



TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Dress-Deceptively Influential

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. DOES CLOTHING MATTER? | 3 |
| 2. “AND THOU SHALT MAKE HOLY GARMENTS” | 7 |
| The Mind of God on Modesty | |
| Fabric and Colors in the Old Testament | |
| Dress Standards under God’s Penmanship | |
| Holy Garments, the “Commandments of Men”? | |
| The Plain Churches Take Up the Mandate of Modesty | |
| Four Basic Functions of Modest Clothing | |
| Which Comes First? The Inner or the Outer? | |
| 3. THE WORLD OF FASHION | 31 |
| The “Language” of Clothing | |
| How Modern Fashion Came to Be (and How It Continues to Be) | |
| 1. Open Sensuality | |
| 2. Wealth and Prosperity | |
| 3. Mass Media | |
| The Fashion Runway | |
| Just Like the Models | |
| Fashion: A System of Sin | |

II. The Art of Modesty

4. THE ART OF DRESS, THE SCIENCE OF ATTRACTION	45
Clothing as an Art	
The Science of Attraction	
Processes of Attraction	
5. LINES AND SHAPES	51
How Lines Work	
Straight Lines	
Moving Lines	
Triangles	
Shapes and Lines in Clothing Design	
Collars and Necklines	
Darts and Misplaced Lines	
Sleeves	
Skirts	
Bodice Capes	
Maternity Dresses	
The Baby Doll Dress	
Lines and Shapes Created with Tightness	
6. COLOR AND LIGHTING	73
Colors Stimulate	
Color Variations	
The Meanings of Colors	
Warm Hues: Red, Orange, and Yellow	
Cool Hues: Green, Blue, and Purple	
Neutral Hues and Chromatics: Brown, Black, White, and Gray	
Colors Applied to Plain Clothing Design	
Colors for Men	
Colors for Women	
Matching Colors	

7. MATERIALS AND TEXTURE	85
Material Design	
Solids	
Prints	
Sheer Material	
Para-Plain	
Material Texture	
The Art of Modesty: In Summary	
<hr/>	
III. Outfit Accessories	
<hr/>	
8. CLOTHING AS ACCESSORIES	97
Plain People's "Little Black Dress"	
Light Sweaters, Business Suits, and Winter Coats	
Layering	
Feet and Footwear	
Undergarments	
Boas, Scarves, and Shawls	
9. CARRY-ALONGS AND ADD-ONS	115
Purses and Handbags	
Sunglasses and Prescription Glasses	
Jewelry and Perfume	
Wireless Handheld Gadgets: Fashion Accessories and Vehicles of Immodesty	
(1) Status Consciousness	
(2) A Body Extension	
(3) Multi-Functionality: Many Ways of Showing Status	
Putting It Together	
In Summary	
10. THE WOMAN'S COVERING	127

IV. Modesty for Men

- 11. THE UPPER MAN** **137**
- The Concept of Masculine Fashion
 - The Suit Coat and Necktie
 - Plain Anabaptists and the Suit and Tie
 - The T-shirt
 - The Polo Shirt
- 12. THE LOWER MAN** **147**
- Men's Trousers
 - Design Elements of Trousers: Flies, Pleats, and Pockets
 - American Militarism: Cargo Pants, Khakis, and Army Wear
 - Suspenders and Belts
 - The History of Suspenders and Belts
 - Design Elements of Suspenders and Belts
 - Suspenders, Belts, and the Church
- 13. THE HEAD OF MAN** **155**
- Hats
 - Facial Hair
 - The Mustache
 - The Conservative Mennonite and Beachy Baby Mix-Up
 - Men's Hairstyles
 - In Summary

V. Modesty in Body, Mind, and Manner

- 14. THE BODY** **167**
- Preoccupation with the Body
 - Head Hair
 - Body Hair
 - Face Sculpting: Makeup and Eyebrow Plucking
 - Skin Tone and Tint

Reshaping the Body and the Synthetic Look
 Weight Loss, Body Toning, and Athleticism
 In Summary

15. MODESTY IN PRESENTATION 181

A Modest Manner

The Eyes

Posture

Tidiness in Clothes as a Matter of Manner

Physical Space

Speech

Volume

Tone

Content

Public Displays of Affection (PDA): When the Sacred
 Becomes Profane

Mannerisms from the Media

Posing for a Picture

In Summary

VI. Lifestyles of the Plain and Fashionable

16. THE RISE OF PLAIN DRESS 197

“Who Are Your People?” Identifying with Your
 Church

The Order & Function of Plain Dress

Three Basic Garment Forms: Draped, Tailored, and
 Composite Styles

The European Origins of Plain Anabaptist Clothing

Changes in Europe & North America

Plain Dress in North America: A Response to
 Society’s Shifts

17. FASHION'S SABOTAGE OF RELIGIOUS DRESS	213
The Fashion Mobilization against Religious Dress, the World Over	
Clothing and Values: The Case of Devoted Catholic Women	
Hybrids in Jewish Headwear	
Muslim Fashion and Trendy Veils	
"Plain Fashion" among the Anabaptists	
Achan's Babylonish Garment: Fashion Idols in the Church	
18. FASHION FANTASY	229
The Fantasy Requires Buying	
The Shopping Mall's Fashion Fantasies	
The Brand Experience	
The Mall's Questionable Stores	
Anything That Comes in a Plastic Bag Is Unfashionable	
The Shopping Addiction	
In Summary	
19. JOINING THE CLUB	239
20. STYLE MOTIFS	245
Why Is Fashion Clicking with Plain People?	
Fall of High Society	
Simplicity	
The Broken Look	
Thrift	
Missions	
The Prepackaged Man: America's New Man	
The Big Business and Business Casual Look	
Effeminacy	
Belonging	
Fashion Mommys	

21. CASUAL CLOTHING	263
Defining Casual Clothing	
Design Elements of Casual Clothing	
Casual Becomes Fashionable	
Conclusion	
<hr/>	
VII. Fashion in the Church	
<hr/>	
22. HOW FASHION CREEPS INTO THE CHURCH	273
Whose Clothes Would You Wear?	
Understanding the Undermining	
Social Identity	
Basic Social Needs	
Create a New Person	
Social Pressure in Churches	
Opinion Leadership	
Fashion Subgroups	
Fashion Pressure Takes Over	
A Climate of Silence	
Trouble Finding Just the Right Words to Describe Immodesty	
Men Shy from Addressing Women's Immodesty	
Ignoring the Problem	
Self-Determination in a Weakened Brotherhood	
Church as a False Sanctifier of Fashion	
Loss of Utility	
No Time for (or Interest in!) Sewing Men's Clothes	
23. DRESS BOUNDARIES	289
Dress Changes at the Borders	
The Boundary of Status Roles	
The Boundary of Location	
The Boundary of Gender	
Why and How Boundaries Shift: The Case of Bloomers (Women's Pants)	

24. EVANGELICAL THINKING AND PLAIN DRESS **297**

The Mix of Evangelical Protestant and Anabaptist Thought

Plain Dress: A Works Religion or Christian Observance?

Plain Dress: Adding to the Word of God or Living It Out?

Plain Dress: Abstract Doctrine or Tangible Practice?

(1) Belief in Modesty More Important Than Practice of Modesty

(2) Inner Beauty More Important Than What One Does Outwardly

25. FASHION SLEEPERS TO SENIOR WEAR **305**

Childhood, the Age of Vulnerability: Dressing a Child or a Barbie Doll?

Passing on the Faith? Parent Responsibilities to Children

Passing on the Patterns

Owning Modesty: Passing On Sewing Skills

The Age of Transition: Youth

Adolescent Peer Culture

Beyond Adolescence: Kidults

The Elderly: Leading the Race or Running Low on Life?

VIII. Conclusion

26. THE STRENGTH OF PLAIN CLOTHING 317

Plain Fashion?

Recommendations for Modesty

Articles of Women's Clothing

Men's Attire

Colors

Homemade Clothing

(Non-)Accessories

Plain Clothing: Working Like It Should

The Advantages of Plain Dress

Do You Want to Be a Part of the Brotherhood?

Appendix and Glossary

Tips for Shopping for Modest Clothing, Patterns, and Material	330
Men's Looks Caution List	332
Shirts and Trousers	
Underclothing	
Material	
Accessories	
Effeminacy and Confusion in Gender	
The Head	
Women's Looks Caution List	334
Dress Construction	
Underclothing	
Footwear	
Material	
The Head	
Accessories	
Cosmetics and Decorations	

GLOSSARY 336

1.	Garments and Accessories	336
	Bags & Purses	
	Dress Styles	
	Jackets—Blazers, Suits, Women’s Overblouses	
	Shirts and Tops	
	Skirts	
	Swimwear	
	Trousers	
	Woman’s Head Coverings	
2.	Construction	342
	Cuffs	
	Embellishments	
	Fabric Design	
	Necklines	
	Skirt Hem: Lengths	
	Sleeves: Length	
	Sleeves: Styles	
	Techniques	
	Waistlines	
3.	Fabric	346
4.	Hair	349
	Men’s Hair	
	Women’s Hair	
5.	Designer Terms and Styles	350
6.	Technical Terms	351
7.	Fashion Movements	352

Bibliography and Index

BIBLIOGRAPHY	355
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INDEX	365
-------	-----

Scripture References
Periods/EPOCHS
General Index

ABOUT THE AUTHORS	394
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Preface

Where are all of the modesty books? They are few, and the few we have are typically vague about clothing design. Clothing, however, is all about the details. Famous fashion designers make their millions because they have the details figured out. Why do we shy from getting specific?

This book works toward eliminating the dearth of detail-rich modesty books. Because it is detailed, we must choose our audience. We specifically write this book for those working within the plain Anabaptist tradition, including: the Amish and Amish-Mennonites; the Apostolic Christians and Nazarenes (Froehlich churches); the plain Brethren and German Baptists; the Conservative and Old Order (Swiss) Mennonites; the Hutterites; the Holdeman Mennonites; and the Russian (Low German) Mennonites. Others are invited to read as well and hopefully glean insight for their context.

The modes of modesty and plainness that honor God are many. While each group may need to skim content that does not apply to its context, this book has plenty for everyone. Hence, our encouragement to readers is to take the insights relevant from this book for your situation. If your modesty and plainness is in need of strengthening, look within your own tradition and historic practice. Attached to our dress patterns is our church identity, which takes generations to build and stabilize.

In addition to appreciating the diversity of ways modesty and plainness are achieved among the plain Anabaptist traditions, we also appreciate the ways modesty can be realized in other cultures and religions. We may not agree with them on some matters but we do share an emphasis on modesty and a struggle to keep it—Catholic nuns and sisters, Orthodox Jews, Muslims, and some traditional cultures in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, for example. This book does not try to judge their contexts in dress matters, nor does it compare our clothes to theirs to see who is more modest and humble. This is unproductive: “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth” (Romans 14:4). What we have is good and the focus of this book is to encourage those in the plain Anabaptist tradition to keep our holy dress untainted, “hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 23). Let us be faithful with what good we have been given.

We anticipate at least two comments from readers and wish to intercept them here with a reply. First, will this book “plant inappropriate thoughts”? In short, no, it should not, and we have taken measures to

CHAPTER 1

Does Clothing Matter?

MODESTY, the flower of manners, the honor of our bodies, the grace of the sexes, the integrity of the blood, the guarantee of our race, the basis of sanctity, the pre-indication of every good disposition; rare though it is, and not easily perfected, and scarce ever retained in perpetuity, will yet up to a certain point linger in the world, if nature shall have laid the preliminary groundwork of it, discipline persuaded to it, censorial rigor curbed its excesses—on the hypothesis, that is, that every mental good quality is the result either of birth, or else of training, or else of external compulsion.

—Tertullian, early theologian
Opening to *On Modesty*

Does clothing matter? Test it: for one week, yield your wardrobe decisions to a stranger—perhaps a West Virginian coal miner, a Chinese rice farmer, an Australian adolescent surfer, a middle-age Massachusetts feminist, a Down Syndrome youth, a retired colonel in a Florida retirement community, an Amishman several notches more conservative, a Mennonite several notches the other way... another brother or sister in your church. How would this person dress you? Would it matter to you? Could you shrug off your new look? How would it make you feel to look like something you are not?

Clothing matters a lot. It rests right on top of our physical being, like a second layer of skin. It wraps the container of our mind and soul. We judge it like we judge a product by its packaging. Standing alongside speech and manner, clothing is at the very heart of defining your exist-

tence to other people. It is at once extremely personal because it defines *you* and extremely social because it determines how others perceive you.

What you wear *shapes* who you are. Like a cast mold for glass or liquid metal, clothing presses you into a form, and like the tool or vase that comes out of the cast mold, when people see how you've molded yourself, they treat you according to intended use. States one observer,

When we wear provocative clothing, our body language is subtly altered. A woman does not stroll down the street the same way in a micromini-skirt and high heels as she does in a pair of jeans and boots. Walking and moving in such styles changes a woman's posture... Clinging clothing molds, lifts, and thrusts (Fischer-Mirkin, 1995, p. 56)

Clothing changes are not just a matter of the individual but reflect sweeping changes that totally reorient a society, as another observer contends:

Whenever a fashion has met the mood of the public and fitted its way of life, neither religious nor legal decrees against it have succeeded. Indeed, some fashion changes are cues that major social changes are occurring... [Yet] nothing is more difficult to alter than a universal and daily custom. In order to take away man's clothes and dress him up again you must demolish and remodel him. (Lang and Lang, 1961, p. 472)

A massive fashion and textile industry has built its fortunes and fame from the idea that dress shapes the man and characterizes the mood of the times. They have figured out the subtle art of dress and have learned how to sell people a "new you." Clothes stand shoulder-to-shoulder with money and power as the tools of the influential throughout time. Does God care about how you dress? Does the demonic world? Do you?

Does what you wear really say anything about you? Put your finger right here and flip to the bibliography in the back. The authors of these books and articles argue that clothing really matters. They have tested its effects. They know the subtle appeals of a good outfit. Fashion manuals (including ones we cite) and innumerable racks of magazines devote themselves to the lucrative art of helping men and women dress to satisfy self: feel good when they look in the mirror, attract the right kind of attention, get a job and then a promotion, catch the eye of another and keep that other under a spell, and turn the longing eyes of strangers.

Will the conservative Anabaptist people, the "plain people"—who have long stood firmly against the world's fashion industry—eventually capitulate under the lure of fashion's promises, all the while sticking their head in the sand and repeating the brittle adage, "clothing does not *really* matter that much, God looks at the heart"? This idea is from an inability to reconcile the fact that clothing *does* matter and we prefer the world's self-satisfying concoctions over modest, plain garments.

This book is different from the stacks upon stacks of fashion manuals and magazines. It takes the same concepts designers use to train individuals toward self-serving ends and identifies how to use clothing concepts to honor God. This book addresses the question of what makes

CHAPTER 2

“And Thou Shalt Make Holy Garments”

I thank the Lord my Maker for ... clothes

—Thomas MacKellar, hymnist

“I Thank the Lord, My Maker” (1844)

THE MIND OF GOD ON MODESTY

And thou shalt make holy garments...

This God said to the Israelites concerning Aaron’s priestly raiment. Why?

“...for glory and for beauty” (Exodus 28:2).

From there, a detailed treatise about the garments of Aaron and other priests stretches throughout sections of Exodus and into the other books of Law. God was very concerned about holy garments, and His directives remain a consistent theme not just in the Law but through the Old and New Testaments. God’s eternal Word is partisan to holy garments, and the Bible testifies to this truth.

Among other God-honoring qualities—and perhaps foremost among them—holy clothing is *modest*. The foundational reason Christians

should take an interest in modesty is that God calls His people to practice it. In covenant after covenant with His people, modesty is a directive and immodesty is declared sin or is associated with sinfulness. Throughout the Bible, modesty and immodesty comes up again and again and again, a theme stringing together history, epistles, laws, prophecy, and poetry. Modesty began when Adam and Eve realized they were naked. God clothed them before sending them from the Garden of Eden, as the clothing they had sewn themselves was evidently insufficient.¹ Modesty continues, at least metaphorically if not literally, right up through Revelation. John testifies that Jesus was fully covered “down to the foot” (Revelation 1:13) with a similar white robe promised to all who overcame sin. The antithesis was the wicked woman on the beast, arrayed in “purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls” (Revelation 17:4), and the condemned city of Babylon, with its fine linen of purple and scarlet, gold, and jewelry (Revelation 18:16).

But what is modesty? What is immodesty? Immodesty is defined as excessive and without lines, improper, indecent, boastful, exorbitant, arrogant, impure, lewd, and boundless. Immodesty lacks chastity and reserve. Immodest clothing is flamboyant, self-glorifying, and attention-grabbing. Juxtapose that with modesty. Modesty manifests humility, reserve, propriety, a lowly temperament, decency, an unobtrusive manner, and a moderate estimate of one’s worth. One researcher defined modesty as “the urge to defend one’s privacy regarding the body, in an attempt to be recognized as a person and not only as a body” (Russo, 2012, p. 194). One Spanish translation of modesty is “honesty,” not covering up to be something else. Modesty reveals the genuine you, without a mask.

Modesty counteracts two root sins of the flesh: lasciviousness and lust (Figure 1). *The sin of lasciviousness* is inciting or moving one to lust. Lasciviousness is excess, unrestraint, wantonness, insolent luxury, indecency, and shameless conduct. Through dress, actions, and speech (“filthy conversation,” 2 Peter 2:7), lasciviousness is declared sin or associated with sinful behavior throughout the Bible. For example, Proverbs 7 describes a woman who is dressed as a harlot, is unrestrained, and flatters with speech. Dressing as a harlot merely means one is dressing for sexual attention in pursuit of personal gain and pleasure.

Lasciviousness is a compact between body, sight, and conceit, or, as stated in more familiar terms: “...the lust of the flesh, and the lust of

¹ The Genesis story, in brief: “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (2:25). “And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons” (3:6-7). “And [Adam] said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I *was* naked; and I hid myself” (3:10). “And Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them” (3:20-21).

at the end. At certain locations, the eye follows more quickly than others.

Lines, as with Figure 5, bring the eye downward. The curving line suggests motion like a waterfall. The straight line points to the bottom right; it pulls the eye down, with speed increasing under the gravitational pull.

A pure circle creates a constant, even speed, pushing outwards with centrifugal force (Figure 6). An oval moves the eye faster on approaching short sides, slower coming out (Figure 7).

FIGURE 6: *CIRCLE*



FIGURE 7: *OVAL*



Triangles

The triangle in Figure 8 (also referred to as a V, partial triangle, or chevron) takes two paths and brings them together. The effect is two-fold. First, a triangle, like an arrow, directs the eye to a terminal point. Wherever the arrow lands, that is where the eye goes.

Second, triangles fan outwardly. Just think of a Japanese hand fan opened and how the eye moves outwardly through the expanse. The fanning motion's intensity is related to two forces. The first is how wide or narrow the triangle is. Wider triangles create stronger fans. The second is how sharp or rounded the point is. Rounded points create stronger fans.

The triangle's point and fan pull in opposite directions. The strength of each and the location where the eye comes to rest depends on the triangle's shape.

When lines intersect like an X, as in Figure 9, four triangles appear. Two pull strongly toward the point (top and bottom) while two have a weaker pull (left and right). The eye moves quickly to the center of the X because four triangles direct the eye there. However, that point is loyal to none of the triangles, creating a stand-alone tension at that point. The eye cannot move away from it naturally because of parallel fanning strengths in each of the two sets. The resolution is for the point to "break."

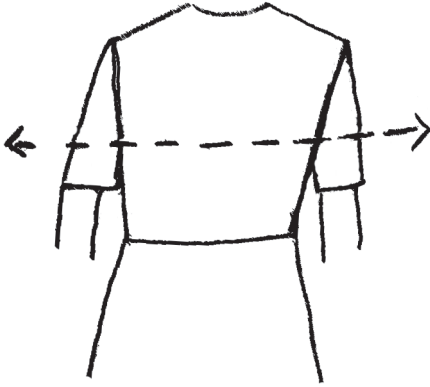
FIGURE 8: *A PARTIAL TRIANGLE, V, OR CHEVRON*



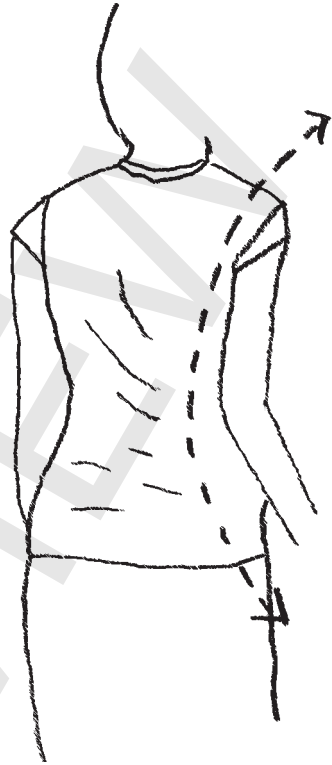
FIGURE 9: *AN X*



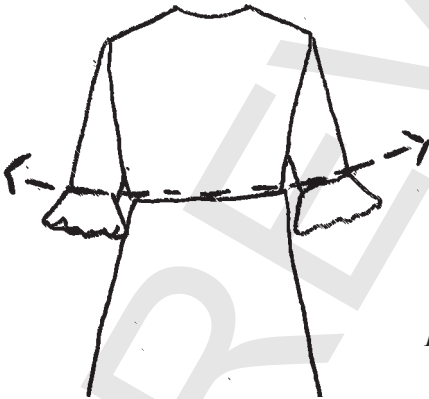
FIG. 30: SLEEVES ABOVE ELBOW



Widens bust and upper torso

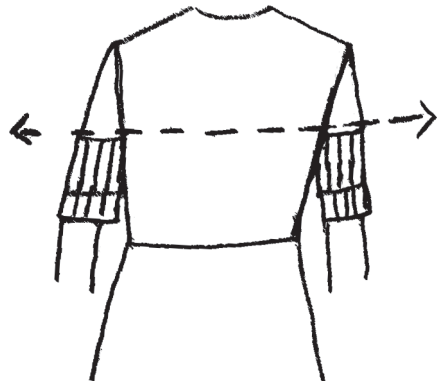
FIG. 31: CAP SLEEVES
Back view

Emphasizes hourglass figure

FIG. 32: DECORATIVE SLEEVES
JUST BELOW ELBOW

Emphasizes waist; decorative portion symbolizes a decorative skirt

FIG. 33: DECORATIVE SLEEVES AT ELBOW



Emphasizes & widens bust and upper torso

Skirts

Skirts have lines and curves at the waist, at the skirt's base, and along the silhouette. A modest skirt effectively addresses lines in three ways. First, the waist contains busyness (as with gathers), disrupting the eye from moving up and down the body. Second, the skirt is full around the hips and seat, hiding form-fitting silhouettes. Third, the bottom hem is low enough to conceal the legs yet is high enough so as not to exaggerate the length of the legs.

The catalog of skirt types, waist types, and skirt accents is long. We will highlight a few examples, with the expectation that readers can use this as a cast-off point to assess other designs.



Fig. 34

The **gathered waist** de-emphasizes the waistline. It bustles, hiding the curvature of the waist, hips, and seat while also allowing freedom of movement. Visually, the gathers create busyness, which disrupts vertical eye movement. Moderation is needed as to the intensity of gathers and the material used.

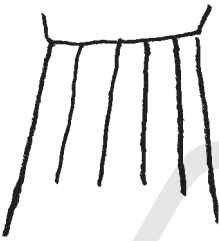


Fig. 35

The **pleated waist** lays flat against the body and is conservative and classic by designer standards. Like the gathered waist, it hides the waist, hips, and seat curves, allows freedom of movement, and disrupts vertical eye movement. If made fashionably, the pleats may draw the eye downward, emphasize the waist-hips area, or potentially show undergarment lines.

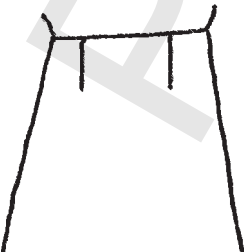


Fig. 36

The **pencil skirt** is often the first alternative to a pleated or gathered waist because it still appears plain; however, it accentuates the figure. The pencil skirt is fitted flatly to the waist. Two darts direct the eye to the pelvic area while also drawing out the bust. This skirt is often worn with a cape that pulls in so the edges of the cape meet (or nearly meet) at the darts. A hanging belt or tie in the back, often paired with this skirt, brings attention to the seat.

FEET AND FOOTWEAR

Among plain people, simple black/grey shoes or brown utilitarian boots convey modesty and practicality well. These colors match any outfit and are built for practical use. Shoes are so commonly worn that they may seem more a necessity than an accessory. However, the shoe market has exploded with options, making accessories out of footwear. Shoes are available for all occasions and even personality types. In one study, a set of participants rated themselves on a variety of personality characteristics, then had their shoes photographed. Another set of participants rated the people's personality characteristics based solely on the shoe photos, with surprising accuracy, especially on age, gender, income, and even attachment anxiety (Gillath et al., 2012). Shoes tell much about a person.

A basic, modest shoe wardrobe consists of boots for work, winter boots for traction and warmth, an everyday pair of shoes, and a pair of dress shoes. Beyond an additional one or two pairs for a specialized function, shoes become accessories, numerous pairs to match outfits and moods. The shoes-as-accessories craze is captured well in several extreme collections, including that of Imelda Marcos, the wife of a former Philippines dictator. When she fled the country during a coup, she left behind 1,220 pairs of shoes, a testament to her lavish expenditures during a time of national impoverishment.

In the center of the galaxy of sensual shoes, with an origin straight out of prostitution, are high heels (Fischer-Mirkin, 1995, pp. 196-97). So sensual are high heels, that today, they are generally understood to be symbolic of women as objects (Graff, Murnen, and Krause, 2013). Daily high-heel wearers are one-third times more likely to rate themselves as attractive than non-daily wearers (Kaiser, 1990, p. 88). Once nicknamed "stripper shoes," the heel creates physical power and height, which boosts confidence. When a woman wears high heels, "her walk becomes transformed into a provocative gesture" (Fischer-Mirkin, 1995, p. 199). High heels shift the gravity and alignment of a woman's walk and balance. It forces her to throw her shoulders back and bust forward. This flattens the stomach while also pushing out the seat. Further attention is added to the back of the leg, which becomes an obsessive focus. The shoes themselves hug and slenderize the foot down to a narrow or spiked end. As the woman walks, the high heels click, bringing attention to the rhythm of her movement and announcing her arrival (Etcoff, 1999, p. 195; Fischer-Mirkin, 1995, p. 199; Flügel, 1930). By necessity, her hips swing to keep balance, which is not only suggestive but also creates a subtle physical stimulation, making her aware of her attractiveness (Faust, 1981, p. 49). As she walks, the impression is of an hourglass. The eye goes to the source of noise—the shoe—and then moves up the body, eventually to the torso.

It is almost unbelievable that a shoe can create this effect independent of any added effect from clothes. In an experiment, a woman asked

MANNERISMS FROM THE MEDIA

A mixed group of plain youth met together for an event. When one of the girls came over, she shoulder-bumped another girl then tapped her shoulder with a fairy wand gesture. This was not spontaneous; it had been practiced and perfected. To those in the know yet unbeknownst to them, this touch signals abnormal interest. To the girls, it just seemed good fun. Is it harmless? Many who have been drawn into deviant lifestyles started out by unknowingly copying behaviors viewed in the media. These girls, too, engaged in ill-guarded, media exposure, picking up immodest mannerisms. The media sector is a haven for people with abnormal interests and it saturates all kinds of productions, even seemingly harmless children's entertainment.

New mannerisms are usually learned from mass media. Media clips are passed around even to those whose media exposure is guarded by the church. Two plain young married men were stunned when an older man who had converted from the outside asked them if they had watched a certain movie. They wondered how he knew, but their speech style and mannerisms betrayed the secret sin. Visual media influences people's behaviors in ways they do not realize.

One study found that young women exposed to common gender stereotypes presented in audiovisual media—women are objects and there for men's lust—are more likely to defend such behaviors in real life (Ward, 2002). Given that mass media is so saturated with vulgarity, those who desire to reflect Christ in manner should ensure that it is Christ they set before themselves, not audiovisual media. Media says to look, to stare: "What else could possibly be more exciting than to stare at this?!" Satan works to make it common, "the way of the times," acceptable. He works to break down the purity and witness of the church by bringing suggestive mannerisms to people calling on God's name.

POSING FOR A PICTURE

The digital camera brought about an explosion of photography, both among the general populace and many plain people, right into many groups that had historically forbidden photography. Because plain people value family and personal relationships, people-pictures have become popular. Personal and family pictures are exchanged in wedding and graduation invitations, through Christmas cards, at schools, and at reunions. They adorn kitchens, bedrooms, living rooms, and Bible pages. Through these changes, plain people have also become much more self-conscious about posing, that is, intentionally creating a "moment" that suggests some ideal mood.

Photographing people is closely linked to fashion; it is the art of capturing a person's body image to put on display. For a man or woman to wear clothing that is immodest reduces the value of the soul and highlights the body. To then photograph the immodest person in an immodest

that are slightly dressy but comfortable, a brown belt or untucked shirt, and, by the end of the 1990s, a cell phone clipped visibly on the belt. The idea of the look is to show that you are too hard at work to worry about dress and that you have been so successful, you have nothing left to prove (Rubinstein, 2001, pp. 60-64). It is a way for the business world to dress casual while not losing control over dress practices. Contemporary Christian pastors and motivational speakers—both close to the business world—adopted the look to great effect, communicating their everyday, relaxed approach to life.

Of note, the cell phone topped off the look with a piece that could not have been included in fashion prior to the 1990s. The cell phone is a symbol of wealth and status, of needing to be reached at any moment to make important decisions that cannot wait. Having a cell phone attached to the waist was the business equivalent of the cowboy's six-shooter, right at hand's reach for a quick response. And just as a shot taken too late could cost a life, so a call not answered in time could result in a missed deal or major financial setback.

As business and office work became a stronger source of income for plain families through recent decades, churches budged to allow business dress of the times. With few changes to church dress, men could turn their wardrobe into one of sleek business casual outfits: for example, tan/white khakis for dark slacks, dark polos for button-up shirts, brown belts for black, and loafers. By morphing plain dress into a casual business style, church men circulating in the business world can face their secular counterparts at trade conventions, sales events, and seminars, sporting full business deal armor while avoiding the humiliating rural peasant look of identifiable plain dress. In this way, plain men avoid leakage of associations with a humble Christian church, yet can remain true to their church and its uniform. This is, of course, a lie, as God does not deal with interchangeable allegiances.

EFFEMINACY

To be effeminate is for a male to behave in ways more suited to females. Over-attention to clothes and hairstyling expresses effeminacy. Effeminacy used to be inappropriate. To be effeminate suggested a mental disorder or a sinful life. Through history, such men have been called minets, fops, and dandies

Today, fashion circles and the media have so conventionalized effeminacy that it blends right into general culture. People seldom recognize it except in extreme forms such as transvestism. One reason is that once exclusively homosexual aesthetics have gone mainstream. Men's clothing has taken on feminine elements through subtle cuts, stitching, and colors in shirts and trousers, especially jeans. By the 1990s, men had their own cosmetic lines of oils, sunscreens, shampoos, hair dyes, gels, and moisturizing creams almost equal to that of women. (Even an essential oils-based beard balm is available!) More men now style their

CHAPTER 23

Dress Boundaries and How They Are Crossed

Fashion purveyors ... murder the past, [as if saying] 'Yesterday I was what you are, tomorrow you will be what I am.'

—Roland Barthes, French semiotician
The Fashion System (1967)

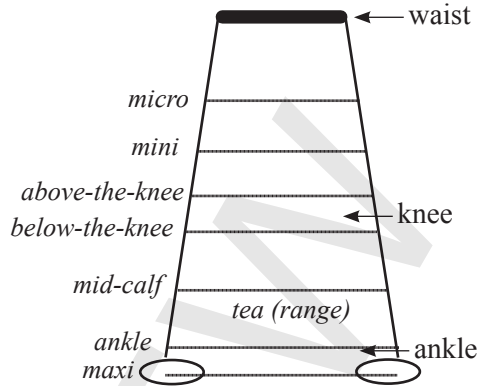
DRESS CHANGES AT THE BORDERS

*C*hanges in dress occur along well-recognized boundaries. Three common dress boundaries include status, location (both physical location and social setting), and gender. Boundary violations cause discord and ultimately personal separation. With such consequences, most dress changes occur at the edge of and not across boundaries. If a change is widely successful within one category, it may cross boundaries, spilling out into broad acceptance, e.g., blue jeans from men to women, Western fashions to developing countries, and jewelry (fake imitations) among the poor.

(5) **Below-the-knee**—below the knee, usually enough to cover the knee in all positions

(6a) **Mid-calf**—length halfway between knee and ankle; also “midi”

(6b) **Tea**—description for a lower hem, in the range from below the knee to bottom calf; also “waltz” length



(7) **Ankle**—hem at the ankle, barely brushing the foot when standing

(8) **Maxi**—below the ankle, often dragging on the floor

Sleeves: Length

(1) **Sleeveless**—no sleeve

(2) **Cap sleeves**—sleeve that is cut at the arm pit; usually is the end of a curved contour extending from the waist to bust to shoulder

(3) **Short sleeves**—length is middle of the upper arm

(4) **Mid-length sleeves**—length is at the elbow

(5) **Three-quarters sleeves**—length is just below the elbow

(6) **Long sleeves**—sleeves from just below the elbow to the wrist

(7) **Full length sleeves**—length is to the wrist

Sleeves: Styles

Eased-in sleeve head—a smooth finish with few to no gathers at the shoulder but still allowing enough room for movement

Fitted sleeve/sleeve head—like the eased-in sleeve head, yet more tailored and form-fitting, with less room for movement; for men, seen on suit coats/jackets

Gathered sleeve head—defined tucks or gathers at the shoulder, creating a full sleeve

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- shoulder pads, 48, 101, 106, 139, 141, 226, 250
- Simmel, Georg (German sociologist), 229, 282
- Simons, Menno (Anabaptist author), 187, 207
- simplicity, 42, 118, 125, 128, 129, 140, 144, 202, 248-249, 318, 321, 322
- Sinatra, Frank (musician/actor), 185
- singlehood, 190, 191, 261, 311, 325
- sizes, clothing, *see clothing construction; sizing of readymade garments*
- skin
- EMULATING WITH CLOTHING, 56, 93-94, 109, 334
 - EXPOSURE/CONCEALMENT, 49, 56, 102, 104, 109, 112, 174, 220, *SEE ALSO ATTRACTION, PROCESSES OF: REVEALING*
 - PLASTIC/SYNTHETIC LOOK, 177-178, 304
 - SKINCARE PRODUCTS, 168, 259
 - SUPPLE/YOUTHFUL, 91, 93-94, 177
 - TONE (LIGHT/TAN), 167-168, 176-177, 179, 222, 304
- skirt & blouse outfit, 105, 215-216, 222
- skirts (dresses), 62-64, 336, 339, *see also waistline, female*
- IMMODEST, 62-63, 69, 227, 334
 - JEAN/DENIM STYLE, 63, 97, 227, 334, 339
 - LENGTH OF, 48, 319, 344-345
 - MODEST, 62, 69, 319-320
 - SLITS IN, 48, 69, 223, 226, 279, 334
- sleeves, 60-61, 345-346
- CUFF STYLES, 342
 - DECORATIVE ENDS ON, 60-61, 119, 203, 277, 334, 342
 - FASHIONABLE EFFECT OF, 48
 - LENGTH AS CAP, 60-61, 68, 103, 345
 - LENGTH AS EXTRA LONG, 103, 249
 - LENGTH AS SHORT, 49, 60-61, 68, 100, 173, 345
 - LENGTH AS SLEEVELESS, 179, 220, 226, 335
 - LENGTH AS THREE-QUARTERS, 60, 232, 319, 337, 345
 - MODEST DIMENSIONS, 175, 313, 319, 345
 - RIPPED ENDS, 145
 - STYLES AND SHAPES, 345-346
 - SWEATERS AND, 100-101
 - UNDERARM HAIR AND, 175
- social class, *see classes, socioeconomic*
- social event, *see events/roles: social events*
- social networking & blogging websites, 124-125, 190, 219, 248
- Solomon (king of Israel), 10, 39, 187
- spacing between people, 185-186
- Spain, 79
- spectacles, *see glasses (prescription)*
- speech, 21, 186-189
- CATCH-PHRASES AND STYLES, 186, 226, 259, 279, 307
 - COORDINATION OF CLOTHING STYLE AND, 225-227, 229
 - IMMODEST, 8
 - MUSIC AND, 188
- sports/sporting
- CELEBRITY PLAYERS, 199, 221, 224, 259
 - CLOTHING OF PLAYERS, 48, 76, 88, 178-179, 293, 348
 - CONSUMER CULTURE OF, 231, 241, 259, 270, 312
 - EVENTS/VENUES, 22, 179, 187, 221, 247, 291, 293
 - EXPENDITURES ON, 211
 - FASHION INSPIRED FROM, 47, 48,