



SEARCH

# Teen girls on fashion tightrope

## Peer pressure can be very tough to deal with, researcher finds

BY SHANNON PROUDFOOT, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

Anyone who thinks teen girls are embracing a "pornified" culture and strutting school hallways in the most provocative outfits they can dig out of their closets needs to think again.

So says a Canadian researcher whose newly published study on girls and school dress codes flies in the face of popular notions that today's girls are slavishly following celebrity styles in an effort to out-sex their friends.

"Girls still have to negotiate a really difficult place, and that's that they are expected to look attractive and they are expected to wear popular fashions, and yet if they err just a little bit one way or another - just a bit too much cleavage or too much skin in one place or another - then they risk being called a slut," says Rebecca Raby, a child and youth studies professor at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ont.

Judgment from fellow students - both boys and girls - is swift and harsh when girls go too far, Raby learned in focus group talks with dozens of Canadian students age 13 to 21.

The groups included girls and boys, but Raby focused on the girls because they were much more vocal and revealed a finely nuanced understanding of the way they and their peers present themselves.

Society is simply not giving them enough credit by suggesting otherwise, she says.

"Girls ultimately get burned by that. They are set up as if they're all Britney Spears wannabes, they have no critical faculties, that what they wear is not thought through, that they're just imitating media images."

In fact, the girls Raby talked to were highly critical of peers they thought wore inappropriate clothing, deriding them for showing off their midribs or thongs at school, and describing them with labels like slut, whore and skank.

"That's pretty harsh and derogatory language to be using, so it was quite noticeable. These girls' comments make it really clear that they're not all engaged in some mad rush to dress as provocatively as they possibly

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