

# A Prudish Parent

I can't help but think of sex when I clothes shop with my teenage daughter. There, I've said it—at the risk of sounding like a parent from a by-gone era, the kind who when I was growing up might have opposed dancing for fear that it would lead to premarital sex.

Shirts, blouses, sweaters and dresses in the junior department are almost universally low cut, a trend being followed by females of many ages, from preteens to “grown women.” Letting it all hang out, apparently, is in.

Then there are bottoms—meaning skirts, shorts, and pants. I have to admit that skirts and shorts, what little there is of them, aren't any shorter than they were in my day. Think miniskirts and hot pants in the late '60s and early '70s, as short as they could get—which I wore religiously.

I also wore hip-hugger bellbottoms, slung nice and low. But the difference between then and now is that my peers and I paired the low-riding pants with shirts that were either tucked in or hanging well over our hips. Today's look is all about skin.

Clothes for teens are also tight, of course, as I suppose they have always been. Such an observation might be sour grapes, coming from a middle-aged woman past the days of looking her best in form-fitting attire.

But the real challenge in shopping for a girl these days is finding any middle ground of clothes that are modest yet youthfully stylish.

Seeing what is being sold to girls today leads me to wonder what we parents—really—want for our children when it comes to sexual behavior. I don't think that sexy dressing necessarily leads to being promiscuous, or even being “sexually active” at all. Certain clothes do not dictate certain activity, but they do call into question how parents and daughters expect girls to behave.

People are sexual beings, who dress to make sexual impressions. But is that OK at all ages? In other words, how young is too young to dress sexy? How young is too young to attract sexual attention? How young is too young to have sex? At some point parents have a responsibility to connect these dots.

We parents are not powerless in these matters—subject entirely to popular culture and pressures from our children. As we allow our children and teens to dress for sex, maybe we parents reveal our own exaggerated concerns and insecurities that our adolescent daughters reap the supposed social benefits of being in style.

If my teenage daughter did not possess a highly developed sense of modesty, I frankly don't know what kind of apparel parameters I would set for her. As it is, she finds clothes shopping very difficult because of her discomfort with showing skin, leaving her to choose between skimpy and dowdy. She's just not ready to shout "I'm young and sexual and I want you to want me!"

I don't hear or read much about similar concerns—except from Britney bashers. But I did come across a recent letter to the editor of *The Daily Oklahoman* written by a mother who said her teenage children will not shop at Abercrombie & Fitch. They—on their own, it seems—disapprove of the image and marketing techniques used.

While many of their clothes are just ordinary, over-priced T-shirts and baggy pants, Abercrombie & Fitch clothiers have been accused of peddling soft porn in their catalogues, which they say are intended for customers age 18 and over. But who shops in their stores?

My daughter bought her first Abercrombie shirt when she was just 11. When she had to start putting some of her own money into clothes, she decided that she could strike a better bargain elsewhere. But she is also uncomfortable with their sexual advertising.

I passed one of their stores the other day, with this subject in mind. Sure enough,

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I could easily see through the windows two large black-and-white pictures of barely dressed women and one of a man—not in a catalogue, but prominently displayed on the walls.

We are all—including children—bombarded with sexual images, but I realize that I am out of touch. For my own good, maybe I need to watch a little reality TV to catch up to where the rest of the country is regarding sexual values. I also could desensitize my daughter by requiring her to do the same. Then shopping for her would be less of a pain.

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