

Objectifying Women? The Importance of Modesty

Modesty isn't something society likes to talk about. Suggest that it might be proper and you'll probably get an angry glance, and if you're in the right situation, a snide comment about the patriarchy. "If you don't like it, don't look," many people declare, and everybody else is expected to applaud their astounding show of eloquence.

Researchers and writers Lexie and Lindsay Kite, while admirably polite in presenting their thoughts around dress codes (and, by extension, modesty), accurately [reflect](#) the mindset of contemporary society: "[Dress codes] inadvertently sexualize young women as a collection of inappropriate body parts, positioning them as threats to be mitigated at any cost."

Another writer, Katlyn White, [expresses](#) a similar sentiment: "Dress codes teach women, from a young age, that their bodies are to be hidden. ... By banning cleavage and thighs, dress codes teach girls that their bodies are objects." By causing young women to think about [their clothes](#), the argument goes, we imply that those young women are merely bodies.

What Modesty Does

Certainly, some girls may become inordinately self-conscious by intentionally dressing modestly. It's always strange to do something different from what we're used to, and with the increasingly permissive attitudes around clothing and personal presentation, modesty (for most people) is definitely different. But—and this is key—is self-consciousness the primary concern?

In the late 2000s, Susan Fiske conducted a study on the effect

of immodest clothing on the male mind. In the study, male subjects viewed images of scantily clad men, scantily clad women, and fully clothed men and women. Reporting on the study, Christie Nicholson [noted](#) that—not surprisingly—the subjects were best able to remember the women in bikinis. Not only that, the subjects' memory “‘correlated with activation in part of the brain that is a pre-motor, having intentions to act on something, so it was as if they immediately thought about how they might act on these bodies.’” In other words, the immodesty present in the women turned on parts of the men's brain that corresponded with objects. Modesty doesn't objectify women; *immodesty* does.

Modesty and Self-Esteem

Contrary to contemporary thinking, modesty—when understood correctly—promotes substantive self-esteem. In her 2000 book [A Return to Modesty: Recovering the Lost Virtue](#), Wendy Shalit notes that “one of modesty's paradoxes ... is that it is usually a reflection of self-worth, of having such a high opinion of yourself that you don't need to boast or put your body on display for all to see.” For confident women, communal admiration is unneeded. Their bodies don't *need* to be marketed because they already understand (1) that their bodies have worth, whether or not they're turning heads; and (2) that their bodies, as beautiful, can be saved for someone who truly loves them.

How to Catch an (Honorable) Man

“But please,” some women may insist, “we *want* attention!” Whether or not they acknowledge it aloud, many women have a desire to turn heads. They know that immodesty *does* garner attention, and for some women, seduction might feel like the last wayward boat off the lonely island of singleness.

Still, women must ask themselves, “Is the attention gained by

immodesty the attention we want?" To be frank, very few women truly desire [one-night relationships](#). Instead, they want something deeper—something that transcends the moral carelessness of society and encourages men to love us as they ought. "However wreathed in smiles it might be," Pastor Douglas Wilson [writes](#), "[immodesty attracts] the kind of man you should not want to attract. The kind of men who work hard to avoid being pigs will begin to work hard at avoiding you." Sincerely virtuous men will not be caught by the body alone; to catch a man of dignity, women must act as ladies of dignity.

Modesty as Glory

My goal here is not to lay down strict rules for modesty—countless rules exist and are debated elsewhere. Rather, this piece offers a reminder that—ultimately—modesty is not a restriction; it's a glory. It's a confident statement that the female form is both beautiful and precious.

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