



FACTORS CONSIDERED IN CLOTHING SELECTION AMONG PRE-ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the foregoing study was to investigate on issues related to clothing satisfaction of the pre-adolescents and how they influence their perception of self-worth. This paper discusses how the pre-adolescents acquired and factors considered in the selection of their clothing. The study adopted a survey design and was conducted in six primary schools in Kasarani Division Nairobi Province, using an interview schedule and an essay. A sample of 144 pre-adolescents was selected and both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed. The majority of the respondents had their clothing mainly bought for by their parents; open-air markets selling second-hand clothes being where most clothes were mainly bought. Most pre-adolescents were mainly involved in their clothing selection. What was accepted by parents and peers were the socio-cultural factors that always influenced pre-adolescent's clothing selection while size and colour were the most influential among the factors related to clothing characteristics. It was recommended that parents should involve their children in clothing selection, school policy makers who deal with school uniforms and designers of children's clothing should always seek the children's opinion when dealing with their designs.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout recorded history, clothing, along with food and shelter, has been regarded among the primary needs of a human being (Horn, 1975). According to Maslow (1943), primary needs must be fulfilled before secondary needs such as love and belonging, security and self-esteem (Storm, 1987). A child on the street or in drought-stricken areas therefore, will first strive to meet the most basic needs in this order: food, shelter, clothing and then secondary needs. The pre-adolescent stage, according to this study, is the period between 11 and 12 years of age. According to Erik Erickson's theory, children in this category are in the fourth stage of personality development. They must learn the skills of their culture or risk developing feelings of inferiority. Children's initial efforts to handle the tools of their society help them to grow and form a positive self-concept. These are important years for the development of self-esteem. As children compare their own abilities with those of their peers, they construct a sense of who they are (Papalia and Olds, 1987; Santrock, 1987; Collins and Kuckzaj, 1991). It is also during the pre-adolescent stage that a child starts defining his/her real and ideal self (Papalia *et al.*, 1987). His appearance affects the satisfaction with self which in turn determines the self-esteem of the child and causes either a feeling of self-worth or depression (Kaiser, 1990). Physical attractiveness is enhanced by one's appearance, which includes the body, any modification made

to it through grooming practices and proper selection of clothing worn (Kaiser, 1990). Self-assessment by a child is based on self-appraisal, feedback from others and comparison with peers (Hayes, 1998; Kaiser, 1990; Papalia *et al.*, 1987). Research shows that children of all ages want attractive children as friends. When clothing is purposefully used to enhance individual's identity, interaction with others also helps to satisfy love and esteem needs (Storm, 1987). Love and esteem needs of children relate to seeking approval and friendship. When the clothes are too different from those of friends, it leads to rejection by peers and the child may become less confident (Collins and Kuckzaj, 1991). Clothing affects a child's feeling about himself, his response to other people and his ability to be physically active with his peers (Langford, 1975). Children who have poor relationships with peers have problems such as low achievement in school, learning difficulties, delinquency, emotional and mental health problems in adulthood, dropping out of school and other criminal vices (Anselmo, 1987; Mussen, Conger, Kegan, & Huston, 1990; Papalia *et al.*, 1987).

It has also been found that attractive children are likely to obtain higher scores and achievement test and engage in more positive interaction with teachers (Collins *et al.*, 1991; Kaiser, 1990). Children hold different stereotypes about attractive versus unattractive peers, attributing to attractive ones such characteristics as greater intelligence and better overall skills (Collins *et al.*, 1991; Hayes, 1998; Kaiser, 1985). There is also some evidence that physically attractive children behave

differently from unattractive ones (Anselmo, 1987; Collins *et al.*, 1991; Hayes, 1998; Kaiser, 1985). Clothing and appearance are therefore important cues upon which people base their appraisals and that of others. They influence how a child interacts with others in the society. According to Horn (1975), clothing provides a positive means of satisfying the need for self-enhancement by beautifying the appearance, making the physical self more desirable thus increasing acceptance by the group, and preventing rejection. It may be a source of overt admiration, resulting in increased self-esteem, self-respect, self-confidence and security.

Functions of Clothing

Clothing serves intrinsic, communicative and social psychological functions (Kaiser, 1990; Solomon, 1985; Storm, 1987).

Intrinsic function: This includes adornment, modesty, convenience, utility and protection (Kaiser, 1990; Storm, 1987). Clothing highlights our good qualities and camouflages the bad ones; it therefore contributes to our physical attractiveness. Modesty is the quality of expressing moderate or acceptable behaviour. Clothing can reflect modesty or immodesty depending on the situation. Clothing allows the wearer to perform certain tasks and protects one from harsh weather, diseases and animal attack.

Communicative function: Clothing may communicate socio-economic status, group affiliation and personal identity (Kaiser, 1990; Storm, 1987).

Social-psychological function: Clothing assists the individual in meeting his developmental needs and in expressing or enhancing his self-concept and self-esteem (Horn, 1975; Storm, 1987). Clothing can also decrease or increase one's confidence. It influences amounts and kinds of social participation. It is therefore a guide to one's general conduct or behaviour (Kaiser, 1990).

Clothing and Appearance

Clothing applies to those objects that we obtain and attach to or wear on our bodies (Kaiser, 1990). Horn (1975) refers to clothing as a kind of 'second skin' or extension of the body. Clothing may confound the process of developing a personal body image to some extent, especially when the clothes do not closely fit the body (Kaiser, 1990). Appearance on the other hand refers to the total composite image created not only by clothing but also by the human body and any modifications to the body that are visual. Clothes are therefore generally viewed in conjunction with bodies, which are themselves modified (Kaiser, 1990).

Research indicates that people view attractiveness more as facial attractiveness, whereas in others, the entire body serves as stimulus. Both bodies and faces contribute to impression of attractiveness (Alicke, Smith, & Klotz, 1986 as cited in Kaiser, 1990). According to Creekmore (1980), personal appearance in high school students was found to be related to the clothes they wear. Attractive students generally wore attractive clothing and conformed to clothing styles worn by the peers.

Critical Issues on Clothing Selection among Pre-adolescents

Members of the society such as parents and teachers often criticize the youth over their clothing. At the same time, the youth wish to conform to the clothing styles worn by the peers. This often results in conflict between parents and the youth over their clothing and this may lead to depression and low self-worth due to dissatisfaction with the clothing proposed to them by their parents (Youth Variety Show, 2001). Self-worth is an important component of one's identity. Review of literature shows that self-worth is related to satisfaction with one's clothing and appearance, and that people with lower self-worth view themselves as unattractive (Kaiser, 1990).

It is during the pre-adolescent stage that a child starts defining whom she/he is through social interaction with peers, and the type of clothing worn can make him be accepted or rejected resulting in low self-worth. A person with low self-worth tends to have emotional problems such as frustrations, depression and loneliness (Hayes, 1998; Bourne and Russo, 1998), which can lead to a search, for comfort in another person (Hayes, 1998). This 'other person' could be a wrong company and could lead to problems such as indulgence in irresponsible sexual behaviour, drug abuse, poor academic performance and dropping out of school. In the contemporary era of many social problems, including HIV/AIDS, drug abuse among others, it is worth bringing up individuals who have self-respect and self-control that result from their feeling of self-worth. An individual with a higher self-worth is responsible, committed to achieving future goals, and can make wiser decisions. While many studies on clothing and self-worth have been conducted elsewhere (Kaiser, 1990; Feather, 1976), they have not received special attention in Kenya. Studies have been done on factors considered in clothing selection for the pre-school children (Njororai, 1994), adolescents (Migunde, 1993), adults (Otieno, 1990), and the physically handicapped (Marinda, 2001), but no study has addressed the pre-adolescent's view about their clothing and the extent to which satisfaction with the clothing contributes to development of self-worth. Papalia *et al.* (1987) recommend that since self-worth is an important key to success throughout life, more research should be done on it. In view of this recommendation, the present researcher sought to find out the role of clothing satisfaction in developing positive self-worth among pre-adolescents. The purpose of this study was to investigate on clothing satisfaction, issues related to it and the role it plays in developing self-worth among the pre-adolescents. This was done by assessing satisfaction with their clothing and relating it to perception of self-worth in connection with their clothing.

Factors that Influence Teenagers in Clothing Choice

Clothing is one of the most noticeable aspects of adolescent culture and is an important means by which individual adolescents express their identities and gain social approval. Adolescents use clothing to compare themselves to peers and to communicate self-importance, emotion, modesty and conformity (Wilson and MacGillivray, 1998). A study carried out by Wilson *et al.* (1998) among adolescents indicates that family, peer and media were very important influence on

adolescent's clothing choice. Younger adolescents report family (parents and siblings) to have more importance than other relationships, including relationships with friends, although this influence diminishes in older adolescents. Another study by Koester and May (1985), as cited in Wilson *et al.* (1998), found that parental influence on clothing selection decreased with the age of the adolescents, although peer, sibling and media influence increased with age. Wilson *et al.* (1998) therefore notes that parental influence declines with age and that only youngest adolescents named family as the most influencing factor on clothing choice. It is the peer group that provides the adolescents with the main environment for social comparison involving likes and dislikes, norms and values, behaviours and appropriate appearance. Peer influence was also found higher in early adolescence, declining in later adolescence (Wilson *et al.*, 1998).

Wilson *et al.* (1998) further note that certain media celebrities have greater impact as ideal role models for a majority of children and are viewed even more positively than actual acquaintances. Television was found to have greater influence on adolescent's clothing selection than from any other media form. However, younger male adolescents indicated more influence on clothing choice from television than females. In contrast to movies, television reveals the current everyday appearance of large numbers of other adolescents in the "global village". Magazines provide approximately half of the media influence on adolescents' clothing choice; they provide examples of dress-for-success work clothing to older adolescent females who are becoming anxious about careers (Wilson *et al.*, 1998). According to Migunde (1993), adolescents are allowed by their parents to participate in selection of their clothing. The most influential psychological factors considered included the item in which one looked attractive, one's own interest, values, attitudes towards the style of the clothing item and the cost of the item. Prestige, popularity of the brand name of the item, the shop from which the item was bought and to impress others, were the least influential factors. Marinda's (2001) finding on factors considered in clothing selection by the physically handicapped adolescents indicates that most of them participated in their clothing selection. The socio-economic factor most considered was income while acceptance by age mates was the least. On psychological factors, the most influential were items in which one looked attractive, one's own interests, attitude towards the style, personal values, comfort and where the item was bought. The least influential factors were: to impress others, prestige, popularity of the brand name and uniqueness of the item.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was a survey study to determine clothing satisfaction, issues related to it and its role in determining a positive self-worth among the pre-adolescents. This study was carried out in Kasarani division located in Nairobi Province. The target population consisted of all the Kenyan pre-adolescents in Kasarani Division. The accessible population was the pre-adolescent children in six primary schools, namely Githurai, Korogocho, Muthaiga, Immaculate Heart, Thika Road Academy and Thika Road Christian School. Six schools (3 public and 3 private) were selected purposively from the division. Stratified random sampling and simple random

sampling methods were used. The sampling frame consisted of a list of all the pre-adolescents (11 and 12 year old children) from the six schools which were stratified on basis of school, age and gender. The list was first stratified according to school. In each of the schools, the lists were further stratified according to age and to give two strata of males and females. From each of the stratum, a sample was selected by simple random sampling. In order to avoid any gender biases, the sample consisted of equal number of boys and girls. Equal number of 11 and 12 year-olds were also selected to ensure equal representation of the two age-groups.

The accessible population consisted of seven hundred and twelve (712) pre-adolescents from the selected three public schools and three hundred and twenty eight (328) from the selected three private schools. Ninety-six (96) pre-adolescents were selected from the public schools and Forty-eight (48) from the private schools. Total sample size was therefore 144, which was approximately fourteen percent of the accessible population. Data was collected using interview schedules and essays written by the respondents. Data were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively to address the objectives. Qualitative data from the essays were coded according to certain words, patterns and phrases; then they were explained in themes. Quantitative data were analysed using the computer statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were used to describe and summarise data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How the Respondents Mainly Acquired Clothing

How the respondent acquired clothing was important as it might have an influence on an individual's clothing preference and clothing satisfaction. The findings on Table 2 show that most (92.4%) of the respondents' clothing were mainly bought by their parents and particularly their mothers. Five-point-five percent (5.5%) of them mainly acquired the clothing through inheriting from siblings, 1.4% bought for themselves and 0.7% had the clothing donated by relatives. These results were not surprising given that at their age, the respondents were in most cases dependent on their parents for provision of their basic needs.

Source of Respondents' Clothing

This variable was considered because where clothing is bought from may have an impact on clothing satisfaction of an individual. A majority (59%) of the respondents' clothing were bought from outlets selling second-hand clothing. Out of this, 51.9% were from open-air markets while 6.7% were from shops. Forty-one percent of the clothing was bought from outlets selling new clothes, where 31.9% of them were from the shops and 9.5% from the open-air markets. This might have had an influence on clothing satisfaction since most of the respondents had their clothes bought from a common place as their friends' hence common clothing features. These findings concurred with Migunde's (1993) and Marinda's (2001) on clothing of the adolescents where open-air market selling second-hand clothes was a popular source of clothing. In most cases, second-hand clothing is imported. Nyang'or (1994) pointed out that majority of working women in Nairobi

Table 1: Respondents' Clothing Acquisition Practice

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Buy for myself	2	1.4
Inherit from siblings	8	5.5
Bought by parents	133	92.4
Donation from relatives	1	0.7
Total	144	100

Table 2: Where the Respondents' Clothing were mainly Bought

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Shops selling new clothes	43	31.9
Shops selling second-hand clothes	9	6.7
Open-air markets selling new clothes	13	9.5
Open-air market selling second-hand clothes	70	51.9
Missing	9	
Total	144	100

Table 4: Socio-cultural Factors Considered in Respondents' Clothing Selection

	Always	Sometimes	Never	Total
	%	%	%	%
Parents' preference	37.0	56.5	6.5	100
Peer group preference	32.6	53.3	14.1	100
Religious beliefs/norms	5.5	42.9	51.6	100
Media/movies	3.3	35.9	60.9	100

N=92

Table 5: Clothing that were Considered in Respondent's Clothing Selection

	Always	Sometimes	Never	Total
	%	%	%	%
Texture/comfort	21.7	58.7	19.6	100
Colour	63.1	29.3	7.6	100
Latest fashion	40.2	44.6	15.2	100
Brand name	3.3	16.3	80.4	100
Size	88.0	7.6	4.4	100
Style/desim	23.9	58.7	17.4	100

N=92

preferred imported to locally made clothing due to the fact that imported clothing were of better quality and were cheaper. Nine (9) respondents never answered the question probably because they were not sure of the source of their clothing as they could have been clothing were mainly donated or inherited.

Respondents' Involvement in Clothing Selection

Whether a child was involved or not in one's clothing selection may have an impact on their individual clothing satisfaction since one will select what he/she prefers. Sixty-four percent (64%) of the respondents mainly participated in their clothing selection while 36.1% were not mainly involved in the selection. Therefore, a majority of them were involved in the selection of their clothing. This finding agrees with Migunde's (1993) on factors considered in clothing selection among adolescents in Nairobi, who found that a majority of the adolescents were involved in their clothing selection.

Factors Considered by Respondents in Clothing Selection

Factors that one considers in clothing selection reflect an individuals' clothing preference which in turn affect clothing satisfaction/dissatisfaction. This section was answered by only those 92 respondents who were involved in their clothing selection.

Socio-cultural Factors

These are factors related to the society as a whole and one's cultural background.

Parent's Acceptance

The findings show that a majority (56.5%) of the respondents who responded to the question were sometimes influenced by

their parents' taste in their clothing selection while 37, 0% were always influenced. This shows that parental influence was one of the major factors influencing clothing selection among the respondents and this could be due to the respondents' dependence on the parents for their clothing provision. This agrees with Migunde (1993) and Wilson *et al.* (1998) who also found that parents influenced adolescent's decision in clothing selection greatly.

Peer Group Preference

As shown on the Table 4, peer group sometimes influenced 53.3% of the respondents who answered the question while 32.6% were always influenced. Fourteen-point-one percent (14.1%) of the respondents were never influenced by the peer group. The results indicate that peer group acceptance was also a major factor considered in the respondents' clothing selection. This is an age when they become aware of what those around them wear and their conformity to group preference greatly determined their acceptance into the group. However, because of their dependence on parents, peers may not have much influence to their selection. According to Horn (1975), this is a time when youngsters seem to be obsessed with their clothing and appearance and spend a great deal of time and effort finding out what 'they' are wearing in order to present the same or similar image as their peers. This result agrees with Migunde's (1993) and Wilson *et al.* (1998) on factors considered by adolescents in clothing selection, who found that peer group was a major factor considered in clothing selection. This is an important transition period in life for the pre-adolescents as they wish to conform to the peer group. At the same time, parents feel that they still have total control on their children's decisions since they are still the major providers for their needs. Parents should understand that the peers' are equally important.

Religious Beliefs/norms

Religious beliefs/norms were less influential factors as only 5.5% of those who responded to the question were always influenced by them while 42.9% were sometimes influenced and 51.6% were never influenced by it. This could be due to the fact that the respondents were greatly influenced by urban life where they were mixed up with people from varying religious/cultural backgrounds hence weakening their ties to their respective religions/cultures. The finding concurs with Marinda's (2001) on factors considered in clothing selection among the physically handicapped adolescents, Migunde's (1993) and Otieno's (1990) on factors considered by adults in clothing selection within Kenyatta university, who found that religious beliefs/norms were less influential factors to their clothing selection.

Media/movies

Media/movies were the least influential factors of the four socio-cultural factors since a majority (60.9%) of those who responded to the question were never influenced by them and 3.3% were always influenced. This could be due to the fact that the respondents spent most of their time on school-work such that they had less time to concentrate on fashion related to media/movies. Media/movies may also have been expensive for most of Kenyans to afford. This also concurred

with Migunde's (1993) results who found that media/movies were less influential to adolescents' clothing selection, but did not agree with Wilson *et al.* (1998) who found that media/movies were major factors influencing adolescents' clothing selection. This difference could be due to availability of media/movies to adolescents in first world countries as opposed to those in third world countries. Parent's influence was the most influential factor among the socio-cultural factors followed by peer's preference. Religious beliefs and media/movies were least influential socio-cultural factors to respondents' clothing selection.

Factors Related to Clothing Characteristics

These are factors such as texture/comfort, colour, latest fashion, brand name, size and fashionability of the clothing that relate to the nature of the clothing. Thirty-six percent (36%) never responded to the questions in this section because they were not mainly involved in their clothing selection. The results are as shown on the Table 5.

Texture/comfort

Texture/comfort was not a very influential factor to the respondents' clothing selection, as 19.6% of those who responded to the question were never influenced while 58.7% were sometimes influenced and 21.7% were always influenced. This indicates that most of the respondents did not mind the texture of the fabric or comfort derived from it.

Color

Colour was a very influential factor because 63.1% of the respondents who answered the question were always influenced by it and 29.3% were sometimes influenced while 7.6% of the respondents were never influenced. Most respondents were therefore very sensitive to the visual appearance of the clothing worn.

Latest Fashion

A larger proportion (44.6%) of the respondents who answered the question was sometimes influenced by the latest fashion, 40.2% were always influenced and 15.2% were never influenced by the factor. The latest fashion was a popular factor considered because at their age the respondents start being conscious of the appearance of those around them hence their latest clothing styles.

Brand Name

Brand name of the clothing had a very low influence on the respondents' clothing selection; 80.4% of the respondents who responded to the question were never influenced by it, 16.3% were sometimes influenced and 3.3% were always influenced by it. This agrees with Migunde's (1993) and Marinda's (2001) findings on the clothing of adolescent and this could be due to lack of the respondents' awareness of the clothing brand names in the market.

Size of the Clothing

As shown on the Table 5, a majority (88.0%) of the respondents who answered the question were always influenced by size of the clothing, 7.6% were sometimes

influenced and 4.4% of them were never influenced. The age of these respondents is characterised by the onset of physical and physiological changes. The size (tightness/looseness) of the clothing worn may cause nervousness to them and they may imagine that everyone is noticing the changes taking place within their bodies.

Style/design of the Clothing

The findings showed that a majority (58.7%) of those who responded to the question was sometimes influenced by style/design of the clothing, 23.9% were always influenced and 17.4% were never influenced. The implication of this is that the style or design feature of the clothing being selected was moderately considered by the respondents. Among the above factors related to clothing characteristics, size and colour were the most influential to the respondents' clothing choice, followed by latest fashion, style/design and texture/comfort of the clothing in that order. Brand name of the clothing was the least influential factor in the clothing selection.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A majority of pre-adolescents' parents in Kasarani Division were educated, employed and resided in the urban area hence influencing their clothing buying practice, factors considered in clothing selection and clothing satisfaction thus perception of self-worth in relation to their clothing. Parents in Kasarani had the greatest influence on the pre-adolescents' clothing selection and size and colour were the most important factors related to clothing. Parents were the major providers of clothing and open-air market selling second-hand clothes was the major source of the clothing. Based on the findings of the study, therefore, the following have been recommended:

1. Parents/guardians should be flexible, involve their children in clothing selection and listen to their views; in fact they should learn to groom their children in accordance with peer preferences.
2. School policy makers who are involved in making decisions regarding children's uniform should consult the children especially when making decisions regarding uniform colours.
3. Clothing designers dealing with children's clothing should consult the children as this may affect their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with clothing hence their perception of self-worth which may greatly affect their social lives.
4. The local clothing designers should improve their designs so that they can effectively compete with the imported ones.

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