

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

PROCEEDINGS OF THE TWENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The 1969 AAPOR Conference was held May 16 to 29 at the Hotel Sagamore, Lake George, New York. It was the twenty-fourth annual conference on public opinion but the twenty-third since the organization was formally named the American Association for Public Opinion Research at Williams College in 1947 and elected Clyde Hart as its first president.

HONORABLE MENTION: DRESS AS NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

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One of the latent functions of dress is communication. Dress and

hair styles are symbols in one of many systems of nonverbal communication—other systems involve gestures and posture, use of time, accent, and conspicuous consumption. Dress has been used to communicate many things about the wearer: social class, nationality, region or tribe, age-grade, marital status, and various official and divine statuses. In the university community studied, it indicates political and social liberalism/conservatism.

This study, under the direction of Shirley A. Star, is based on data from 410 interviews obtained (with an 85 per cent completion rate) from a random sample of Berkeley students. Preliminary investigation suggested that a wide variety of specific features of dress and appearance cluster together into a few basic types, and respondents' dress was rated on this basis. The types range on a single continuum from highly conventional to highly unconventional. Color photographs of drawings of these types were used to obtain both respondents' ratings of their own appearance and information on stereotypes associated with the different types of dress. These data show that *actual* dress is strongly related to ethnocentrism, economic conservatism, and foreign policy attitudes, with conventional dress indicating conservative politics. It is similarly related to social attitudes, especially regarding sex and drugs.

These patterns are clearly recognized by others: the stereotypes about appearance reflect reality with considerable accuracy. One consequence of this may be to facilitate the formation of politically homogeneous friendship groups, since a potential friend's political position is immediately apparent. Hostility toward those who dress unconventionally is probably due to distaste for the political and social attitudes expressed by their dress.

The accuracy of this communication arises largely because the wearer can freely, although often inadvertently, choose a dress style that indicates his position. But there are also systematic distortions, both because dress symbolism is not sufficiently elaborated to express atypical combinations of political and social attitudes and because there is sometimes pressure on an individual not to wear the styles appropriate to his beliefs.