

Advice from the Trenches: Negative Clothing

Dear C and Dr. B:

I am worried. My daughter is starting college in the fall, at a school in a very conservative area in the south. The social norms are very different from those in Providence.

My concern is with her new fashion trend - sheer tight tops and no bras. Apparently, it's a TikTok thing. I have talked to my daughter about reconsidering her wardrobe at her new school, but she refuses to budge. She says that the style reflects a woman's right to be judged no differently than a man. She says that bras serve no purpose, are expensive and repressive, and all they do is accelerate drooping. The whole point of this new style, called Negative Clothing, is to showcase the nipple.

I call this Negative Common Sense. I fear she will be judged or, worse, raped. I am not sure she realizes just how fast people are judged and mostly by their appearance. I feel I am helpless to protect her.

- Fran Tick

Dr. B says:

There are a lot of social issues being tackled in home grown movements on TikTok. A lot of these deal with sexuality, identity, equality. Some people are trying to make political statements, others just following trends - whatever the motivation, all of it has blowback and repercussions.

Your daughter is 100% right on one level, but she seems unaware of the very real consequences of challenging the norms. Most people are ready to complain about injustice, but not willing to take on the responsibility of consequence. I am not sure the TikTok "free the nipple" revolution will have much impact on women's rights - what's trending seems to come and go rather fast.

Unfortunately, she's an adult and there is really nothing you can do to protect her. Parents in the '60s probably felt the same way when their kids went topless at protests about Vietnam.

Part of college is learning to survive on one's own. Let us hope that common sense prevails.

C says:

Your daughter is not 100% right, Fran, she is 100% duped. If she wants to campaign for women's rights, she'd do a lot more for the cause if she put her energy into addressing issues such as equal pay, abortion rights, better jobs and affordable day care. Real women with real problems do not appreciate the kind of "help" your daughter believes she is offering. The only people profiting from this fashion trend are the clothing manufacturers and social media influencers.

Here is a bigger and more useful truth your daughter would do well to understand - the first and most important thing to do upon entering any new place or culture is learn the lay of the land and the local customs. Whether you respect or agree with those customs, you are not going to be able to get anywhere if you just put on horse blinders and start shoving your own ideas down people's throats. There are places in this world where even walking out on the street in a pair of shorts can get a woman killed. There are also places in the world where clothing is optional and you can see nipples galore.

Unfortunately, neither of those fashion trends does anything to improve the actual quality of the inhabitants' lives.

I grew up in the '60s, when free love, nudity and psychedelic drugs were the norm and we all thought we would change the world. We didn't. The drugs have just become more dangerous, STDs have become deadly and erect nipples still get a lot of attention for all the wrong reasons.

Your daughter is going to do whatever she wants - don't waste your time trying to get her to change her mind. You can't tell teens or young twenty-somethings anything. They know it all...at least in theory. And by the end of her first semester at Ultra Conservative U, your daughter will have learned what happens when you put a theory to the test. I wish her luck.

- Cathren Housley

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com