

Dress Codes and Respect

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“Kids today have no respect! Do you see the way that they dress? They’re always breaking the rules!”

A couple of recent news stories involving students who broke their schools’ dress codes have probably raised reactions like this, mostly from the older generation. This might have been your reaction too to these headlines, but sometimes seeing that there is a problem is different than seeing what the problem actually is. The first and easiest problem to see is that these students are disrespecting their school and its rules.

This is true, but it is a bit shallow. Respect of institutions and those in authority is important, but in one case¹, the student was respectful; she was told that what she was wearing broke the rules, so she obediently went home and changed. She even claimed she was not trying to make a point, but that it was hot, and she wanted to be comfortable. The second case² involves a female student named Alexi Halket of the Etobicoke School of the Arts who started a twitter campaign with the slogan #croptopday (crop-top day). Her reason for promoting a style that contravenes the school dress code, according to a recent article, is that “I wanted to feel very beautiful, look very beautiful, and feel very confident in myself and be happy — and they were sexualizing my outfit.”

“Sexualization” is an issue that needs to be addressed because it involves the issue of respect at a much deeper level than institutional respect. Remember, these students were not wearing shirts with slogans that were disrespectful obscene — they were wearing clothing that crossed a line that had been drawn between what is and is not considered modest and acceptable.

These young ladies were wearing clothes that they considered to be acceptable. After their schools disagreed with their choice, there were reactions from other students which sided with the rule-breakers rather than the schools, but the substance of the reaction is more important than the fact that they rebelled. In the first case, the slogan which was popularized was #mybodymybusiness (my body, my business) and the second was the aforementioned crop-top day. Do these slogans disrespect their schools? Sure, but not nearly as much as they disrespect the people who came up with them! These students do not understand why or how to respect their own bodies, or those around them.

We need to encourage respect for our bodies, and also recognize that sexual attraction is normal because of the way that God created people. God created men to be attracted to women, especially visually, and women to be attracted to men. Though the visual dimension for women seems to be slightly less pronounced than that of men, men are also expected to abide by dress codes for the good of all. It is important to remember that natural attractions can easily be warped through lust and selfishness.

The first young lady gave this quote³, which shows her level of basic misunderstanding:

"To ask female students to put sweaters on and 'cover up' to ensure the male students are not distracted or exposed to female sexuality is sexist and outdated," Nicolle wrote. "This standard presumes that female students are considered a distraction and therefore its a females actions that must be policed. The sexualization of a teenage girls body is not her problem, it is the problem of those who choose to sexualize a 17-year-old's body."

On the one hand, there is truth in this statement in that others (men) should not lust after (sexualize) women, even if they are tempted to, but on the other hand this young lady seems to think that men don't need her to cover up because they won't be distracted! She is suffering from a bad case of misinformation, she seems to believe that men have gotten over visual temptation and lust, and that women's bodies should not (or do not) distract them, no matter what they wear or don't wear. This is a denial of basic human biology and psychology and, as such, it is dangerous.

Young people in particular need to understand that they are valuable and that wearing decent clothing is an affirmation of their worth and dignity. These facts seem to be lost on the young ladies who are fighting for a "right" to wear clothing that actually demeans them. Those who are older and wiser — hopefully, but not necessarily, their parents — need to show them that codes of decency show respect for both women and men, and promote an environment that is less "sexualized" — a place where learning and work can happen. And that is what schools should be.

CHP Canada affirms respect for human worth and dignity and opposes efforts of all types to undermine it, such as mis-information, indecency, pornography, and violence.

Footnotes

¹ www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/london-student-in-jeans-tank-top-sent-home-for-breaking-dress-code-1.3088412

² news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/robyn-urback-on-crop-top-day-rejecting-the-dress-code-was-my-vietnam-then-i-grew-up

³ www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/london-student-in-jeans-tank-top-sent-home-for-breaking-dress-code-1.3088412

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