

Clothing Selection Practices of Adolescents and Implication for Family Values

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Abstract

This paper reviewed the clothing selection practices of adolescents. It also examined its implication for the family values. The current surge in fashion, accelerated by the media, exerts profound influence on the adolescent's clothing choices. These includes, ungendered clothing styles, indecent dressing, ostentatious clothing and obsession with fashion. This a times conflicts with the family values and accepted cultural norms. It was concluded that, the family has enormous role to play in this regard, to conserve these values. Based on these, recommendations were made.

Key Words: Adolescents, Family, Clothing Selection, Fashion, Peer Influence, Practices.

Introduction

Adolescence is viewed as a transitional period between child and adulthood. It is marked by many incidences which include the search for identity whereby they are involved in trying out different behaviours and self images in an attempt to discover their own selves. They also attempt to establish autonomy. In these endavours, clothing is used as a means of declaring independence, connectedness and to distinguish themselves from others.(Olugbenga and Odeleye 2008). Adolescence therefore adopt styles of clothes that express their particular identity.

Trends in fashion have moved with technological changes. Social change has brought about positive and negative changes in fashion trend (Nnubia, 2010). Globalization and information and communication technology has greatly helped to accelerate these changes at a bewildering pace across the globe. These exert much influence on today's adolescent. For them fashion is an accessible and flexible way of expressing modernity (Berk, 2004). Since fashion is always evolving, it corresponds with the evolution of change in the personality of teenagers (Steinberg 2008). They attempt to

define their identity by consciously styling themselves in different manners to find what best suits them and are accepted by their peers (Rawin, 1992).

Hence clothing selection in most case is based on peer approvals. Their inexperience in life may not allow them to carefully scrutinize what to and what not to imbibe from the trend in vogue. These unchecked choices most times clashes with parental customary control. This generates conflict between the adolescent and their parents. Adults perceive their fashion as “weird” or out Landis and they perceive the adults as conservatives (Rynn, 2014). There is therefore, the need to strike a balance between the two for healthy family growth. This study therefore tries to examine adolescents characteristics, their motivations for clothing selection and wearing, their clothing selection practices, challenges related to these practices and implication for family values.

Adolescents Characteristics

Adolescence is a period of transition between childhood to adulthood approximately between the ages of 13 years to 20 years. The transition time varies among cultures but generally defined as the time when individuals begin to function independently of their parents (Vander Loff, Frank and Campbell, 1985, Jones and Meyer, 2008). In simpler societies the transition period is shorter while in industrialized world the transition period is greatly extended due to

many years of education as they prepare for the productive world of work (Berk, 2004). Irrespective of the length of the transition time, the basic task of this phase are much the same around the world. Recognizing and understanding the unique developmental characteristics i.e traits associated with human growth is central to establishment of healthy relationship with the emerging adult (Berger, 2008).

During this remarkable stage of life cycle, adolescents experience rapid and significant developmental change which leads to rapidly changing behavioural identity and character changes (Berk, 2004). Every aspect of life is involved in these changes; physiologically, intellectually, psychologically, socially and morally. These characteristics are interrelated and overlap (Berk, 2004). Erik Erikson regarded these developments as psychosocial process going on through life (Jones and Meyer, 2008). Thus adolescence is a product of both biological and social forces. Biological changes are universally found in all primates and cultures. These internal stresses and the social expectations accompanying them make a young give up childish ways and develop new interpersonal relationship and take a greater responsibility. These forces give rise to the following adolescence characteristics.

Physiological Characteristics:

Adolescence is a period of accelerated growth called ‘growth sprout’ (Jones and Meyer, 2008). The body changes

of early adolescence rivals those of infancy in speed and dramatic change but differ in one crucial way – Adolescence are aware (Berger, 2008). The beginning of adolescence is marked by puberty a flood of biological events leading to adult sized body and sexual maturity (Berk, 2004). These changes are genetically influenced by hormones processes. They experience restlessness and fatigue due to hormonal change (Adolescent Learners Characteristics, 2007).

There is improvement in gross motor performance but the patterns of change differ for boys and girls. Girls gains are slow and gradual leveling off by ages 14. In contrast boys show a dramatic spurt in strength, speed and endurance continues through the teenage years (Berk, 2004). Accompanying the rapid increase in body size and changes in the physical features related to sexual functioning, some called primary sexual characteristics involving the reproductive organs (ovaries, uterus and vagina) in female (penis, scrotum and testes) in males others called secondary sexual characters which are visible on the outside of the body and serve as additional signs of sexual maturity for e.g. breast development in females and appearance of under arm and pubic hair in both sexes. Sexual maturity in girls is marked by onset of menstruation (menarche) and in boys by the production of semen spermerch) (Jones and Meyer, 2008).

Pubertal changes exerts some psychological impact on the

adolescence. According to(Rice, 1996 and Berk, 2004) these changes affect the adolescents' self image, mood and interaction with parents. They are moody and less stable emotionally. There is also rise in parents child conflicts. Furthermore, there is also physical vulnerability resulting from poor health/dietary habits or engaging in risky behaviours. The common dietary disorder is known as resonate anoxeric and Bullima anoxeric (Berger, 2008).

Cognitive/Intellectual Characteristics:

Adolescents develop intellectually just as their physical body attain maturation. Jean Piaget described it as the stage of formal operation (Jones and Meyer, 2008). This implies the development of the capacity for abstract scientific thinking. They no longer require concrete things and events as object of thought unlike children which reason in concrete terms. The development of formal operations leads to dramatic revision in the way adolescents see themselves, others and the world around them in general (Berk, 2004). They can now test hypothesis, analyze data, grapple with complex concepts and think reflectively (Caskey and Anfara, 2007). Inductive reasoning of a child gives way to deductive reasoning.

Personality trait associated with those developments includes egocentrism which is typically evident at the beginning of adolescence, intuition the middle and logic at the end (Berger, 2008). Egocentrism leads them to centre many of their thoughts

on themselves and wonder how others perceive them. They try to make sense of conflicting feelings about their own parents, school and classmates (Berk, 2004). Though they think deeply but not realistically about the future. Adolescents egocentrism differs from egocentrism of younger children in that adolescent egocentrism does not ignore others but rather distorts their understanding of what others might be thinking about them (Berger, 2008). Thus there is heightened self consciousness about their appearance. As teenagers imagine what others must be thinking about them; two distorted images of the relation between self and others appear; imaginary audience and personal/invincible fable (Rice 1997, Berk 2004 and Berger 2008).

Imaginary Audience: This manifests by heightened self awareness whereby they believe that they are the centre of focus of everyone. Everyone around them is intensely interested in them. Thus they are deeply concerned by the audience of their peers who presumably judge every visible oddity of their appearance and behaviour (Berger 2008). This explains the prolonged length of time adolescence spend inspecting every detail of their appearance.

Personal/Invincibility Fable: This is the idea that one is invincible, never defeated and protected from every harm (Berger 2008). Their inflated opinion of their own self importance about their imaginary audience may

lead them to feel they can go unhurt by certain risks e.g. unprotected sex, addictive drugs, self starvation, etc (Berk 2004).

Finally, they are argumentative. As adolescents acquire formal operation they are motivated to use them. The once pliable school age child becomes a fiercely argumentative teenager who can marshal facts and ideas to build a case (Berk 2004).

Psycho-Social Characteristics: The transition between childhood and adulthood heads to rapidly changing behaviours, identity disturbances and strong emotions (Green 2015). Stanley Hall described it as a period of emotional stress resulting from the rapid and extensive physiological changes occurring at pubescence (Caskey and Anfara, 2007). These development are normal part of adolescent growth.

Green (2015 identified five psychosocial characteristics of adolescence. They are as follows

Labile Emotions: This general emotional trend from late childhood through adolescent is towards less confidence (Berger, 2008). They can shift mood easily, vacillating between happiness and distress, self confidence and worry (Green 2015). Increased hormonal reactions in the body affects these emotions. Mood swings, peaks of intensity and unpredictability, sometimes results to over reaction to ridicule, embarrassment and rejection (Berk, 2004). Complex social interactions such as conflict with

friends, school pressures and experimentation with romantic relationship can exacerbate the labile emotional state of adolescents Green (2015). Disappointment may lead to depression and in extreme cases thought of suicide (Berger 2008).

Personality Identity: Adolescent explores and tries to assert their personal identities. There is the struggle to reconcile their understanding of themselves as a unique person and where they fit in with peers and society at large. Four identity status are experienced as a result of this search. Berk (2004), Berger (2008) and Stenberg (2008) outlined them as; identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and identity achievement. All children begin with identity diffusion, lacks knowledge of whatever their identity is. This is followed by identity foreclosure in which commitments are made without exploration of alternatives, then moratorium or the process of exploration and finally identity achievement in which moratorium has occurred and resulted in commitment (Stenberg 2008).

While these unstable identity issues are common part of early adolescence, they tend to stabilize between the ages of 19 and 21 (Green 2015). Trial and error in matching both their perceived image and the image others respond to see, allows for the adolescence to grasp an understanding of who they are, Rawin (1992).

Peer Relationship: During adolescence relationship with peers begins to take precedence over relationship with family. Strong emphasis are placed on friend's perception and values more than that of parents (Green 2015). Adolescent peers could be classified into cliques and crowds. Cliques are loyal to one another and excludes outsiders while crowds are large group who share common interest but may not necessarily be friends (Berk 2004). Cliques and crowds provide both social control and social support and promote group norms through criticism and exclusion of people who do not conform (Berger 2008). Peers could be constructive as well as destructive paired with adolescents limited life experiences and under developed decision making skills, teenagers are often vulnerable to negative peer pressure (Green 2015).

Independence and Testing Boundaries: Adolescents need to develop autonomy, experience new activities and earn more independence. These often drive them to test parents and teachers rules and boundaries (Green 2015). Though teenagers can benefit from testing boundaries during this stage of development, they still require rules and boundaries, if they are to avoid negative influence and achieve their potentials.

Self Centered Attitudes: Adolescence hardly looks at circumstance from other peoples perspectives. This is due in part, to their still developing brain

structures. This apparent apathy is normal and typically resolves itself once a teen reaches the end of adolescence, judging others quickly but acknowledging one's fault slowly (Stenberg 2008, Green 2015).

Adolescents Motivation for Clothing Selection and Wearing

Group Affiliation: As young adolescents affiliation base expands to include family and peers, feelings of conflict arise because of competing allegiances (Wiles, Bond & Wiles 2006). Group affiliation is the primary concern or motivation of adolescents with regards to clothing selection. According to Berger (2008) the crowd guides the adolescents on decision about clothes, music, drugs, classes and so on.

Clothing is used to signal connectedness and to distinguish themselves from other groups of young people by defining themselves based on their crowd membership (Newman 2010). Clothes help teens to explore new identities separate from parents and blend with peers. Therefore a way of establishing an identity is by being part of a peer group. And one way of fitting in within a peer group is looking like members of that group (Olugbenga and Odeleye 2008, Newman 2010).

Peer Influence: Adolescence forms a self conscious desire to feel important in their peer groups and enjoy social acceptance (Weston 2005). They derive affirmation and approvals from their friends identical outfit choices and

from mimicking their friends appearances.

Newman (2010) identified two common behaviours associated with this peer influence. Mirroring and twinning - mirroring is exhibited when someone feels insecure but sees him or herself reflected back in another person's appearance, word or action. The person feels pumped up, and less insecure. Twinning bothers on quest for affirmation and approval of others to bolster self esteem. Adolescents exhibit these behaviours in other to bolster their fragile self esteem.

Clothing now becomes a source of overt admiration resulting in increased self esteem, self respect, self confidences, recognition and security (Nwankwo 2002, Steele 2009).

Media Influence: Another strong factor that motivates adolescents in clothing selection is the media influence. Media exposure over the past decades has increased likewise adolescents utilization of them, computers, cell phones, stereos and television to gain access to various medium of popular cultures (Okorie 2005). Just as fashion is evolving to influence adolescence so is the media. Media life takes place amidst a never enduring barrage of flash on screens, pages and billboards (Bradán Klein 2008). This barrage consciously or sub consciously register into the mind causing issues with self-image, a factor that contribute to an adolescence sense of identity, Marcia (1966).

Hence, they are socially vulnerable due to influences of media and negative interactions with adults (Kellough & Kellough, 2008). Also the celebrities of the day in most case media stars exert profound influence on adolescents motivation for clothing selection. Their clothing styles are tailored to mimic these icons.

Clothing Selection and Wearing Practices of Adolescents

Peer approval and group affiliation being given an uppermost consideration in motivation for clothing selection and wearing by adolescents, predisposes them to various forms of clothing norms and practices. Whereas clothing choices and selection according to Anyakoha and Eluwa (2008), and Nubia (2010), should be based on figure type, age, sex, complexion, dress colour, time, activities and status. Adolescents adopt blindly the perceived fashion in vogue. The following clothing practices are common clothing practices among the adolescents:

Ungendered Clothing: Steele (2009) described two notable trends which are likely to continue. Blurring of gender boundaries and towards ever more casual everyday dress. Blurring of gender boundaries has resulted in ungendered clothes. Trouser and tailored suits are two notable examples of men's style now regularly worn by men and women. In earlier years there is a sharp distinction between men and women clothing in colour, shape, fabric and decoration.

Blurring of the gender boundaries on clothing distorts the cultural values and identity in distinction of feminine and masculine gender. Adolescents easily adopts these trends being always dominant in the fashion scene. Girls wear trousers, boys wear earrings, plait their hair, tattoo their bodies etc.

Shabby Clothing: The move towards more casual dressing has metamorphosed into all manner of dressing styles ranging from skimpy dressing, bump shorts, miniskirts, see through wears exposing private parts of the body etc. Most adolescents copy verbatim these clothing styles especially the girls. Boys sag their trousers exposing their under wears. They copy and wear such indecent, reckless and seductive, scandalous and sexually provocative clothing meant for commercial sex hawkers (Ozougwu and Anyakoha 2005). Thereby, they become sources of social stigma because of their vulnerable personality. Adolescents social maturity often lags behind physical and intellectual development (Scales, 2003).

Ostentatious Clothing: Finally, idolization of media stars as models for clothing selection and wearing practices have brought about ostentatious clothing styles. Hence the struggle to acquire these clothing articles and their accessories at all cost. Despite the fact, that the life span of these current fashion is usually very short, and changes faster than price in

stock market (Saduwa, 2006). Fashionable clothes of today becomes a fad at a very short time (Ukwe, 2010). The quest to blaze with the trend drive the young people into these with its attendant problems.

Challenges of Adolescent Clothing and Wearing Practices

Obsession with Fashion: The rapid changes in the contemporary fashion trend poses a lot of challenges for the family, especially for the young adolescent. Adolescents want to be popular in their environment by wearing expensive clothes made by famous designers in order to be respected by their peers. In some cases the family budget may not be able to carry this ostentatious lifestyle. Ayesha (2014) commented that in their area Pakistan, the poor class who cannot afford it, only feel depressed and stressed out due to unreasonable fashion trend. They sometimes commit suicide as they cannot afford such need that earn them respect. Therefore, quest to keep pace with fashion drives some of them into various vices such as stealing, begging, fraudulent behaviours, prostitution, etc.

Poor Academic Performance:

Academically, obsession with fashion trend interferes with their studies. The zeal for academic pursuit to become a renowned professional in various fields are exchanged at the altar of becoming a fashion model. Ranjan (2014) observed that instead of reading their textbooks they prefer to read fashion magazines. Most of them

prefer to go into the glamour world than any other job. The media world has been the vehicle carrying these changes. Much information regarding the recent trend in styles blocks the minds of children and distracts them from their studies. These generates conflict and tension between the adolescents and the parents.

Indecent Dressing: Furthermore, indecent dressing styles copied by adolescents in order to win the affirmation and acceptance of their peer is also a great challenge. Such indecent clothings in the name of fashion induces sexual harassment and disciplinary problems in school and social disorder, (Ozougwu and Anyakoha 2005, Olugbenga and Odeleye 2008). It also attracts abuses on the poor vulnerable youngsters whose intention may be in contrast to that of the beholder. The adolescent struggles to respect their parents and also fit in with their peers. A combination which a times is impossible.

Implication for the Family Values

Exemplary Lifestyle: Family is a group of people comprising a husband and wife and their dependent children (Igbo, 2011). It can also be described as a collective body of persons who live in one house and under one head or manager, a household including parents, children and servants as the case may be, lodgers or boarders (A. R. Dictionary 2010).It constitutes the fundamental unit of every society. The family remains the first agent of

socialization. Though the adolescents are usually interested in greater personal independence, the home remains the headquarters for articulation and execution of family programme. Whether verbally or overtly learning takes place from parents to child in everyday family life, forming the habits and behaviour of the child (Gronhog 2014). Parental habits exert a significant influence on their children. There is intergenerational transfer of behaviours. It is more socially acceptable and convenient to learn and copy observed activity of the parents. Cleveland, Gibbon, Pomery and Brody (2005) noted that patterns set in place during childhood continues. If these patterns are positive they can buffer some of the turbulences of adolescence. Parents and their children behave alike. Parent should therefore work on their children early and help the adolescent towards accepting themselves the way they are, rather than bring carried away by peer pressures on current trends in fashion.

Strengthening of Parents-Adolescent Relationship: Parents are crucial for support and guidance at this time. Parents-adolescent relationship are pivotal but not always peaceful (Stenberg 2008). Dispute arise when a child's drive for independence clashes with parental customary control. These conflicts generate a healthy family close relationship though the issue of contention should remain focused based on principles and not

deteriorate into meaningless battles (Cleveland et al 2008). Public criticism should also be avoided as a critical remark from parent or teacher can be mortifying as a result of their heightened self awareness (Berk 2004).

Upholding of Core Family Values: Families should explore their values and cultures and dreams and chose to live a life conscious of the global environment especially the current trend in fashion. The United Nation Development Programme (1996) emphasizes a human centered approach which is widely participatory process of social change in which families themselves share an opportunity to take part in making decision that affects their lives. Therefore, core family values have to be upheld and prevented from being eroded by external influences. Values are generally what individuals and families and societies hold to e right, true and desirable and therefore create norms which are rules for behaviour and lifestyle (Igbo 2011). Parents can influence their adolescents clothing selection and wearing practices via monitoring, modeling and conversation (Berger 2008). It is therefore, the role of the family to keep these adolescents within the ambient of the family values and cultural norms for fashion.

Intra-Family Communications: Through discussions of family rules and practices, adolescents become more aware of their parents' values and the reasons behind them and

gradually they come to see the validity of parental belief and adopt them as their own. And as such, both generations benefit from warm protective family bond throughout the life span (Berger 2008). Family closeness should be fostered through communication, support connectedness and control. Parents should therefore influence their adolescent's clothing choices, linking the childhood years experiences with emerging adulthood.

Conclusion

Trends in fashion have moved with technological advancement. Information and communication technology has enabled exchange of ideas, innovation and fashion at a bewildering pace. This exerts profound influence on the adolescents and as such has implication for the family. The family which remains the custodian of the family values and standards has enormous role to play to ensure the sustainability of the cherished family values.

Recommendations

1. Parents should keep watch over their children's clothing choices and fashion.
2. School should also make some strict rules to avoid indecent dressing and using of fashionable accessories within the school premises as it lures others to imitate them.
3. The media should play a role in helping to control the excesses, since they are the biggest means of

spreading fashion news among people.

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