

Neckties may indicate attitude, character

By ALAN HARRIS
Of the Emerald

Do neckties project the inner nature of those who wear them? Are they a silent transmission of sexuality? Or are women, tired of being subjected to fashions designed by men, secretly plotting to allow men to choke themselves senseless with their ties?

These questions are inspired by recent statements made by Gerald Andersen, executive director of the Neckwear Association of America on the occasion of the "dressing up" of the White House staff.

The staffers used to hang around in casual clothes, Andersen says. But when Pres. Carter shook up his Cabinet and promoted some of his aides, neckties played an important part in the White House's new "take charge" image, Andersen says. A tie is not just a tie, he notes.

"A tie has a visual vocabulary that indicates at a glance who the wearer wants to be and what he wants you to think about him," Andersen says. "The necktie often says it all, and on a most personal level."

Andersen's statements could be seen as slick salesmanship in light of the association he represents. But the study of the evolution of our civilization's clothing has provided us with some interesting theories. Why do people wear such things as neckties? Volumes have been written on the subject.

Works such as "The Importance of Wearing Clothing," by Lawrence Langner tell us that the necktie was introduced to this country in 1660. Like most useless objects, the tie once had a very important function. As its name implies, the necktie tied the collar around the neck.

But with the advent of one-piece shirts, the tie took on a deeper sociological significance, Langner says.

Not needed to actually fasten anymore, "the necktie has become a symbol of modern man's superiority, for to be sure that in selection and wearing a tie, he reveals his conservatism or bohemianism, or some other attitude towards life.

"And even in his day-by-day selec-



Graphic by Tom Ettel

tion of the tie to wear, he fits the apparel to his mood — he can indicate his interest in horse racing (ascot tie), his loss of a friend or relative at a funeral (black tie), and even his membership in the Socialist Party in England (red tie)," Langner says. "Or he can show his disdain for his class by refusing to wear one at all. Or he can refer to his necktie as a phallic symbol to confuse his lady friends."

Shades of Freud. What might this mean for those sporting bow ties, or even polka-dotted ties?

Langner's theory jives with the opinion of Andersen, the neckwear association spokesman, but University Pres. William Boyd is not convinced.

"It seems to be a self-serving statement to get us all to buy more ties," Boyd says of Andersen's statement. Admitting that he wears a tie as "part of his uniform" because it is expected of him, Boyd adds that he wouldn't want others to presume the nature of his personality by the ties he wears.

George Kramer, assistant to Lane County Commissioner Archie Weinstein, said he wears a tie more out of habit than anything else. Weinstein, a colorful dresser, doesn't wear ties but he wasn't available to explain.

However, "On a day-to-day basis, it

doesn't make a damned bit of difference whether or not you wear a necktie," Kramer says.

Kramer says he's not sure that more neckties in the White House mean abler administrators.

Navy chiefs should note Langner's assurance that clothing is "part and parcel" of our civilization — and that ties are part of the package.

David Moursund, professor of computer science at the University, says the tradition of wearing a tie on campus has been slowly dying over the years.

"The only time I wear a tie is to weddings and funerals," Moursund says. He remembers a meeting of 35 University department heads in 1969. "I walked in and was the only one without a tie," he says.

Indeed, Western culture on the whole seems to be passing through a casual clothing stage. Although current fashion trends appear to be going through a "dressier" phase, one look on campus shows that anything goes. With unisex clothing the norm, gender-guessing isn't the cinch it used to be.

But Boyd commented on one difference that still exists between men and women — the necktie. Boyd says that "neckties remain a peculiarly mas-

culine piece of masochism."

According to Langner, we have dressed our men in clothes labeled "male" and women in clothes labeled "female" for thousands of years, and "utility, ornamentation and sexual attraction initially had little to do with it.

"Then men prohibited one sex from wearing the clothes of the other, in order to maintain this differentiation," Langner says. Western civilization accomplished this by providing trousers, knickerbockers, pleated kilts or tunics and other legwear that permitted free movement for the male. The female was forced to wear hampering skirts and dresses which impeded her movements, he says.

Langner also notes that "women have continued to rebel against what they regard as the injustice of being required to wear skirts. As a result, it is not hard today to imagine a world in which both sexes will wear exactly the same clothes."

To some extent this already exists in Red China, where both men and women wear quilted blue shirts and trousers, he says.

Perhaps they concur with Henry David Thoreau, who in the best Confucian tradition, said: "Neckties strangle clear thinking."

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