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Sagging Pants Does Not Equate to Sagging Values

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Sagging Pants Does Not Equate to Sagging Values

By Vanessa Lopez- Littleton
UCF Forum columnist
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I teach a class in the DeVos Sport Business Management graduate program at the For years I've debated the issue of people wearing sagging pants with anyone who cared to listen. I've hesitated to speak publicly for fear people would think I was condoning the style of dress. For the record, I believe style is a matter of personal expression.

Consider it this way: Some Americans grow up in neighborhoods where they are exposed to people who wear sagging pants almost every day. They see it inside of their homes, around their communities, in magazines, on the Internet and on TV. As a result, some would argue, it's a part of their culture.

Fashion and trends come and go, some of which reflect the social consciousness of those who participate in them. As such, young people should be allowed to express themselves and their culture with their style of dress. The mere fact that it is offensive to others does not negate their constitutional rights. The only intervention necessary should come from parents, who instill morals and values in their children, and the government, when the child is in a public school setting. Beyond that, style should be a matter of personal choice and not subjugated to the taste and preferences of others.

What is the real issue with sagging? Is it the fact that underwear or shorts are exposed, or is it something else? I would argue for the latter of the two.

Here's why:

The day after the recent Academy Awards presentations, Good Morning America aired a performance by Edén singing her new hit, "The Weekend." What was so striking about this performer was that she was sagging, or so I thought. She was wearing a leotard and MC Hammer-style pants down below her natural waistline exposing the upper part of

her hips. As I feverishly scoured the Internet looking for outrage and backlash, I quickly realized none existed.

Later that day, I saw a video on Facebook of a very cute toddler “teaching” a dance class while three adults mimicked his moves. It was kind of cute, except every time he bent down, a large portion of his diaper was exposed. The video had over 29 million views and not one comment on the sagging pants.

So that I was clear on what sagging was really about, I did some research. Sagging is a male fashion trend of wearing pants low to expose underwear. Thus, women who wear jeans below their waistline to expose a G-string (known as a “whale tail”) and dancing toddlers are not considered to be sagging.

I was perplexed, so I mentioned the issue of sagging pants to a former student who is white. Without prompting, he acknowledged that he had also worn sagging pants while in high school. When he started college, however, he stopped wearing sagging pants and was shocked to learn they were still common around town.

Another student offered an even more interesting perspective. She was appalled by the trend, which she said started as a way for homosexual/bisexual signaling in prison. After more research, I found no evidence to support the signaling-in-prison theory but found backing for the notion that inmates were often provided ill-fitting pants in jail without belts or elastic.

The more I asked about the issue, the more intriguing it became. I was told by some that people who wear sagging pants are hopeless and crying out for help. This statement was a bit more shocking as it represents a gross overgeneralization. Many saggings have become productive members of society, including my former student who is now interning at the state capital and preparing for law school.

I’ve come to realize that the issue of sagging pants is not about fashion, hopelessness or the historical significance of the trend; it’s about black males and the way they are viewed in American society. Some argue that if they would pull their pants up, others would respect them. But as many black males—who have never sagged their pants—can attest, they have been disrespected regardless of the anatomical positioning of their pants.

As we know, America struggles with its own issues of diversity. There are strong undercurrents of racism and discrimination and alarming health statistics for minority groups. When subgroups, such as young black males, seek to express themselves or posit their own cultural elements, many of our laws – and us –are slow to accept them. In fact, sometimes we create laws to temper them.

In order to understand the uniqueness of the lenses through which others view things, we must be open to understanding subcultures with different sets of norms and values. If we are on the outside looking in, we are prone to make judgments based on our own set of morals and values.

Each of us is unique and should be appreciated and valued as such.

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