

'A REAL MAN WEARS PINK'

Bright colors on bright young men at Leadership Academy

Earlier this year I visited the Leadership Academy for Young Men, the all-boys high school on Lake Avenue. I was gathering information on an educational matter, but I was also taking notes on the outfits. One young man wore a bright orange shirt and a royal blue paisley bow tie. "My son might look cute in that," I thought. Another kid was looking sharp in a turquoise diamond print sweater and black bow tie. Another student wore yellow pants, a red plaid shirt and navy blazer. Hot pink and purple ties were everywhere.

The young men weren't so brightly adorned when Leadership Academy opened a few years ago. The original dress code mandated a white shirt, navy blazer, khaki pants and traditional yellow and navy tie. Grant money allowed the school to purchase this uniform for all the students, but then the state Department of Education decided that schools couldn't use grants to buy uniforms. School leaders decided to keep the spirit of the dress code — tie, button-down shirt, slacks — but to relax the color requirements.

Many of the young men took this freedom and ran with it.

"A real man wears pink," said Nygel Mcinnis, whose mother and grandmother instilled in him that particular fashion belief. He was wearing a baby blue shirt, gray v-neck sweater and a hot pink tie when I returned to Leadership Academy to report on its students' fashion influences and philosophies. "I saw this tie and figured I would get it and wear it to school to show I am a real man."

Calvin Pugh was wearing an electric blue shirt and says he also likes pinks and oranges. Wearing bright colors is a way of "displaying happiness," he said. Pugh gets a lot of his wardrobe from Macy's, where he says he can find "a lot of stylish stuff for reasonable prices."

Several young men choose bow ties, some with big polka dots, or other bold patterns. "I don't like it when

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Anthony Fantauzzi



Dakota Coons



Savion Rambert



Nygel Mcinnis



Victor Caldwell



Howard Eagle III



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Academy

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the ties hang lower," said Dakota Coons, whose bow tie was purple. He said he got a deal for 10 bow ties in all different colors for \$11 on Amazon.com.

Savion Rambert accented his turquoise shirt and white tie with a largefaced watch, similar to the one worn by the school's vice principal, Lee Wingo III. "I believe it brings a certain flash and style to my outfit," he said.

Some of the boys counted Steve Harvey or Drake, as fashion influences. Others admire Lebron James and Russell Westbrook, noting that many NBA players wear colorful shirts with different designs when they are doing media interviews.

Donald Hill, who was wearing a yellow shirt, navy blazer and yellow and blue polka dot bow tie, admires the clothing of gospel singer Deitrick Haddon. "I like to do a church, hip-hop style," he said. Not all the boys are into the bright look. James Weathers wore a plaid navy and white tie and a blue shirt. "Everybody has their own style and they can express themselves with their own colors," he said. "I'm just an average guy, not flashy." And not everybody has a fashion philosophy. "I really just try to match," said Anthony Fantauzzi.

Principal Wakili Moore says Leadership Academy students are often complimented on their attire when they travel around the community for field trips. He thinks it is good for the students to get up and tie a tie every morning. "It is my belief that the better you dress, the better you feel about yourself. We are preparing young men for their futures and they have to dress professionally to be taken seriously in the workforce," he said.

Some of the boys noted that people treat them a little better when they are dressed up. "It shows people that I am a respectable young man," said Howard Eagle III, clad in a cardigan and striped tie.

Jeans, sweatpants and such are allowed on occasional special days, but not everyone takes advantage. "I don't dress down," said Donald Hill. "I like to look good."

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Leadership Academy student Keith McGee.

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Leadership Academy student Donald Hill.



Leadership Academy student Xavier Goolsby.

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