Summer Goodman

PWR Short Form

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**Bad Girls**

Marcus High School, located in Flower Mound, Texas has received backlash on its local news networks several times. Once over a movement to expel a student over a racist photograph and once because a student brought a gun to school. The only time the school made national news however, was over a controversial video they made regarding their dress code that both offended and outraged the female student body and their parents, along with female high school students across the country.

The video in question was shown to the student body on the second day of classes in the 2018-2019 school year, made with the intention of educating students about the school’s policy on dress code but “missed the mark,” according to the school’s principal, Will Skelton. The video opened with a shot of two female students walking down one of the school’s staircases, while the song “Bad Girls” by M.I.A. played in the background. They are quickly joined by six other students, all girls, five of whom, like the first two girls, happened to be wearing shorts. They all come together in a triangle formation with their hands on their hips, while the camera pans across their bare legs. They are then quickly stopped by a teacher and sent to a classroom with a “dress code violators” sign on the door. The next notable, and most controversial shot in the video is of a teacher standing at the front of the classroom in front of a whiteboard with the phrase “I will not wear athletic shorts” written on it several times. The teacher then hits the whiteboard with a yardstick as she leads the classroom full of only girls in a chant repeating that phrase.

By the start of the next school day, there were angry emails from parents directed at the principal, numerous complaints from students, and intense backlash on social media over the video. By the next night, there were news segments and dramatically increased negative social media attention on the school. One student specifically had a lot to do with that social media outrage.

Cat Moring, a senior at Marcus High School, posted the video the school released onto her Twitter account, where to date it has been viewed nearly 300,000 times. The text above the video reads: “Today my school was shown this video. So sad how ONLY girls are shown as the violators. I understand why my school has a dress code, but what about boys who wear shorts, or show their shoulders? It’s 2018...Why are we still over-sexualizing teen girls?”

She instantly received support from both fellow students and strangers. Nearly all the comments left under her post were praising her for speaking up against the offensive video and the presence of sexism in high school dress codes. Cat said she’s had girls retweet her post from not just her own school, but girls from local schools, schools across the state, and even some from schools across the country. The reach of her post wasn’t just limited to girls still in school, but women of all ages reached out to her to share their support. She believes the widespread reach of her post was due to “the overall implications that a dress code can have on women and nothing about [her] school in particular”, “it’s not [my school] that’s the problem,” she puts it. Moring believes that on a greater scale than just high school, the video sheds light on a double standard in how society treats men and women.

Many people in her local community, like Moring, felt the need to speak out against what they deemed the blatant sexism shown in the video. As the video continued to spread on social media, parents began to voice their own concerns over the video. In a segment by WFAA, one outraged mother in the community likened the video to “a public service announcement from like the 50’s saying, you know, ‘be a good girl’”.

The negative response to the video Marcus High School released wasn’t just because of the offensive nature of the video, but the controversy surrounding the policy itself. A team led by Velma Lapoint, a professor in the Education department at Howard University found that “girls specifically have rules barring them from wearing clothing deemed as immodest in as early elementary school”. A growing number of people are beginning to see this as concerning, believing that by forbidding young girls from showing too much skin and requiring them to cover their bodies they are being sexualized. That was the main criticism Moring and other students at the school held for what they felt was over-sexualization of such a basic and seemingly unproblematic article of clothing. Another student vocal about the video’s inappropriateness, Nicole Howell, points out the hypocrisy of the video in an interview with WFAA, saying “They were [showing the girls in the video] at the the same time saying that shorts were too sexual to be worn at school”.

According to Attillah Brookshire of Walden University, “approximately half of the public schools in the United States require uniforms or a formal dress policy”. The general goal of these dress codes, as Amy Argetsinger of *The Washington Post* describes it, is “to improve discipline and academic performance by setting basic standards for physical appearance”. It has been a widely held belief in the United States amongst school boards and district faculties that having students follow a dress code creates a less distracting learning environment, though there has been growing opposition to that stance. Students and parents across the country have started to raise issues with many dress code policies, namely the disparity of influence it has on girls as opposed to boys.

Leading many other students and parents, Cat Moring stood up for what she believed in, spoke up, and was heard by women across the country. Moring shared her beliefs and objections on her small platform on Twitter and was shocked by the number of responses she received. The support and praise she received for speaking out on the issue made Moring realize “[the] problem with dress code is not my high school. It exists in schools across the nation”. Moring was a part of an important conversation that she trusts will bring about change. She believes that soon “the world [will catch] up with the idea that women's bodies aren't something that are just overtly sexual,” and that starting a dialog is the first step in accomplishing that.

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