Student opinion: The problems with dress codes taken too far

Anna Rupp

For the longest time, clothes have been a way for students to express themselves, showing their interests and their style. But at high schools across the United States, including Yutan High, students aren't able to do that because the dress codes are either too strict or are enforced more than they should be.

While I agree that schools should have a dress code or policy in place for students to prepare them for when they graduate and have a dress code for work, they should not be so strict that they affect students in a negative way and drown out all positive outcomes. There are many issues with dress codes today: they are more likely to target female students than males, the school shouldn't be so strict if the parents are fine with the clothes, and dress codes can take part in mental health issues and make students feel more self conscious.

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First off, dress codes are shown to target females more than males. According to a national report in The Philadelphia Inquirer, "About 90 percent of dress codes prohibit clothing for girls, such as short skirts, spaghetti-strap tank tops and leggings, but only 69 percent of dress codes prohibit clothing for boys, such as muscle shirts and sagging pants." First off, girls do wear and own clothes that have a little bit of midriff, so they are more likely to get dress-coded for showing skin. Therefore, I could understand why a lot of schools prohibit certain clothing, but boys do wear inappropriate clothing and often make it through the entire day or halfway through the day without getting dress-coded. People are more likely to notice girls' clothing because in today's society, and even decades ago, dress codes normalized that girls showing stomach skin was "bad." So today that's basically the only thing that most school officials look for. Therefore, it takes them a while to see the inappropriate shirts that other students wear that represent something really

disgusting or bad. This has even happened at Yutan. On the first day of school, up to 10 girls were dress-coded by morning for wearing a shirt that showed skin, but a few weeks later a boy wore an inappropriate shirt, and he made it all the way to fourth hour without getting dress-coded. In my opinion, wearing an inappropriate shirt is way worse than wearing a shirt that shows a little bit of midriff. A lot of inappropriate shirts that students wear represent or are connected to drugs, gangs, alcohol, sex, violence or even negative politics. Showing a little bit of midriff isn't as bad as some of these examples because everyone has a stomach, and it is less of a distraction to the learning environment than these other types of clothing.

In addition to that, most parents would not want their children wearing shirts that promote bad stuff, or they would let their child face the consequences by their peers if they wore a bad shirt, right? So why should the school be so strict about what their students wear if most parents see what their children wear before they head off to school? Again, I understand that a lot of schools post on social media during the day about what their students are doing, so they want them to look nice and represent their school in a good way. But it shouldn't be the school's job to tell students what to wear if the parents are okay with it because the parents probably bought the clothes and are fine with them. I know that during school hours the school is our "legal guardian," but they shouldn't have more control over students' clothes than the parents. An example would be that some dress codes are so strict that you can't wear holes in your jeans. Some parents don't see a problem with it, so why should other schools' dress codes ban it? Overall, if our parents are fine with the clothes we wear, then the school should be fine with it, as long as it doesn't disrupt the students' ability to focus or cause a school disruption. "I think if our parents let us out of the house in certain clothes, it shouldn't be a problem for schools because the public is more dangerous than a school," said a freshman.

As a result, poor mental health is a commonly known problem in today's society, but did you know that dress codes are a part of the mental health crisis in teenagers? According to an article called This is Gendered, dress codes can lead to mental health issues and can make females in particular feel more self-conscious. Having a dress code can tell a girl that the way she dresses and looks is important to others, and this can make girls feel more self-conscious about themselves, which can sometimes cause eating disorders and anxiety. "Me wearing something that I'm comfortable in, that doesn't distract anyone shouldn't be a problem. Giving students the idea that covering everything up can put students in a bad state," a sophomore said. Do schools really want this? Do they want female students caring about how they look and how they dress, or do they want students to focus on their education? This could all be avoided by not having such a strict dress code. By letting students choose what they want to wear instead of telling them what to wear, students would probably do better in school and be a lot more successful. Furthermore, by having such strict dress codes, high school students everywhere are losing that creativity they have and are instead growing up in a dull environment, and it can cause students to lose self-expression through their clothing.

These are just some of the reasons enforcing a dress code too much or having a strict dress code is harmful towards students. I know Yutan doesn't have as strict of a dress code as other schools across the country, and we should be grateful for this, but there is always room to help students know that expressing themselves through their clothing is nothing to be ashamed of.