

Fashion is empowerment

How Kiana Davis is reshaping the way we look at clothing

By Chelsea Davis

When most people think of “fashion” they simply think of clothing – what we put on our body everyday because we’re supposed to be clothed in polite society. They don’t see it as much more than a necessity, an everyday occurrence that isn’t given much thought, rhyme or reason. What these people fail to see, however, is that fashion is much more than the clothes we wear. It’s a statement, an expression of self that we slip on to show the world who we are and who we want to be perceived. All people, at one point or another, fail to see the power fashion yields and the power we can yield with fashion as our tool.

One such woman is acutely aware of the power and importance clothes can have. Her name is Kiana Davis and she is the founder, creator, designer, and all-around BAMF of Kiki’s Kinis. Davis created Kiki’s Kinis with the intention to give women of all shapes and sizes their power back by creating swimsuits, bikinis, and various other cool, classic, and casually chic items of clothing in their shape and size. Davis knew her purpose was to empower women.

“I love women and I want them to feel comfortable in their bodies and their clothes,” Davis said. “So I know I need to make them feel that in my suits and clothes. Fashion is whatever you want it to mean – it means being comfortable and confident in yourself.”

Davis came up with the idea for Kiki’s Kinis just under a year ago (July 2017) while vacationing in Puerto Rico. She laments that she couldn’t find a suit that fit her body correctly – smaller on top and a little tighter through her hips – without succumbing to 200-dollar-plus price tags. She decided to remedy the situation and grabbed her brother’s t-shirt and a bathing suit pattern and created her own bikini. Soon she had girls asking her where they could get their own suit.

“On my first day I got seven orders,” Davis explained. “One of my pictures in Puerto Rico ended up on the explore page and I gained 200 Instagram followers on the first day, and over 2,400 by the time I actually launched.”

At just 20, Davis quit school and used the money she’d made as a server to launch her business in summer 2017. By January of 2018, Davis had become completely self-sustainable on her income from Kiki’s Kinis. In fact while we were conducting this interview, her phone and Twitter were blowing up and she’d sold out more of her designs.

While she’s always loved fashion and the role it plays in our lives, Davis wasn’t always sure that a life in fashion design was in her future.

“I always wanted to go into fashion in some regard – I even started a fashion club when I was in elementary,” Davis said. “But after taking some fashion classes in high school, I *knew* I never wanted to be a designer – but I still wanted to work in fashion.”

Davis enrolled in a fashion merchandising and retail marketing program in college, and began to learn the ins and outs of the fashion industry. From there she used that knowledge to confidently launch her business last year, and is actually happy that she's designing clothes, because she's empowering women through her designs.

Throughout her journey Davis has met incredible people, entrepreneurs, and women who have helped her learn and grow – a community. She's also faced some pushback from family and friends – due to leaving school and taking on quite a risky project. However, her family has since come around.

“People were initially really against [Kiki's Kinis], especially my parents,” Davis said. “But it's in my blood, my dad owned businesses! And it's definitely a struggle, even now. I've had to miss out on some fun times with friends, but I've found a community of people who inspire, empower, and lift me up.”

As for the future of Kiki's Kinis, Davis envisions even more inclusivity in her line and has just hired someone to help with the actual construction of the pieces, since each piece is made by hand, to do just that. Davis also plans to further expand her other items of clothing, including rompers, dresses, and jewelry – and more!

“Right now I can't put all of the sizes on the website – time, money - but if someone asks me I can see what I can do,” Davis said. “But the suits do stretch to fit different body types – that's the beauty of my suits! And I love that each piece is handcrafted, so hiring her is a big help.”

As for her own future, Davis just wants to make people happy doing what she loves, and hopefully lead a comfortable life. She currently is making plans to move to Puerto Rico – where her business was conceived – and open a storefront in an old, converted shipping container. She is also entertaining the idea of converting a vintage camper into a mobile store and hitting up parties and parades, music festivals, and cruise ship ports.

“I want to live in Puerto Rico because it's where I first inspired and it continues to inspire me,” Davis said. “I just want to make a living doing what I love and making other people happy and if I can also support my parents and family too – then great!”

When asked what piece of advice she'd give to other young entrepreneurs, particularly women, she said it was the same advice she's given and continues to give herself.

“Don't let anyone stop you. Leave all of the negative energy, all the pestering little flies in your ears that say no – ignore it all,” Davis said. “You're in this with you and yourself alone and you're going to do what makes you happy. You have to.”

