of the time.

But so long as the drama of sex rivalry goes on, with attractive individuals favoring scanty dress and unattractive individuals favoring heavy camouflage, the tide of dress is as likely to turn one way as the other.

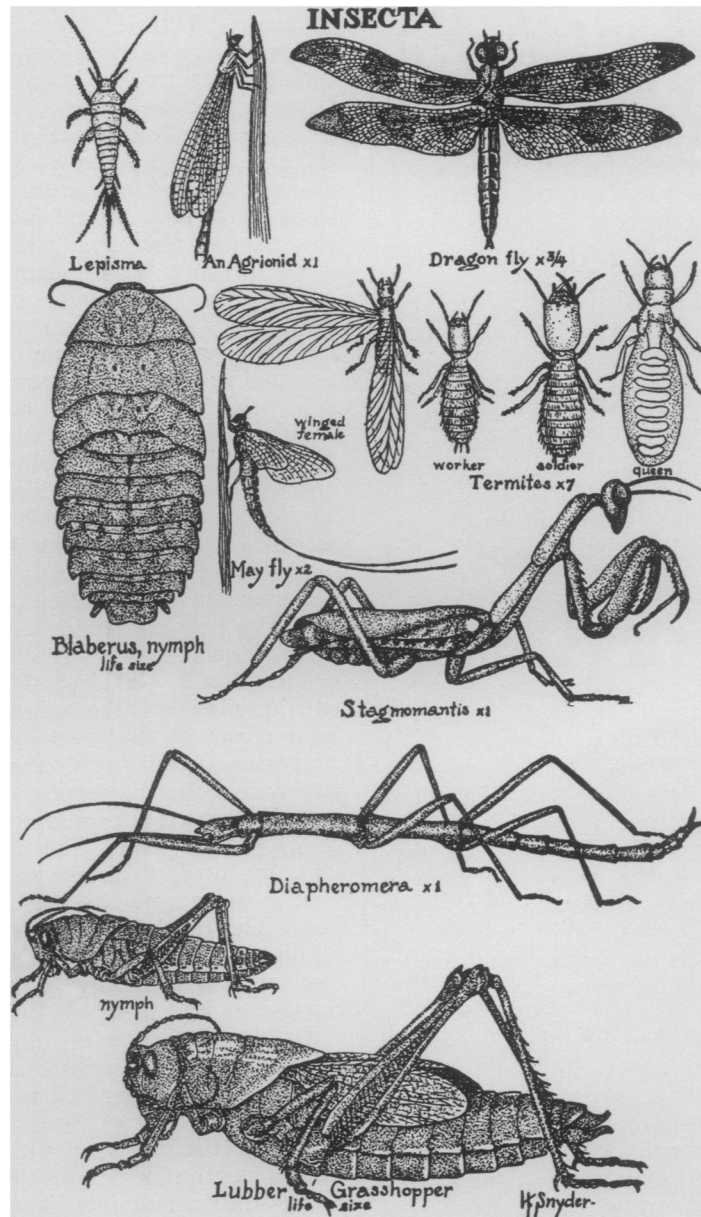
The fact that makes it likely that costumes will become more scant rather than more voluminous is that the value of sunlight has begun to be stressed. Babies of all classes are now dressed or rather undressed, so that they can get sun baths, instead of being swathed in clothes, as well dressed babies of other periods have been. It has been realized very lately that children of kindergarten age, and those younger and older too, are not being dressed so as to get the benefit of the valuable ultra-violet rays when they play out of doors, for these rays do not go through thick clothing. Because of this, government home economics specialists have begun to study the kind of clothes that will meet this need, particularly summer clothes for children.

So gradually, the idea may work upwards toward the adult, and the urge to get a daily dose of sunshine will seize the average man and woman acutely enough so that he and she will demand clothes suitable for the new idea. The one piece bathing suit, so long denounced as unsuitable for civilized human beings, may yet become the respectable attire of another generation.

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