

Dress to express

Business



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In my public school, the dress code is debated. Is it fair? Is it sexist? Is it constitutional? Most students comply with the dress code, however, many feel the dress code expropriates their rights. Students claim the code is “restricting” or “violating the first amendment,” but is this the case? The High School Handbook states, “Clothing that disrupts or substantially detracts from the educational process will not be allowed. Any clothing endorsing alcohol, drugs, tobacco, weapons, or displaying inappropriate words or pictures is prohibited” (Administration).

Although the dress code prohibits unseemly clothing, it does not violate the First Amendment or freedom of expression. Administrators have the legal right to censor clothing if it creates disruption within the school (Tinker vs. Des Moines). The dress code protects students from offensive messages and creates a professional, educational environment. In the ongoing debate regarding the dress code, ultimate decisions are based on the Tinker vs.

Des Moines case, a famous court case that defined the rights of students inside a school. It was the first court case regarding the first amendment in high school. A group of students wore black armbands to protest the Vietnam War, and students were suspended for expressing their political opinion. After the students were suspended, they brought their school ultimately to the Supreme Court, which ruled that students do not lose their First Amendment rights to freedom of speech when they step onto school property.

Students’ rights remain as long as they do not cause a disturbance within a school. A disturbance is defined as an interruption of a peaceful and settled

environment. In a school setting, a disturbance resulting from inappropriate dress wear could be a physical fight, distracting other students, or upsetting the feelings of students. In the High School Handbook, the dress code is vague for a reason– so that each violation of the dress code can be based on a case by case basis. What may meet the dress code for one student, may not for another.

If a student violates the dress code, they are called to the office and asked to make an adjustment. In an interview with Ms. McDonald, a vice principal, I asked why we had a dress code, she stated: It is a general policy for every school... It is just to make sure that we continue to have a level of appropriateness in school. If we were to have a student show up in any kind of garment that they wish, we might have people that could possibly be offended by that person's choice... Because this is a community where we want everyone to feel supported and respected, there has to be some kind of limitations set by a dress code (McDonald). A dress code is needed because regulations are required to maintain the desired, educational environment. The school dress code is mandatory because it protects students from offensive or inappropriate dresswear.

According to the Melton versus Young case in 1972, when a student wore a jacket with the confederate flag on it, many students and faculty members complained to the principal of the school. The confederate flag symbolizes a time of segregation which was discriminatory toward the students at Brainerd High School. When Melton refused to take off his jacket, he was suspended. Although the First Amendment protects political speech, according to Tinker vs. Des Moines of 1969, since the confederate flag on his <https://assignbuster.com/dress-to-express/>

jacket caused significant disruption within the school, the principal had the right to suspend him, also according to the Tinker standard.

When this case was brought to court, the judges agreed with the principal's decision (Melton). A dress code is needed to protect students from feeling offended or uncomfortable from seeing inappropriate, offensive clothing. Clothing speaks louder than words. It is how we express ourselves and create impressions for other people. A school is a community made up of all types of people. It is impossible to please everyone, and the way we dress shouldn't be dictated to please others.

However, students must be aware of how their clothing affects others. The vice principal stated, " When people ask me to check on whether there is a dress code violation, it often comes from them feeling uncomfortable about what they see" (McDonald). Whether the garment is revealing certain body parts or skin, or promoting the confederate flag, it causes students and teachers to feel uncomfortable. This sense of feeling uncomfortable leads to a disruption and distraction in the classroom, which ultimately can lead to a disruption in the school. High school is supposed to be a safe place for all students. Restrictions on dresswear can enhance the environment for the school by protecting students.

By having guidelines to follow, students can feel safe and can focus in an appropriate way. In the court case of Chambers versus Babbitt, Chambers was a high school student who wore a shirt to school that said " Straight Pride." A few students were offended, and the principal asked Chambers to change his shirt. In conclusion to the case, the school was found to be wrong

to ban his shirt because others disagreed with his shirt's message. The shirt did not cause substantial disruption, so administrators could not silence his political speech (Chambers).

Schools today are changing, especially regarding the topic of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender teens in our community. Based on these changing conditions, it cannot be definitively decided whether or not Chambers' shirt was unconstitutional. This court case demonstrates how important the dress code is to the environment within the school. The social and diverse aspects of a school community continually fluctuate, but it is still important to recognize how the messages and ideas we express with our clothing have an effect on the school community. If students could convey any messages they wanted, other students could be offended. In our school environment, it is not just the messages portrayed on students' clothing that has an effect.

Body parts and skin are equally are distracting and uncomfortable for many students. During my interview with Ms. McDonald, she explained that, There is a sense of privacy to an undergarment, and they should be covered up so they don't cause a disruption... When people see an undergarment hanging out, their attention is drawn to that and not to what is going on in the education... People's attention is naturally drawn to that. And therefore they are not paying attention to what is happening in school. Socially it becomes the conversation (McDonald).

When a student violates a dress code in such a way that it becomes distracting to others, it changes the atmosphere in the classroom. Attention can shift from educational topics, which can create an awkward situation for

both the student and the others in the classroom. As the clothing becomes the center of attention, the student may feel overexposed. The guidelines of a dress code are meant to create an environment that makes students and faculty of the school feel accepted and safe, while providing an appropriate learning environment. An educational environment is needed to sustain a focus on academics, and prepare students for future professional settings. After high school, students will be entering the work force and other professional environments.

A dress code teaches students how to dress appropriately for the setting. If students were never taught that a shirt showing their midriff or pictures of alcohol on it were not acceptable, they could be unprepared after graduating from high school. Inappropriate clothing is not acceptable in professional settings, so it should not be acceptable in an educational setting. It is the school's responsibility to prepare students for life after high school, and teaching students how to dress and present themselves are necessary life skills. For this reason, a dress code goes beyond offensive words and messages regarding drugs.

The dress code applies to a student's overall presentation. The dress code aims for a casual business standard. Boys wearing low rise jeans revealing their briefs are just as distracting as a girl revealing her midriff.

Undergarments are supposed to be under clothing and covered up, hence the name. Private parts of the body should be kept private as well. No matter what the current fashion trends are or what a student's personal style is, undergarments and personal body parts must be covered.

This part of the code causes controversy and many people claim it is sexist. Fashion statements and current trends have certainly influenced female dress wear in a radical way. Ultimately, there are more diverse fashion trends for women than men, and when it comes to fashion, women are typically more “risky” or “outgoing”. Girls usually branch out with their clothing by wearing skirts, dresses, pants, cropped tops, blouses, etc. At school, boys typically wear pants, shorts, polos, and T-shirts.

The dress code is not intentionally geared towards censoring girls. It just happens to be that way because of the current fashion trends. Permitted clothing should reflect the values and beliefs of a school. The mission statement states: “Our High School encourages students to be passionate, inspired, and hopeful learners who strive for excellence and competence, who view our world with open hearts and creative minds who are ready to use the tools of tomorrow” (Administration). Dress code violations can disrupt goals by offensive messages and images that can hurt others, or by disrupting learning environments with inappropriate dresswear. At my high school, students and faculty value education, opportunities, challenges, and determination.

All of these values lead to success, which is demonstrated by the general dresswear at the school. Although the restrictions prohibit clothing promoting violence, illegal substances, or exposing skin in personal areas, they do not limit expression. Students are free to wear what they want to school. My school encourages creativity and expression. It is part of the mission statement. But just like all things in life, regulations are necessary.

The school dress code teaches students how to dress appropriately, and to be aware of how their messages can affect others.