

A photograph of a woman from the waist down, wearing a bright red, form-fitting dress and matching red high-heeled shoes. She is standing on a light-colored surface against a plain white background. The text is overlaid on the image.

**WHO TAUGHT YOU
HOW TO
DRESS?**

Ginger Burr

Who Taught You How to Dress? Home Study Program
By Ginger Burr

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Welcome



Welcome to “Who Taught You How to Dress?” – your guide to undressing old beliefs, recognizing your inner beauty and creating a fashion statement that is truly your own.

My name is Ginger Burr, President of Total Image Consultants and the creator of this fashion home study program—a course that has been in development for years. After working with countless women throughout my career, I realized that there were recurring issues that regularly kept them from appreciating their true potential for recognizing and expressing their beauty. Once those barriers release their hold, I was amazed and delighted as I watched these women come into their own. That is what I wish for you as you begin this journey.

If, as a teenager, anyone had ever told me that when I grew up I’d be an image consultant (not that there officially was such a thing back then!), I would have laughed. This is not to say that I didn’t love clothes (I did), and I was always changing my hairstyle (I still do!), but I was a teenager in the 1970’s – arguably the ugliest decade in fashion history. (If you grew up then, you know what I mean.) There was only one accepted skirt length (short!—too bad if it wasn’t flattering!), low rise bellbottom jeans were the rage, bad polyester (think men’s leisure suits (a fashion nightmare!)), and jarring color combinations (the shag carpeting in my bedroom was orange and pink) – these were all the norm.

So, how could I, a shy, gawky, knock-kneed teenager from a little town in Western Mass. called Feeding Hills, become a well-known Boston fashion stylist? Well, through a series of life changing experiences over the next 10+

years, it came to be. Now, 22 years later, I have a reputation as someone who understands where women are coming from when it comes to their image (having been there myself!) and, more importantly, someone who knows how to get them where they want to be.

Think of the fashion mistakes you have made and chances are good I've made them, too. Money wasted on unworn items – been there, done that. Letting others think they know better about what looks good on me than I do? Yup, guilty. Wearing what everyone else is wearing because I wanted to fit in? Don't remind me (flannel shirts are forever banned from my wardrobe)!

I see it all the time! More women today are confused about what to buy and what to wear than ever before. We are regularly bombarded by outside (often competing) messages from the media, celebrities, Hollywood fashion gurus, friends, relatives, and (yikes!) even strangers about how we should look. As a result, our heads are spinning with information (or often more accurately mis-information), our wardrobes are out of control, and our psyches are begging for relief. And, in the meantime, we feel like we are wasting precious time, energy, and money on a wardrobe that doesn't meet our needs or feed our soul. It's no wonder women are frustrated!

The good news is that I figured out how to overcome all of those issues, and I am delighted to share my insights and successes with you in the "Who Taught You How to Dress?" Home Study Program. Throughout this program, as I guide you in creating a look you love, you will recognize an inner spirit that gives you the courage to explore who you are and ultimately helps you to discover looks that appeal to you. The end result will be the creation of a personal foundation built on beauty, confidence, well-being, and joy.

Welcome to a fascinating, life-altering journey that I am looking forward to exploring with you!

Best,

Ginger

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INTRODUCTION



Who Taught You How To Dress?

Your guide to undressing old beliefs, recognizing your inner beauty and creating a fashion statement that is truly your own

By Ginger Burr, AICI, CIP

Why do so many women have a love/hate relationship when it comes to their body image, self-esteem, and personal style? Why are they frustrated, overburdened, overwhelmed, misguided, despondent, and unfulfilled when it comes to how they perceive themselves? When did they begin to identify dressing as a necessary chore rather than a fun form of personal expression, and worse, when did they give up on feeling good about how they look? What will it take for women to achieve a peaceful coexistence with their bodies and style?

Let me tell you right up front. This home study program is designed to make you think--to create awareness and not necessarily to address every minute aspect of fashion. In my experience, that doesn't work. As sad as it may seem, many women have lost faith in their ability to feel good about how they look. Go ahead and ask a woman if she likes the way she looks every day. Chances are high that she will roll her eyes or laugh. It seems unimaginable to her that this could be true. For many women, their self-worth and their

self-image have been crushed.

Too many women determine their self-worth in large part by how they feel about their bodies. They compare themselves to other women on a daily basis and are constantly searching for the magic formula for how to look good and feel good about themselves. It is no wonder we see the burgeoning success of makeover television shows, the consistently high sales of fashion magazines, and the increase in plastic surgery and Botox treatments. Baby boomers are aging. They are not happy about it, and they are not going to take it sitting down!

Where did you learn about fashion—whatever that might mean to you? In other words, who taught you how to dress? Consider these possibilities:

- ☞ Are you still living by fashion rules imposed on you as a child?
- ☞ Have you consciously or unconsciously adopted these rules or do you consciously shun them ever mindful of embarrassing memories?
- ☞ Was it positive reinforcement or hurtful comments and unwanted advice that has defined your style?
- ☞ Do you dress out of deference to your body and lifestyle or out of defiance and rebellion?
- ☞ Was there someone whose style you wanted to emulate or distance yourself from when you were growing up?
- ☞ What is the overriding influence that draws you to a particular outfit on any given day?
- ☞ Why did you choose to wear the outfit you're wearing today (e.g., it's your favorite, it was the only thing clean, it's the only thing that fits, you ran out of dog food and just wanted to run to the store, you want to look sexy, you want to be comfortable...)
- ☞ Do you generally like the way you look every day?

In 2004, Dove's *The Real Truth About Beauty Study* reported that “Just

13% of all women say they are very satisfied with their beauty, 12% with their physical attractiveness, 17% with their facial attractiveness and 13% with their body weight and shape.” Their statistical analysis also revealed that “women rate qualities such as happiness, kindness, confidence, dignity and humor as powerful components of female beauty, along with the appearance of a woman’s skin, physical and facial appearance and body weight and shape.” The problem is that given the powerful media messages about idealized physical beauty, damaging childhood messages about body image, and an unnatural obsession with thinness and youth, women often have a hard time getting past the physical demands of beauty to focus on the inner qualities that truly define beauty.

Marion Davis (founder and director of Self Esteem Boston Educational Institute), who offered insights into the self-esteem aspect of my work, and I have worked with women for more than two decades, and our experience has shown that women’s body image concerns and level of self-esteem directly influence the personal style choices they make.

Young women have the added burden (although they do not always realize this right away) that they have been born into a society where casual dress reigns and exposed body parts are the rule. They see celebrity role models who make and break fashion trends, but they often find that these fashions do not translate well into regular life or worse, they wear the fashions anyway oblivious to the fact that they are not flattering. Once awareness sets in, they yearn for something with more substantive value, and they are frustrated in their search. Where is the middle ground between teen rock star and nana clothes?

Our society professes to encourage individuality, but in actuality, this is only true if you are young, thin, and fit the fashion industry’s definition of beauty. Without exception, this empty standard of beauty is damaging to women’s self-esteem and body image. Women often feel judged when they make style choices based on personal expression. As a result, and in opposition to the pressure to conform, many women revert to unconscious dressing--throwing on whatever is available and comfortable, sublimating their personal style, hoping no one notices, most of all themselves. Women long to feel empowered by knowing that real beauty comes from understanding and expressing yourself. Fashion edicts be damned!

The *Who Taught You How to Dress?* home study program offers you access to your own insights and answers about your image, and a chance to recognize and delight in who you are as an individual. Through a series of thought-provoking questions, enlightening insights, and empowering exercises, you will be challenged to question what has previously influenced your fashion choices, to take a look at why those choices no longer serve you, and you will then be guided to make changes that truly express your uniqueness. Your eyes will open to new ways of thinking about your body, style, and self-confidence.

The exercise on aligning inner and outer beauty (Chapter 4), for example, will help you recognize and celebrate your uniqueness. It offers a filter through which to run quick fixes and generic fashion advice to see what is a good fit and what is not. What you will not find is complicated fashion rules to memorize, glorified (and ultimately disappointing) quick fixes, or encouragement to look outside yourself for approval.

As the idea for this program began to take form, Marion and I decided to further explore the thinking behind the fashion choices women make. We took our research to Newbury Street in Boston (think Rodeo Drive meets Hollywood Boulevard) where you see everything! We spent hours sitting, each with a cup of tea, watching people as they passed by us. Time after time we would ponder what possessed someone to dress the way they did that day, whether it was outlandish, funky, creative, elegant, messy, eclectic, unusual, daring, or even downright bizarre. What motivated them to don that particular outfit that day? Did they know what messages their clothing was sending to the world? And, did they care?

Perhaps they chose their outfit thoughtfully and with great care, or maybe they ran out of coffee and threw on something to go to the store. Maybe everything else was in the wash, or they wanted to annoy their mother! Who knows? All we know is that our curiosity was piqued. Next, we decided to ask women who were walking down Newbury Street to respond to the question of who taught them how to dress. Their responses were as revealing as some of the Newbury Street outfits.

One woman expressed her dismay over her weight. "I've never been heavier, and as a result, I do not feel good about myself at all." Not surprisingly, men have a totally different outlook. One man, upon seeing our question

“How do you feel about how you look” and the full-length mirror we had set up, took one look at himself and said “I look good!” This was a response shared by numerous men who stopped to look.

Another woman’s response was mirrored by many others. When we asked to talk with her, she hesitated, then said, “Thanks, but I have issues with that (referring to her body image and self-esteem). I’m glad you are doing it though! We (women) could use your help!”

Welcome to the home study version of “Who Taught You How to Dress?” This program takes you on a journey to help you identify and address inner and outer obstacles standing in your way of creating a meaningful image. Through a series of small, introspective steps, you will recognize an inner spirit that gives you the courage to explore who you are and ultimately helps you to discover looks that appeal to you. Often, I have found that women have ignored these inner concerns that have been pulling at their heartstrings or keeping them from expressing themselves fully. If this is true for you, do not despair if some of this feels a bit overwhelming. That is where the monthly teleclasses can be useful in offering support, connection with others who are experiencing similar feelings, and guidance.

Let me assure you before you get started, that there is no right or wrong way to do the program to get results—as long as you do it. You might find that you breeze through some exercises and others take more diligence, focus and perhaps even patience. Be kind to yourself. As long as you do the exercises (and there could be a few here or there that do not pertain to your needs, e.g., geographical dressing), you will be moving in the right direction. It is your inner spirit that will help sustain you through these life changes that challenge your self-esteem and sense of style, and it is this same spirit that will help you rebound quickly. The overall journey throughout the next seven chapters will guide you in creating a look you love and will result in the creation of a personal foundation built on beauty, confidence, well-being, and joy. So, let’s get started!



CHAPTER 1

Will the Real You Please Stand Up?

When most women ask themselves the question, “Is what I see who I am?” the answer is a resounding no. With endless demands on their time and energy, figuring out how to express themselves authentically in their clothing choices is rarely a priority (even if it is a hidden desire).

They often put their own needs last. As a result, they do many things, including dress, on autopilot stopping occasionally to bemoan the fact that they have lost their sense of identity, their personal style. With no obvious recourse, they retreat into a state of unconsciousness when they get dressed and the cycle continues.

Does this sound familiar? Once you realize that you have been dressing unconsciously, you will find that it is harder to revert back into that cycle. You may be able to do it, but it causes more angst than it did before you were aware. Awareness is the first step to making any real change.

Trying to dress with purpose without looking inside is like expecting results from a diet where the authors say you can eat all the things you are currently eating and still lose weight. Real, long-lasting results are just not possible. Satisfaction will be fleeting, and frustration will be magnified. It is the perfect set-up for failure which countless women already know.

“If my clothes could talk, I think that what they would say about me is... smart, sporty, organized, comfortable, healthy/energetic, and trustworthy.”

~SURVEY PARTICIPANT

“I’m old, lazy, and don’t have the knowledge of what looks good on me.”

~SURVEY PARTICIPANT

The exercises in this chapter will help you better understand yourself. They will reveal old information that has, until now, influenced your clothing and style choices. The first step you take in teaching yourself how to dress is acknowledging what comfortable or uncomfortable habits and old patterns define your image now.

Awareness is the first step towards change. It begins when you:

- ☞ Realize that you often dress on autopilot, unconsciously making choices about what to wear.
- ☞ Acknowledge that old patterns from your youth and parents' influence still have an impact on the way you see yourself.
- ☞ Decipher childhood messages about body image that affect your current choice of style and your level of self-esteem to this day.
- ☞ Understand more clearly who you are at a gut level, thereby acknowledging your uniqueness and inner beauty

While this exploration might, at times, feel awkward or even sad or upsetting, the new awareness it reveals will ultimately allow you to make changes and move on.

Unconscious Dressing

When Kate met me at the door, she was dressed all in black—black turtleneck, black sweatpants and black shoes. We sat and talked for a bit and then headed to her closet. When she opened the door we were greeted by what seemed like a never-ending sea of black. The only relief was a hint of white and a maroon sweatshirt with her old college logo on it. “See,” she said. “This is why I called you. I have been dressing in black for far too long. I’m bored, but it is easy and feels safe. I don’t know what else to do.”

While black is a staple in many women’s wardrobes, it can also be a way of hiding. The thinking is black goes with black goes with black. Little thought has to go into getting dressed, and the look is acceptable. This is one way in which women go unconscious when it comes to dressing themselves.

Not to mention that black is a great color on fewer people than the fashion world would have you believe.

Unconscious dressing is rampant in our society. In addition to the more calculated black wardrobe, unconscious dressing comes in other forms. For example, have you ever:

1. Arrived at work and discovered you are wearing one navy and one black sock?
2. Gone to the ladies room and realized that for the past 3 hours you have had your sweater buttoned wrong so it hangs oddly?
3. Looked in the rearview mirror of your car as you are backing out of the driveway and realized you still have 4 velcro rollers in your hair?
4. Seen yourself in a photo and wondered what possessed you to wear that outfit?
5. Run out the door to pick up the children or get to an appointment only to realize that you are still wearing your workout shorts or slippers.

With so many factors working against women (e.g., body image issues, social pressure, history, compromised self-esteem, disinterest in fashion, etc.), unconscious dressing comes as no surprise. Women are bombarded daily with messages about how they “should” look and what they “should” be wearing. When they are unable to translate those messages into reality, resignation eventually sets in, and they give up. Instead, they resort to dressing in what is safe and easy. Rather than inflict any more pain on themselves, they just stop looking. Eventually, after this pattern is repeated often enough, it becomes an unconscious choice.

Have you ever had the experience when you are in the middle of preparing dinner and suddenly realize there is a key ingredient missing? You run to the grocery store dressed in your sweatsuit or jeans and wrinkled t-shirt. As you are running down the spaghetti aisle who do you run into? Your boss, old boyfriend, or nosy neighbor. Without hesitation, you inwardly berate yourself for not taking a minute to comb your hair, change your shirt, or take a quick peek in the mirror. Then you berate yourself for caring, but you do.

For some women this experience is an aberration. They wave it off and

can honestly laugh at themselves during or afterwards. For others, however, it is a regular occurrence, and the effects are more insidious. Slowly and subtly, it chips away at their self-image and self-esteem. Over time, they become acutely aware that they often dress haphazardly. When this awareness strikes, they chalk it up to yet another time when they felt “less than.”

Rarely will someone live in a state of unconsciousness forever. Awareness eventually dawns. It can be triggered by seeing yourself in a photo and realizing you are not happy with the way you look. Life changes can also serve as a catalyst (e.g., empty-nest syndrome, birth of a child, divorce, or a new job opportunity). An approaching milestone birthday, or an overheard unflattering comment by a friend, relative or stranger, though not a pleasant way to precipitate change, can create awareness. In whatever way awareness is conceived, what you do with it is what is important.

Our society is not forgiving when it comes to how people dress and present themselves publicly. We constantly judge people. Magazines advertise the best and worst dressed lists, reveal who looks good in a bathing suit and who does not, and they regularly make unkind remarks about the clothing and image choices made by celebrities and women in politics. This catty interchange trickles down to the general public. I can tell you right upfront that it is a no-win situation for those in the limelight and rarely any more satisfying for the rest of us if we are dressing simply to try to please others. It just doesn't work.

If you watch any awards show or follow a female candidate on the campaign trail, you know how ruthless and inconsistent the fashion commentary can be. One stylist loves the look and another wonders what she was thinking when she chose the outfit. Good luck trying to satisfy everyone. It is no wonder women often feel conspicuous and judged. As a result we feel self-conscious, uncomfortable, and spend too much time worrying about what others might think.

Whether one dresses consciously or not, when your clothes speak, people listen. For many women, realizing that they are making a statement by their clothing and image choices, while somewhat intimidating and frightening, is enlightening. They have been unconscious about it for so long that they are clueless as to what image they are projecting.

Women are waking up. With this awareness comes a desire to learn how to orchestrate and fine tune their visual message to create an image they love. We know this because:

- ☞ There is a seemingly inexhaustible demand for makeover television programs. Women are fascinated by what is possible, and hunger for information they can apply to their own needs. These television shows fuel their desire to make changes but rarely help actualize the changes.
- ☞ Women are turning to image consultants, fashion stylists, and personal shoppers to help them achieve their own personal makeover. Others dream about affording this perceived luxury.
- ☞ Plastic surgery is at an all-time high. Women are searching for ways to feel youthful, vibrant, and beautiful. A nip here and a tuck there—one surgery leads to another.
- ☞ In a research study conducted in 2004 by the Association of Image Consultants International in conjunction with the Marketing Research and Planning Council in the Department of Marketing at Central Michigan University, study participants indicated that of all outside influences, friends and parents had the greatest influence on their image and personal style (32.4% and 22.5%, respectively).
- ☞ In the same study, “respondents were asked to what extent they received teaching about personal style and image in their past. Of the 75 responses, 30 clients (40 percent) indicated they had received no teaching. Of the 45 (60 percent) who had received some teaching, 29 indicated that their teaching was indirect, 17 received direct instruction (through demonstrating make-up techniques, looking at magazines together, shopping together, discussing styles or etiquette, for instance), and 14 indicated their learning came through criticism.” (AICI Image Study, Marketing Research and Planning Council in the Department of Marketing at Central Michigan University, from January to July, 2004).

What happens when women realize that their clothing choices impact the impression they make? In a survey, we asked women “If your clothes could talk, what would they say about you?” This led to an overwhelming flurry of responses.

No one who responded was impassive. This question clearly evoked a deep, emotional response from self-congratulatory (My clothes would say, “Baby, you are unstoppable!” or “Wow, I am glad that I am on someone who has good taste.”) to self-critical (“Why do I always look so frumpy?” or “I have the wardrobe to look sensational, but I never feel sensational because I am always just a little too heavy to feel good about myself.”) to just plain heartbreaking (“We are closest to her body, we hear the sorrow, feel her pain. She uses us as a shield.”)

Many women expressed their frustrations ranging from practical issues such as time constraints or hating to iron, to deeper concerns around body image and self-esteem. Many indicated that they wanted help touching that part of their soul that feeds their desire to express their beauty; the part of them that makes them unique.



If Your Clothes Could Talk Exercise

Take a minute and consider these questions:

1. If your clothes could talk, what would they say about you? Write down whatever comes to your mind first – do not censor it.

2. Go back and re-read what you wrote. Are you happy with the response? Is this what you would like your clothes to be saying about you? If not, and a fairy godmother could wave her magic wand, what would you ideally want your clothes to be saying about you?

Respond to these questions in whatever way inspires you. Jot some notes, write a poem, draw your feelings, write a song or rap, or make a collage. Use your Who Taught You How to Dress Journal if you need more space. Try not to judge yourself and your responses. Just be thankful for your new awareness. It is the first step to creating a look you love.

Once you are aware that you are not dressing in a way that feeds your soul (and perhaps this is not a totally new awareness but just one that you have been ignoring), it is helpful to understand where some of your dressing habits originated. In other words...who taught you how to dress?

Who Taught You How to Dress?

Have you ever asked yourself “Why am I wearing what I am wearing?” The answer is revealing every time. In fact, it is one of the first steps in dressing with purpose and personal fulfillment, that is, dressing consciously.

Every woman is unique in body type, proportion, coloring, personality, likes, dislikes, and inner essence. To write a book that addresses all possible combinations of style concerns is nearly impossible, not to mention mind-boggling for anyone but the most fashion hungry person to digest. Most women want to look good and be done with it. They don't want to be slaves to the fleeting fashion trends, or be trapped into looking one specific way.

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www.whotaughtyouhowtodress.com



Over the past 22 years, Ginger Burr, believing that your image is about representing the best of you (not making designers happy), has built a remarkable career as an expert personal image consultant working with women from all walks of life. Whether it's the “dynasty” shoulder pad era, the never-ending confusion of business casual, or the low-rise pant controversy, she has helped women navigate through (and sometimes completely ignore!) the styles of the season and feel good about how they look.

A notable speaker and leader in the field of fashion and style, Ginger's adroit understanding of beauty trends and fashion has been celebrated by Fox TV News, The Boston Globe, cnn.com, Worth Magazine, and Women's Health Magazine, and she has worked with corporate clients such as Harvard Law School, Fidelity Investments and as the media spokesperson for Rowenta Corporation.

Ginger has distinguished herself in several untapped niches, including her image work with the transgender community and was recognized in 2007 by VegNews Magazine as one of the “25 Most Fascinating Vegetarians” in the world for her innovative and groundbreaking work as a vegan image consultant.