

Shannon Vail is high school teacher of 5 years and serves as an advocate to the school's administration on behalf of the student government to open dialogue between students and faculty about policy issues, such as dress codes.

Teenage girls are beginning to become conscious of a subconscious message school administrations have been sending for years. The dangers of sexualizing girls at younger and younger ages are limitless and the consequences exclusively damaging.

Beyond reasonable dress restrictions for all students, underneath the explanations for dress codes that disproportionately affect girls, school administrations engrain sexist ideals and outdated gender roles on America's young. In school, teenage and younger boys and girls learn that the female body is dangerous and that harassment is acceptable. Then they carry these habits into college and into adulthood.

What is the real message when a girl is dismissed from class because her shoulders were exposed? Why does her education suffer for the "benefit" of her male peers? When will schools begin teaching all students to be responsible for their own actions and their own education, rather than shifting all blame to girls?

Too often I pass girls in the hallway after they have been sent to the office for wearing shorts. In that same hallway, a boy wearing a shirt that says 'good girls swallow' passes on his way to his uninterrupted education.

Let's think about that girl, who is wearing shorts to school. She has been removed from class because her dress has been deemed 'too distracting' for education to continue. So now that she is gone, the rest of the class can regain their focus and learn. On her walk to the office, where she will be given a baggy pair of sweatpants which no doubtedly mark her like the scarlet A, she begins to feel pressure to maintain a certain appearance. Her education isn't as important as that appearance, or else she would still be in class right now.

Let's think about that boy, who is wearing a demeaning and offensive shirt to school. He thinks saying 'good girls swallow' is his prerogative. Why wouldn't he? His education is never disrupted for his clothes, he doesn't receive judgmental glares from his peers, he doesn't get shamed in front of his classes for having certain body parts. His educational experience is protected from the inevitably distracting female body. It isn't his fault that he can't pay attention in class, it is because the girl sitting in front of him is revealing her shoulders.

In a culture where sexual assault occurs every 107 seconds and 4/5 of those attacks are committed by someone the victim knows, it is not hard to figure out where the trend begins. Shifting responsibility from one person, the assailant or 'distracted' boy, to another person, the victim or the girl in shorts, leads to victim blaming.

EXPAND HERE: victim blaming- college campuses?

Shannon Vail 10/10/2015 11:43 PM

Comment [1]: I am trying to establish that the point of view of author is different than the typical administrator /staff member. Many of the stories I researched didn't have a person like this so I wanted to make it clear that her perspective is unique, but I'm not sure how well that comes across.

Shannon Vail 10/10/2015 11:46 PM

Comment [2]: Here I am trying to set up my argument that dress codes and the enforcement of dress codes have an impact beyond the years spent in high school. Do I do a good job of communicating those impacts or is that an area where I could add on?

Countless times I have stayed after school to help students with what they missed in class when they were sent to the office. I have proctored detention where more than half of the students were girls who got dress coded earlier that week. Rather than practicing with their soccer teammates or the brass section of the band, they are paying for not looking the way the administration wants them to look.

I have overheard students telling their friends about the explanations they got as to why their dress was too inappropriate to remain in class. I hear variations of the same thing but it never fails to baffle me. It's always "too distracting" for the boys.

EXPAND HERE: direct quotes

Our students look to us as examples. What example are you setting when you verbally and symbolically tell a student that her education is being put on pause so her male peers can focus in class? What example are you setting when you call out a student in front of her entire class because of her dress? Is making her change her clothes not shameful enough? Must she be evaluated by you, her peers, and the principle? Do you not see how you are now the one sexualizing this student?

EXPAND HERE: adults sexualizing

As an advocate for the student government, I ask these questions of my fellow faculty and administrators.

My wish is that we lived in a world where my involvement wouldn't be necessary, where the students were fairly heard and able to enact change. But we aren't there yet.

We aren't in a world where men and women, boys and girls, are seen as equals yet. We aren't in an educational system that emphasizes personal responsibility over blame shifting yet. We aren't in a culture where the abuser is blamed rather than the victim. We aren't in those places yet, but I do believe we are on the way.

- check citations
- every day sexism project- cite names/date posted
- hyperlinks

Shannon Vail 10/10/2015 11:51 PM

Comment [3]: This is another area where I want to emphasize the impact of dress code enforcement. Often it is the explanations that administrators give that show the underlying sexist ideals. I discussed it earlier with the comparison of the girl and boy students but do you think I should go into that argument a little more here?

Shannon Vail 10/10/2015 11:53 PM

Comment [4]: I like the transition between these two paragraphs but I'm not sure if I explain how teachers/administrators are sexualizing students. Do I address it enough earlier or should I expand on that? And if I should expand, is there a way I could do it while keeping the flow here?