

Challenging the Thinking Around Dress Codes

Teach Consent
Not Shaming and Entitlement

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Challenging Old Thinking

- I have very strong feelings about adults in authority continuing to perpetuate a culture in which girls are taught
 - Their bodies are shameful
 - They must somehow figure out how to fix sexual feelings for men and boys
- We should be teaching about consent not shame

Dress Codes Add to a Big Problem

- Unlimited, hard core pornography
 - Where consent is almost never an issue
 - Kids are learning from porn
 - Yet there is very little education around consent
- In the meantime, dress codes or the way dress codes are enforced, mostly address what girls wear
 - Reinforcing ideas that girls are responsible for how boys act

She Did Not Ask For It

- Consent means making sure that sex is wanted by all parties involved
- How a girl or woman is dressed has **NOTHING** to do with consent

Consent? Huh?

- News story today
 - 48 men asked about how they learned about sexual consent—37 of them said they never did
 - College sex educator: “From what we have seen, it doesn’t appear as though they are familiar with the basic premise of what consent even means.”

Marisa Kabas, *No Means What?*

~~Acceptable Behavior~~

- Jian Ghomeshi
 - Repeatedly sexually harassed a coworker (including humping her from behind)
 - In his own words about the charges she brought, he wrote: “I have reflected deeply and *have been working hard to address the attitudes that led me, at the time, to think that this was acceptable.*”

~~Acceptable Behavior~~

- Brock Turner, the “Stanford rapist”
 - Caught in the act of raping an unconscious woman
 - Sentenced to 6 months; will only serve 3 months
 - His father wrote a widely circulated letter, painting his son as a victim
 - He wrote that his son deserved lenience because “He has no prior criminal history and *has never been violent to anyone including his actions on the night of Jan 17th 2015.*”

Sexual Assault, Endless Stories of Girls Being Shamed

- There are many more stories, most won't get heard
- Less than 40% of rapes are reported
- Statistics indicate that 1 in 4 North American women will be raped
- Many recent news items of girls getting kicked out of school *for clothing that is completely normal* in clothing stores, on TV, what their mothers would wear, etc.
 - Main reason: their clothing is distracting, not only to the boys, but to male teachers!

Language Matters

- “Rapists cause rape. Not what women wear, consume, where they go, etc.”
- “Rape is a willful act, the actor is a rapist. And yet you’d think that young women on campuses in particular were raping themselves, so absent have young men been from the narratives.”
- “Individual men disappear in this narrative and rape, assault, pregnancy just become conditions to which women have to adapt.”
- “This training begins early. Girls in middle and high school are told their forms and garments cause male behavior. **Who is responsible for the behavior of boys in these narratives about spaghetti straps and leggings? Girls.**”

Rebecca Solnit, *The Case of the Missing Perpetrator*

We are Insulting Our Young Men

- The idea that a girl must cover up to protect the boys
 - Tells them they are not responsible for managing their own feelings
 - This is deeply insulting to our boys
 - Creates false feelings of entitlement

Guidelines Should Be Based on Context, Gentleness, and Activity

- Language used is “distraction-free” and “business casual” (with a lot of specifics about length of shorts and bra straps)
- **But the context is *a school***
- **These are children, not sex objects, not bank teller trainees**

Activity

- Can they get through a day in a tank top and shorts? Yes.
- Can they get through an active day in high heels and a short skirt or pants that are hanging below their bum? Not so much.

Context: Stores and Closets

- It's important to acknowledge that girls are wearing normal clothes for sale at all stores that sell girls' clothes
- 1 in 5 children in BC lives in poverty: she may not have any other clothes

Context: Normal Kids and Adult Baggage

- Boys and girls being distracted by one another is **normal and natural**
- A lot of dress code enforcement is about dumping adult baggage on them
 - That young girl with breasts, she already has to deal with looks and judgment. Do responsible adults really have to add to that by calling her out and asking her to wear stuff she might not even own?

Gentleness

- Students should have an advocate
- No one should be allowed to make a child feel ashamed of their clothing or body
- No child should be called out publicly
 - This happened at my daughter's school

Conclusion

- I have very strong feelings about this
- As a young woman I had severe eating issues. I continue to have body image issues (what woman does not?)
- I have had many instances of sexual harassment in my life and way too many women I know have been sexually violated
- Let's be really cognizant of how our messages to young people contribute to a world where people do not have health around these issues

Sources

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