

Age-Appropriate Dressing? YES, NO, MAYBE!

JOAN SCHWEIGHARDT



Diane Pollock

You're getting older . . . and older . . . and older. Does that mean it's time to throw out the funky handbags, stilettos, skin-tight leather pants and/or mini skirts? Must you trash your strategically ripped jeans, patched-up hoodies and ancient purple high-tops in order to ensure you're dressed age appropriately?

YES!

Samantha Brown, a stylist at OkMyOutfit (www.okmyoutfit.com, offering personal styling and shopping services that connect everyday people with expert celebrity stylists), answers emphatically. "When a person's wardrobe doesn't progress," she explains, "it creates the illusion that they're stuck in time. From outdated suiting, stale trends and silhouettes that are no longer modern, a wardrobe that hasn't evolved is a giveaway that the wearer is probably holding on too tight to the past.

"In my industry," Brown continues, "I'm often hired to help clients find a new look that suits their current lifestyle and body type. This is not always an easy task as those who pay little attention to the fashion industry don't even know where to start. Sometimes a client will be very fashion-savvy but have no idea how to translate the industry trends into their own closet. When they do change their style choices [on their own], it's typically to cover up more (sleeves to hide aging arms, longer hemlines, etc.) and succumb

Samantha Brown

to the 'comfortable' footwear over the sky-high options. For those seeking promotions or those who have received them, [it's important to] shift toward the more professional version of themselves."

"For an older woman who wants to dress sexy, again I say absolutely. But the definition of sexy can change with age. Sexy may now be a leather pencil skirt, as opposed to leggings with cut-out-lace side panels. Again, a matter of sophistication."

NO!

While Dawnn Karen, a fashion psychologist who actually founded the Fashion Psychology field, would likely agree with Brown that what one wears reveals something about one's psyche, her response to the question of whether it's necessary to change our wardrobes over time is antithetical. Karen, a former

model, fashion publicist and designer, *begins* with her clients' psyches and helps them to work their way out, "bridging the gap between perception and reality."

"I do not adhere to age-appropriate dress," Karen tells us. "Clients should dress according to mood enhancement and mood illustration." Dressing to illustrate one's mood, Karen explains, perpetuates one's current emotional state. It's even possible to get yourself out of a funk by changing into something that





Dawnn Karen

represents the mood you want to encourage.

Karen adds that most men and woman have a tendency to neglect fashion as they get older. Or, to combat the feeling of being invisible, they will sometimes wear pieces that are reminiscent of their younger days. She tells her clients that they don't need to abide by any fashion rules, some of which she believes carry nuances of discrimination towards "ageism,

racism/skin tone, sexism, etc." She calls these undercurrents "micro-aggressions," a term which has come to mean offhanded degradation of any socially marginalized group.

Definitely **MAYBE!**

Diane Pollack is a wardrobe consultant and personal shopper in New York City. Her company, Style Empower (www.styleempower.com), is all about "Style for Your Lifestyle," meaning "every woman is different and they have to wear what works for them."



On the subject of dressing according to one's age, Pollack says, "I believe a woman at any age can be trendy, if she so desires. Some women come to a point where this is not important anymore. For those that do want to be on trend, I say absolutely. For example, a woman can be on trend with colored nail polish, but if she wants to wear a green, she might

want to pick a sage or olive, as opposed to a neon green. This is called sophistication.

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Pollack reminds us that Tina Turner can rock a mini-skirt better than many 20-year-olds. "Many women simply don't care to wear mini-skirts as they get older. But there should not be a hard rule to say [they can't]. The bottom line: If a woman can keep it sophisticated, she can make it work."

THE LAST WORD:

The King of Phases and the Queen of Uniformity

Having received a "yes," "no" and "maybe" from the pros, we went to two people



Sharon van Ivan today; right, van Ivan in the 1980s



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who have nothing to do with the fashion industry for the last word.

Zach Stampone is the founding broker of the Stampone Group (www.stamponegroup.com), a real estate company featuring high-end luxury homes in South Florida. Stampone, who calls himself “the king of phases,” is only 26 years old, but is a creative entrepreneur who has bought and sold businesses since the age of 18 (see www.zachstampone.com to view additional accomplishments), we thought he’d earned the right to add his two cents to the mix.

Toward the end of high school, Stampone wore his hair in a ponytail and, as for his clothes, he remarks, “Let’s just say they didn’t fit.” After high school, he began selling real estate and shooting his own films – Stampone began what he recalls as his “Tony Soprano” phase by wearing lots of Puma jumpsuits. “Then,” Stampone reveals, “because I was becoming somewhat successful at this whole selling real estate thing at such a young age, I felt the need to dress ‘older’ so older people would take me more seriously. I’m not sure why this turned into me dressing like an old man and hanging out at the local cigar lounge, but hey, I’m an extremist.”

When he decided it was time to open his own gym, he adapted his “free spirit” phase, which meant backtracking from looking 70 to looking like “a 14-year-old kid wearing multi-colored tank tops and surfer style board shorts.” These days, his style might be considered “multi-faceted.” “I learned it’s okay to try new things and live by experience. I’m a filmmaker, entrepreneur, and someone who just loves people, fashion and anything else my awesome life has to offer. I’m happy my journey has led me to this point so far. Now I’m thinking about growing a massive beard. I never did that before!”

At the other end of the spectrum, we interviewed someone who might well call herself the queen of uniformity. Sharon van Ivan, who is 69, is an actor (she appeared most recently in “Mad Women,” directed by Jeff Lipsky) and the author of the memoir “Juggle and Hide.”

Except for a brief psychedelic excursion into the world of mini-skirts and bright colors during the late 1960s/early '70s, van Ivan has been wearing the same styles since childhood. She favors jeans, tee-shirts, comfort shoes, vests and jackets – and to dress things up now and then, scarves and/or unique hand-crafted necklaces (created over the years by her artist husband). Says van Ivan, “I never liked girly clothes. I prefer extremely casual, non-threatening solid colors, especially grays and greens and blues. The only prints I own are on my scarves.”

One of van Ivan’s favorite garments is her Banana Republic



Zach Stampone

military-style vest, which has always made her feel less vulnerable about her petite frame. “I never decided to dress the same way all my life. But looking back, I see that’s what I have done.”

OK, so we do tend to notice – and judge – people by whether they are appropriately dressed. Perhaps the best advice is: Understand what’s appropriate for the occasion, then find yourself an outfit that suits the occasion and flatters you. ■



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