

What Does Our Culture's Dress Down Mean?

It seems that nearly everywhere I go, people are dressing casual for events that once virtually mandated more formal attire. At one time, people dressed up when they went shopping, to a restaurant or movie, school, a doctor's appointment, jury duty, and even when they voted.

Today, there are dress down days at work, where employees wear jeans, shorts, sandals, logo T-shirts, and even flip-flops. CEOs and politicians are also dressing down, perhaps attempting to conceal their mega-million dollar assets.

I see people in church wearing tank tops, jeans, shorts, and sneakers. Men now wear baseball caps in church, and other indoor events. At one time, men were expected to remove their hats inside.

There was a time when a man rose from his seat during an introduction, primarily as a display of respect for the person. No longer. Standing for a woman is also a fading gesture. Although I hear texting her with sexual innuendos is on the rise. Texting has replaced talking in social settings. Look around any restaurant, and you witness people glued to their cell phones. You cannot yet marry your cell phone. But eventually, some Federal judge will discover that it was in the Constitution all along – we just stupidly overlooked it these past two hundred-plus years.

In addition, what should we make of female celebrities who spend a night out on the town sans underwear, and allow photographers to capture their privates digitally for all the world to see?

Holes in jeans are the standard. Once at a gas station, I witnessed a young woman wearing shorts with a large rip about the size of a softball snack dab in the middle of her backside. She was not wearing underwear, and her bottom was visible. I never did get her name, but I will always remember that smile.

Green hair. Orange hair. Purple hair. They are not common, but if you get around enough, you will see them. Tattoos are ubiquitous among the younger crowd. This was a practice once reserved for military men. Nose, belly button, nipple, eyebrow, tongue, and even genital piercings are also popular. Short shorts are widespread.

Today, it is not uncommon for politicians to use profanity in a public speech or an interview. Language in general has grown coarser, and foul language is now the standard. At one time parents used to wash their children's mouths out with soap for uttering profanities. Now

they record it, send it out to some video show, and want the entire world to hear their child spit out a few “F-bombs”. Oh, what proud parents they must be!

I will not even try to understand the dress down we see at the beach. Frankly, in this age of obesity, when many men have larger breasts than women, both sexes should consider covering more – and not less – of their body at the beach. This is not a moral perspective, since I am more concerned with our appetites. The seafood buffet is much less appetizing when you witness what comes out of the ocean.

Yet, people do dress up. I still see gowns and suits worn for proms and weddings. For Halloween, people spend all sorts of money and effort acquiring or creating a precise look for their costume. Where is that effort elsewhere?

I scoured the internet looking for explanations to these phenomena. Here is what I discovered.

Some believe it is a sign of cultural immaturity. Parents dress like children, wearing attire that is not only unisex, but also uni-age. Years ago, children strived to emulate adults. Today, adults prefer to emulate the young.

Another explanation is that what is most important for us today is our personal comfort. Jeans and sneakers are certainly more comfortable than a suit, a gown, a tie, or heels.

Perhaps there is more of an attitude of wearing what we want because it is a free country, and dress down is an act of defiance. This might explain why we see sagging pants, extreme low-riding jeans, and whaletails.

Finally, maybe we dressed up years ago because we wanted others to view us at our best. Today, we no longer respect other people’s opinions.

I do not pretend to know if any of these cultural changes are meaningful. But I promise to do my part and properly conceal myself the next time I walk the beach. Honestly, I do not believe anyone really wants to see me in a Speedo.

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