

ABSTRACT

Freedom and Conformity in Dress among Adolescents in Trinidad

Margaret Gordon

This research sought to examine the clothing purchasing and wearing behaviours of adolescents in Trinidad and determine the extent to which they used freedom in choosing clothing or conformed to fashion trends. The study also investigated whether there are differences in these behaviours based on the household income of their family, the stage of adolescent development i.e. early, middle and late, the gender of the adolescent, religion and ethnicity. Data were collected in two phases. In the first phase, 376 secondary school students from the east, west, north, south and central of the island were surveyed. In the second phase, 2 focus groups were conducted; a total of 10 boys, 12 girls and 8 parents participated in this phase. Exploratory factor analysis identified 6 themes underpinning the manifest responses for purchasing clothing behaviours and 4 themes for the wearing clothing behaviours. Factor scores were saved and used in parametric tests as dependent variables in regression models. Results revealed that the purchasing and wearing behaviours of middle adolescents differ from early and late adolescents. While early adolescents' purchasing and wearing behaviours tended to be influenced by their peers; the tendency decreased as they matured to later adolescent stages. Adolescent boys purchased clothing to conform to their social network, whereas adolescent girls were less conforming. The household income afforded adolescents the opportunity to purchase fashionable clothing, or the clothing advertised in the media. Roman Catholic adolescents use a high level of freedom when purchasing and wearing clothing. The results were consistent with the human ecological concepts, and hold implications for parents, educators, counselors, designers and clothing merchandisers. Recommendations for further research were also suggested.

Keywords: Adolescent; stages of adolescent development; purchasing clothing behaviours; wearing clothing behaviours, freedom, conformity.