

That Day I Wore Yoga Pants: 5 Myths About Modesty

by Phylcia on August 19, 2013

(Since the writing of this post, a sequel has been written, [The Motive to Modesty](#))

Hurriedly I raked through my second dresser drawer in the dim light of the unlit closet, scrambling for pants of some kind. Finding some, I grabbed a work out shirt, jammed feet into tennis shoes and breathlessly answered the door for Mr. M.

“Ready for breakfast?” He asked.

We cooked breakfast together and headed downtown to go for a walk by the James, where a paved path was perfect for running. By the time we got there, however, our plans changed to the farmer’s market (our Saturday favorite), Estate Consignments and coffee at a little shop beside the bank.

As we walked into the estate store Mr. M glanced at my outfit. The pants I had found in my harried search were work out capris – otherwise known as yoga pants. “You know...” He said. “You are dressed a *lot* like those girls you always comment on at the gym.”

We had talked about this before. Mr. M has requested, not commanded, that I refrain from wearing the pants to the gym, and really not in public at all. But I’d ignored the request, and here I was walking down the sidewalk in them.

“I was kind of surprised you wore them.” He said sadly.

I picked at the tag on a buffet table, glancing at myself in a mirror in the corner. It was just one request he had made – a request based on what he knew of his own male mind and the minds of the men around him. But I wanted MY way, so I ignored it.

I like those pants. I like them because not only are they comfortable – as all yoga pants are – but I look *trendy*. I look like one of those suburban moms with a ponytail, pushing her children through the market in a twin-seat stroller. And I like that look, regardless of the consequences.

But there *are* consequences.

The issue here is not that I wore yoga pants. The issue isn’t yoga pants at all, but the principle of the matter. The pants are skin tight. You can see every curve of my lower body. Not only is it attractive to Mr. M, but from several informal interviews, comments, and input from other men, it’s a recurring blind spot with Christian women everywhere. It’s about how hot *I* look, or how *I* want to dress, regardless of what anybody thinks.

Let’s be real: I have failed and still do fail at modesty on occasions like I just depicted above. The journey toward true femininity is one we all share as Christian women, and today I’m going to share some truth I’ve learned through my own mistakes and the studying I’ve done because of them.

I recently saw [an article](#) shared on Facebook written by a woman’s husband concerning modesty and the church. While the article addressed young men, it was primarily ‘shared’ on Facebook by... women. Why is that?

The content of the article reflected two concepts:

1. Men are not keeping their eyes to themselves and honoring their Christian sisters, and
2. Women are unfairly singled out about their clothing in the church and workplace.

There is certainly truth to the first point, and the bulk of this man's article was very valid in its address to men and the issue of lust. But the reality is that many Christian men – at least the ones who truly seek after God and are convicted by His Spirit – are not only *aware* of their lust problem, but guilty about it. They are not all shameless beasts looking for an opportunity to undress women in their minds. **In many cases, the very women offended by the negative attention of men are dressing in such a way as to earn it.**

The issue of modesty gets heated, as fingers are pointed and hemlines discussed, but I'm going to skip all that fuss and speak woman to woman, because I think we can handle it!

#1 Myth of Modesty: 'It's His Job Not to Look'

It's true, lust is a sin, and men shouldn't entertain it.

But if we give them nothing to look at, how often do you think they would be tempted to lust after us?

The article I mentioned earlier said women have been unfairly singled out concerning modesty. While men *are* responsible to honor us with their eyes and minds, **when we dishonor ourselves by what we wear, the real unfairness is to the men.** Do we really expect to wear whatever we want and then tell them not to look at us? Do we really expect to fit in with the latest (often sexually promiscuous) trends and NOT be viewed as an object of sexual desire?

It is not just his job not to look: it is *our responsibility* to provide nothing provocative to look at. We cannot blame men for what we instigate, and it is time for women of God to start acknowledging our responsibility in this matter, taking up our cross, and honoring God with our dress.

#2 Myth of Modesty: Setting Standards is Legalistic

I will always have a reader who emails me about my modesty posts saying that she wore yoga pants and it wasn't a big deal. "I understand you were convicted that it was wrong," The email might kindly explain. "But I haven't been convicted yet."

I'm not here to write a list of rules to be broken or ignored, but rather to talk about real issues that address real young women. I realize that it is not my job to write your personal standards of modesty. But since we are on the topic of yoga pants, let me share some things Mr. M commented to me when I was writing this post:

"Yoga pants make it difficult to work out when the girls are right there and the pants are so tight, it's basically like the woman is naked. A friend of mine even said when a girl wears yoga pants... it shows all the form and features while covering up flaws, like imperfections of the skin or cellulite. They are designed to be appealing."

Additionally, a young man in a men's group Mr. M once attended upheld this view. He told the men it was tough for him to try to work out, where there are girls wearing yoga pants doing stretches right beside him. It was a struggle not to lust after them. He would have to make himself leave the vicinity to do his workout with the still-present threat of remembering their image and stumbling later on. Yet another friend told Mr. M that it pained and concerned him that his girlfriend would go to the gym in her yoga pants to work with her personal trainer, but he didn't feel he could ask her to stop without being perceived as controlling.

What is the real issue here? Is it what not to wear? In our hearts we know it isn't. It's a standard of behavior, not a standard of dress, that is ultimately missing from our lives when we fail to be modest.

I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. (1 Timothy 2:9-10)

Paul wanted women to dress with 'decency and propriety... **as appropriate for women who profess to worship God.**' This high calling is our standard of behavior, which directly influences our standard of dress. It calls us to be different from the trends, the culture, and the leanings of the modern church. It calls us to align our spiritual life with our outward life in all things, willing to make personal sacrifices in order to do so.

Setting standards is not legalistic; regulating others BY our standards is legalistic. **Many of us spend a lot more time telling the men of the church to quit looking and the other women in the church to quit dressing the way they do, and we never evaluate our own closets.**

#3 Myth of Modesty: Men Don't Care What I Wear

Oh, they do. They care. Why else would *we* care so much? Why do we place such value on being told we are pretty or beautiful by a man? Why do we spend half an hour getting ready before a date?

Because men *DO* care what we wear, and we know it!

Men care so much what we do (or do not) wear, they are very conscious of it at all times. While the level may differ man to man, the concept remains the same: extra skin, extra form, extra cleavage or extra leg will draw either subconscious or conscious attention from them. They are designed as visual creatures (we have had this taught to us many times over, have we not?) so a visual stimulant catches their eye.

On an innocent level, men simply like pretty things. My brothers notice when a girl looks put together. My dad has commented on movie actresses who are classy and well-dressed. Mr. M has commented to me that a passing woman's dress was pretty. They like pretty things and they like when we wear them.

Because of this, **we have a great power.** We have the power to draw their eyes toward us for one of two reasons:

1. For the appeal of their desire based on revealing enough of our bodies to entice them; or
2. To appear attractive in personality as reflected in how we dress.

This leads me to my next point.

#4 Myth of Modesty: Lust is HIS Problem

Lust is a rampant problem in the church and in our culture. Most often lust is addressed with men, but it is also a major issue in the lives of women. It simply looks different for women than it does for men.

In Myth #3, I listed two ways we can turn a man's head:

1. For the appeal of his desire based on revealing enough of our bodies to entice him; or
2. To appear attractive in personality as reflected in how we dress.

Don't think I can't relate with a desire for attention. I am acutely aware that there are certain items I could wear that would draw Mr. M's attention to my body, and I would be flattered by it. In fact, I would relish the attention and be affirmed that he found me desirable.

Manipulating a man's attention for the purpose of affirmation is how women are tempted to lust.

Case in point: Eve.

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.” (Gen. 3:6)

Eve was given to Adam as his most trusted companion. She was also the most perfect beauty ever to be created in the body of a woman. You can bet her beauty served her well as she asked Adam to taste-test the forbidden fruit!

Eve thought the fruit of the tree was useful and pretty, but also **desirable**.

“For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.” (1 John 2:16)

When I give into my desire to for Mr. M's attention, at the expense of his endeavor to honor God, I am giving in to the lust of *my* flesh and encouraging the lust of *his* eyes. I am also expressing pride by ignoring God's command for 'decency and propriety' since I claim to worship Him. I am becoming Eve.

#5 Myth of Modesty: Modesty is Just Something I Do

“The more you cover up the more [a Christian man] will want you. Men like mystery, and when you reveal that mystery walking down the street, there is no reason for them to pursue you. They've already gotten their reward.” – Mr. M

Would you like to reward passing men with a glimpse of your body?

Men who couldn't care less about who you are?

Modesty affects us, ladies. It affects us greatly. It affects how we are perceived, how we are respected, how we advance in our careers, and whether we get asked on a date by a God-fearing, decent man.

Our choices in how we dress – how short our skirt is, how low our shirt is, how tight our pants are – **is the clearest reflection of our personal priorities and our openness to letting God’s Word alter our lives.** I realize that is a bold statement, but it is very, very true. When I am not walking in God’s Spirit and seeking to do what I read in His Word, I will wear whatever I want at the expense of the men around me and my own self-respect. **In those moments, I would rather be trendy, Pinterest-y, and pretty than prove to the world that I worship God.**

When we stubbornly resist the call to cover up, we reveal hearts that have misplaced priorities. We have a high calling, ladies, clearly laid out in Romans 12:17-18. This passage talks about forgiveness, which applies to all treatment of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, **so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.**”

Modesty is respectable in the sight of all men. It just *is*. Additionally, in our relationships with men, it *depends upon us* to dress in a way that keeps peace between us and our brothers.

“But Phylicia,” you may say. “How am I causing a lack of peace by how I dress?!”

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from **fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul...**” (1 Peter 2:11)

When we dress in a way that has even **the potential** to cause a man to lust, we create an unnecessary war against his *soul*.

Think about that for a moment.

Dressing in the way God commands – with modesty, propriety, and decency – protects the men around us from waging a needless war in their souls. **When we REFUSE to accept our responsibility to protect our brothers – our sister’s husbands and sons – from lust, we are creating a war and inciting unrest in the church.**

Yes, it is the responsibility of the men to turn their eyes away. So let’s entrust them to the Lord and let Him deal with their responsibilities while we concern ourselves with our own. Ladies, I am right here with you, dealing with this issue, struggling with it, fighting with my closet over it! I am asking you to join me in this endeavor. I want to trust Mr. M around you. I want you to trust your husbands around *me*.

On a final note, here is some encouragement. 1 Peter 2:12 says:

“...having your way of life honest among the Gentiles, that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

When we keep ourselves hidden, those who see us glorify God because they see a different woman than they are used to. Anyone can join the trends. Anyone can wear yoga pants. **But the woman who chooses to change in order to obey God will be blessed in her doing.**

We’re in this together girls! Let’s honor God and earn the respect of the men around us by pursuing His standards for all of life and living.