

Perceptions of University of Ghana Students towards Campus Female Fashion

Ida Ofori^{1*} Albie Mensah¹ Francis Amenakpor¹ Paul Goddey Gablah²

1.Department of Fashion Design and Textiles, Accra Polytechnic

2.Department of Science Laboratory Technology, Accra Polytechnic, P.O. Box GP 561, Accra, Ghana, W/A

*E-mail address of corresponding author: mrs.ida.ofori@gmail.com

Abstract

Western fashion has influenced traditional fashion in Ghana and this trend is common on university campuses. Vital body parts concealed by the traditional woman are now on display to the disapproval of many Ghanaians. The study explored perceptions of 270 University of Ghana students toward female fashion on Legon campus. Both male and female respondents aged 18 to 50 years were selected by the proportionate random sampling technique and a structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Hand-coded data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Chi square analysis showed no significant relationship between gender and respondents' perceptions of female fashion. About 70% of the respondents indicated that generally, female students on campus dressed indecently. Christians, who formed 87% of respondents, regarded decent dressing as covering vital parts such as midriff, breasts and thighs. Moslems who formed 10% further believed decency entailed covering the hair, arms and legs. Whereas 37% of respondents stated that indecent female dressing had no effect on them, 61% (mostly males) stated that it affected them negatively. These effects included distraction of attention and sexual arousal. Suggestions made by respondents to moderate indecent dressing included introduction of dress code, education and sacking perpetrators from class and examination halls. Decency in campus fashion could moderate promiscuity, and boost academic work of students. There was therefore the need to moderate trends which exposed sensitive body parts. Recommendations included education, sacking indecently dressed students from lecture halls, government policies to ensure that second hand clothing importers reject indecent clothes.

Keywords: Clothing, fashion, western fashion, traditional fashion, indecency, decency.

1. Introduction

Fashion is a silent language that conveys a message about the wearer, which may or may not be accurate. It is as such one of the strongest forces in the world and has motivated the way people dress for centuries. It shapes man as a whole and reflects a continuing process of change in all facets of his life. However, the word currently brings to mind the trend or styles of clothing that are most popular at a particular time and place. Frings (1994) and Kefgen and Touchie-Specht (1986) indicated that the terms clothing, dress and costume include anything that is put on the body such as hair arrangement, painting, tattooing, disfiguring or scarring. However for the purpose of this study, clothing will be restricted to garments or apparel. Although the style of clothing is only one aspect of fashion, it is considered the most important by many people. The importance of fashion cannot be overestimated as it supports thousands of industries the world over. In Ghana, it is a source of income to many, especially in the private sector. Ghana has therefore adopted the U.S Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) initiative to export garments to the U.S market. Ghanaian fashion can be grouped into traditional and western types. Traditional fashion includes "kaba and slit", "fugu", "batakari" and "agbada". Western fashion on the other hand, embraces styles such as trousers, suits, shirts and other styles which have been imported into the country from the United States of America, Europe and Asia, among others. Currently, some of these styles, for the youth expose vital body parts such as breasts, midriff and thighs. Many female university students prefer these outfits because they are in vogue and as such are willing to endure various discomforts these clothes may pose just to be in fashion. This provocative way of dressing may encourage sexual lust leading to rape and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases. Clothing reflects the values, attitudes and interests of the wearer. According to Frings (1991) buying motives vary from consumer to consumer and from day to day. They include the desire to be fashionable, attractive, accepted by friends, peer groups or colleagues and impress others. Importance of clothing as a means of achieving approval and acceptance is paramount in the value configuration of adolescents. As people mature, their interest in clothing generally becomes less emphatic, probably because so many other facets of life develop. Members of this group often express individuality in clothing and are concerned about price, lasting qualities and maintenance problems (Horn, 1968).

In Nigeria, Obadare (2004) reported that there had been complaints and counter complaints about the way some female students dressed on campuses of Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), University of Lagos and the University of Benin city by some authorities of the university which led to the suggestion of dress codes for the Obafemi Awolowo University and the setting up of a committee in the university of Benin to check indecent dressing.

Bruce (2005) reported that college life has many special benefits including the informality of dress pervasive on most campuses. Almost any outfit is acceptable so long as it is clean, fashionable and reasonably covers parts of the body. Quansah (2004) lamented that the dresses some young ladies wore when attending lectures on some of the university campuses and when they were out shopping left much to be desired. Azu (2005) also indicated that there was a new trend in dressing among those pursuing tertiary and second cycle education that involved dressing in provocative or see-through outfits that exposed the most revered parts of the female body. Again, Atiase (2005) reported that male students interviewed on Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology campus on female fashion lamented the situation of indecent dressing by expressing a mixture of displeasure and disappointment. The situation on University of Ghana campus is not different. Cooper (2005) reported that one of the country's top female artistes was stripped naked by some frenzied male students after her performance at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Kumasi but was rescued by the organizers. Despite public outcry many did not have sympathy for her claiming she deserved what came to her because of her indecent way of dressing (Kanyog, 2005). Dodoo (2005) nonetheless was of the view that there was no excuse for anybody to attack a lady even if she walked naked in the streets. He reiterated that it was nobody's business to tell the other which dress to wear or which not to wear. He claimed the fetish priestess who walked bare footed with the breast dangling on the chest was not accused of indecent dressing. Doe (2005) said that Ghanaian ladies watched television and different kinds of movies from which they copied bad dressing.

Goodchilds and Zellman (1984) asked adolescents whether there were certain articles of clothing that indicated sexual interest. Both boys and girls reported that when a woman wore see-through low-cut top, tight jeans or did not wear brassiere, she was possibly indicating a desire to have sex, although boys were more confident than girls of this interpretation. The writer explained that young men might interpret a young woman's outfit as a sexual signal whereas the young woman may have selected that outfit to conform to fashion trends. Lennon et al (1999) found that dress conveys both accurate and inaccurate messages about the wearer.

Terry and Doerge (1979) found that the highest likelihood of rape was associated with a woman's wearing of seductive clothing. On the contrary, Richards, Rollerson and Philips (1992) regarded that highly passive and submissive women wearing body-concealing clothing were at greatest risk for sexual victimization. Middlemas (1967) pointed out that dressing smartly is not a matter of having a lot of clothes or wearing expensive clothes nor is it necessarily wearing the latest fashions. The secret to being well dressed lies in choosing clothes that are right for one's activities. Chambers and Moulton (1969) also contended that individuality was the key to being well dressed and this was most easily attained by the mature person who knew better than to copy or imitate friends.

2.0 Research Methodology

2.1 Data Collection Tools (Methods)

The proportionate random sampling technique was used to select 300 respondents from the five traditional halls of residence (Akufo, Legon, Mensah-Sarbah, Volta and Commonwealth). This technique made it possible to select a representative number of respondents for the study. Again, the proportionate random sampling technique was used in determining the number of students to be selected from each hall of residence

A questionnaire with both open and close-ended questions based on the objectives of the study was used in collecting data.

Since all the respondents were literate, the questionnaire was self-administered by respondents to save time and make analysis easier. Unobtrusive observation was done to supplement information from data. Photographs of various fashion styles were also taken of some students on campus to illustrate information. Three hundred questionnaires were administered but two hundred and seventy (270) were retrieved.

2.2 Data Analysis

The data was hand-coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The results were presented in frequency, percentage distributions, and pie charts.

3.0 Findings and Discussions

The sample composed of 157 (58%) male and 113 (42%) female resident students from four traditional Halls .

3.1 Table 1 shows that the age distribution of the respondents was from 18 to 50 years; 82% were within the range of 18-22 .This was not surprising, because many students, apart from mature students who gained admission into degree programmes in the university were around this age. This might have therefore made the problem of provocative dressing quite pronounced at the University of Ghana. The study of Gawne and Oerke (1968) as well as Tai and Tam (2005) indicated that young consumers attached greater importance to clothing as a means of gaining acceptance and approval than did mature persons. Thus they had the highest propensity to adopt fashion that exposed vital body parts such as the cleavage, midriff and thighs.

Figure 1 reveals that majority, (87%) of the respondents were Christians; 11% were Moslems and the remaining 2% were atheists. Female Moslem students on campus could readily be identified by their way of dressing,

which concealed their entire body parts except the face, hands and feet. With the Moslem style of dressing, one might not be wrong to deduce that those who claimed to be Christians and the atheists were mostly responsible for provocative dressing. Aboagye-Mensah (2006) reported that some females had chosen the house of God to do a personal exhibition of their vital body parts, which did not portray the image of Christianity in good light. Modesty was described by Christian and agnostic respondents as covering of vital body parts such as the breasts, midriff and thighs, whereas all the Moslems believed that modesty meant covering of all body parts with the exception of the hands, feet and face.

Table 2 portrays that about 53% of the respondents spent their holidays in the Greater Accra region. It is likely that this percentage was exposed to fashion trends in Accra. Most of the second-hand clothes, which exposed vital body parts, were sold in Accra. This suggests that the respondents who lived in Accra patronized them most. 15% spent their holidays in the Ashanti region, 7% spent it outside Ghana. It seemed that students who travelled to the western countries adopted some of the provocative western styles and introduced them on their return. About 6% each spent their holidays in the Central and Eastern Regions of Ghana. Only about 4% spent their holidays in the Brong Ahafo, Upper East and West, probably due to the distance.

The Chi-square statistic was used to test and accept the null hypothesis that there was no relationship between gender and religious affiliation and perceptions of respondents to female fashion trend. Fashion change was more rapid and pronounced among female students than male.

Figure 2 shows that religious affiliation of the respondents fell under Christianity (87%), Moslem (11%) and agnostic (2%). Though the results showed no significant relationship between religion and perceptions toward female fashion trend, what constituted decency was different between the two religious groups. All the Moslems believed that modest dressing implied covering of all body parts with the exception of the face, hands and feet, whereas majority of the Christians were of the view that modest dressing meant covering vital body parts such as breasts, mid-riff, back and thighs.

Table 3 indicates that about 70% of respondents perceived campus fashion as indecent; only 12% said it was decent; 8% felt that female fashion on campus was alienated or westernized; 61% of the respondents, majority of who were males indicated that female fashion trend affected them, while 39% said it did not. Of those who said it did not affect them, 34% indicated they were used to seeing them while 14% said they enjoyed looking at them. Of the respondents who reported that female fashion had an effect on them 31% who were all males expressed that it aroused them sexually. About 22%, majority of who were females lamented that it was a disgrace to womanhood; 15% all males complained that the trend of female fashion distracted their attention in class, library or examination halls. Suggestions given by respondents to moderate provocative dressing on campus included education, dress code, and sacking from lecture and exam halls; 64% described a well dressed person as one who dressed with vital parts such as breasts, midriff and thighs covered, while 38% were of the view that a well dressed person was one who dressed to suit the occasion; 22% indicated that she should be fashionable.

4.0 Results and Discussions

4.1 Age of Respondents. One of the most important variables in the size of the wardrobe or amounts spent on clothing is the age of the individual. The age distribution of the respondents was within the age range of 18-22 years and 56.3% were in this age range. This is not surprising, because many students, apart from mature students who gain admission into degree programmes in the university are around this age. This might have therefore made the problem of provocative dressing quite pronounced at the University of Ghana. The study of Gawne and Oerke (1968) as well as Tai and Tam (2005) indicated that young consumers attached greater importance to clothing as a means of gaining acceptance and approval than did mature persons. Thus they had the highest propensity to adopt fashion that exposed vital body parts such as the cleavage, midriff and thighs.

4.2 Religious Affiliation of Respondents

Ghana is predominantly a Christian country and it was therefore not surprising that majority of the respondents were Christians. Female Moslem students on campus could readily be identified by their way of dress, which concealed their entire body parts except the face, hands and feet. With the Moslem style of dressing, one would not be wrong to say that those who claimed to be Christians and the atheists mostly did provocative dressing. Aboagye-Mensah (2006) reported that some females had chosen the house of God to do a personal exhibition of their vital body parts, which did not portray the image of Christianity in good light. Modesty was described by Christian and agnostic respondents as covering of vital body parts such as the breast, midriff and thighs whereas all the Moslems believed that modesty meant covering of all body parts with the exception of the hands, feet and face. Christians and the agnostic all agreed that female fashion that exposed vital body parts was indecent. About 53% of the respondents indicated that they spent their holidays in the Greater Accra region. It is likely that this percentage was exposed to fashion trends in Accra. Most of the second-hand clothes, which exposed vital body parts, were sold in Accra. This suggests that the respondents who lived in Accra patronized them most. 15% spent their holidays in the Ashanti region, 7% spent it outside Ghana. It seemed that students who travelled to the

western countries adopted some of the provocative western styles and introduced them on their return. About 6% each spent their holidays in the Central and Eastern Regions of Ghana. Only about 4% spent their holidays in the Brong Ahafo, Upper East and West, probably due to the distance. About 68% of the sample made their own clothing choices.

5.0 Conclusions

Campus fashion trend was dictated by trend of Western fashion which exposed vital body parts such as breasts, midriff, underwear and thighs. Majority of the respondents might have acquired second-hand clothes which were cheaper than locally produced ones. Many of the respondents (68%) perceived female fashion on campus as indecent. Decency in campus fashion could moderate promiscuity, and boost academic work of students there is therefore the need to find ways to moderate fashion trends which expose parts of the body such as the breasts, midriff and thighs.

Recommendations

1. Decent dressing be made mandatory by hall tutors; resident students who fail to comply could be made to lose their residential status.
2. Freshmen, during orientation are sensitized on the need to dress decently and be made aware of sanctions that go with indecent dressing.
3. Lecturers to remind students to dress decently for lectures and sack indecently dressed students from lecture halls.
4. Hair dressers and seamstresses should advice clients of the need to dress decently.
5. Government should set up policies to ensure that importers of second hand clothing reject indecent clothes.
6. Meeting between Home Science department and executive members of National tailors and dressmaking Association to encourage them to advice their clients to design and produce decent styles.
7. Education through parents, churches, student bodies such as Home Science Students' Association (HOSSA) and National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) as well as guidance and counseling teams.
8. Dissemination of information on the need to adopt decent fashion and reject indecent ones to individuals through the mass media.
9. Advocacy groups and Social Welfare Department to add their voice to campaign against indecent dressing.

TABLE 1: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

Age in years	Number	%
18-22	149	55.3
23-27	58	21.6
28-32	19	7.1
33-37	6	2.5
38-42	3	1.3
43-47	2	0.8
48-50	1	0.4
Total	238	100.0

% based on number of responses

FIGURE 1: GENDER OF RESPONDENTS:-

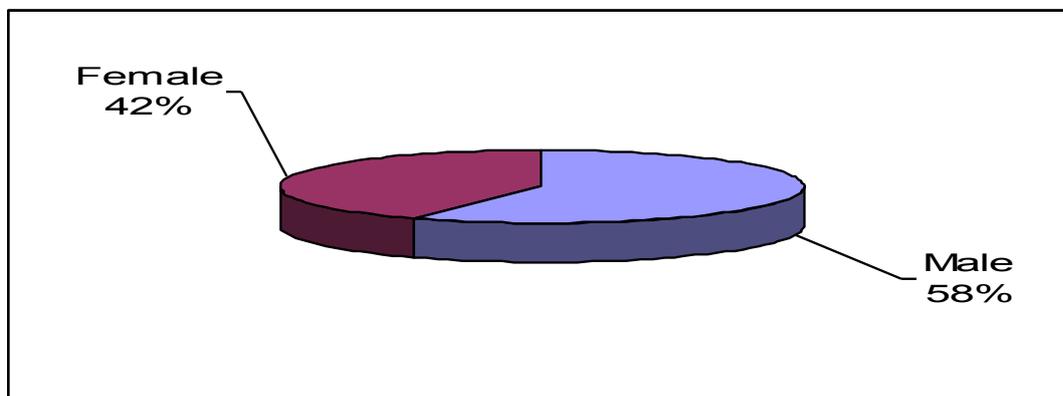


FIGURE 2: RESPONDENTS' RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS

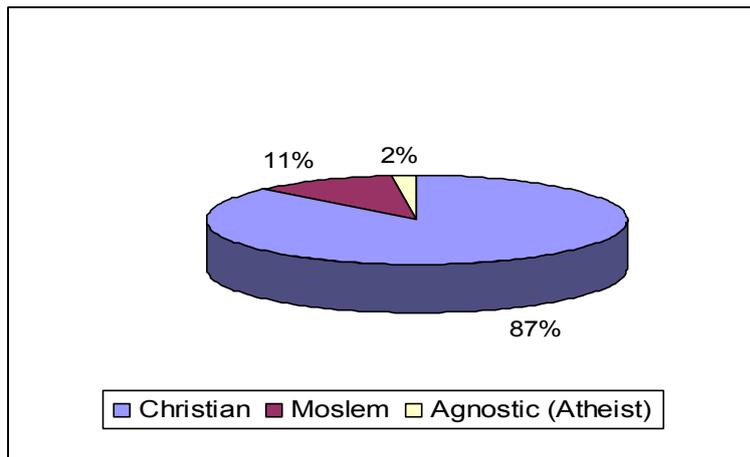


Table 14: General Impressions about Fashion among Female Students on Campus

Impression	Number	%
Very indecent or indecent	182	66
Decent or quite decent	35	13
Following Western Fashion / Alienated	21	8
Fashionable	12	5
Extravagant	10	4
Indifferent (decency is relative) / no response	8	3
Monotonous	2	1
Total	270	100.0

TABLE 17: SUGGESTIONS TO MODERATE CAMPUS FASHION TREND

Suggestion	Number	%
Education-parents, religious leaders, lecturers, mass media, student bodies such as NUGS	107	43
Dress code/policy by government	93	37
Nothing can be done/it is their right	28	11
Perpetrators should be embarrassed and sacked from lecture halls and shunned	15	6
Policy by government	6	2
Reward and sanctions	2	1
Total	251	100.0

Table 19b: Relationship between Religion and General Perception of Female Fashion Trend on Campus

Relationship	DF	Value	Probably value
Religion and general impression on the way female students dress	36	31.04	0.703

Pearson's chi-square was used in testing the hypothesis at a significance value of 0.05.

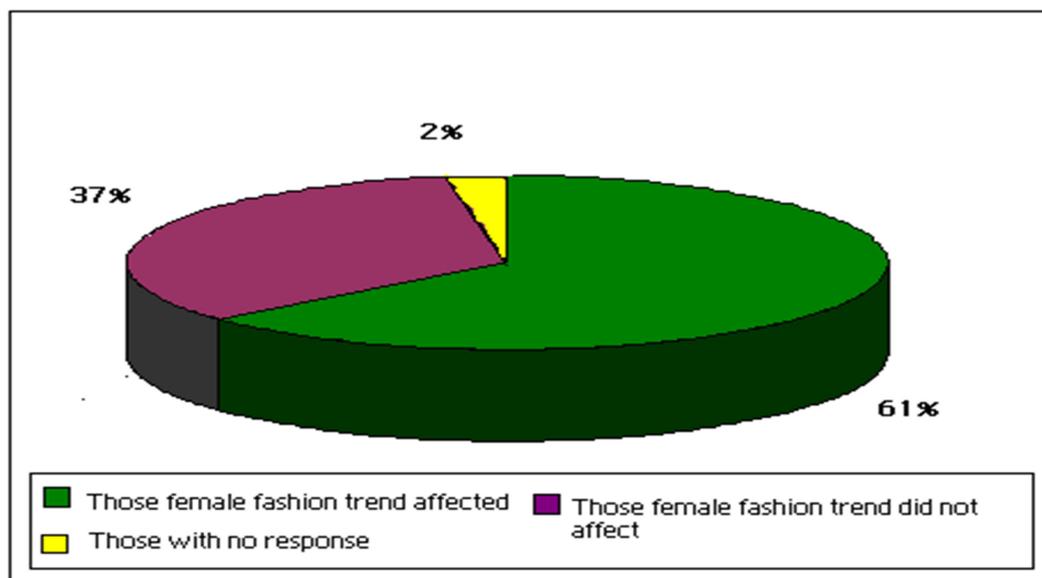


Table 16: Effects on Respondents on Respondents who said it affected them.

Effect	Number	%
It arouses me sexually	51	31
It is a disgrace to womanhood	36	22
It irritates me	26	16
It distracts my attention in class / library	25	15
I feel harassed	13	8
It is against my religion	12	7
It makes me cautious	2	1
I feel pressurized to dress like them	1	1
Total	166	100.0

% based on number of responses

Table 17: Suggestions to Moderate Campus Fashion Trend

Suggestion	Number	%
Education-parents, religious leaders, lecturers, mass media, student bodies such as NUGS	107	43
Dress code/policy by government	93	37
Nothing can be done/it is their right	28	11
Perpetrators should be embarrassed and sacked from lecture halls and shunned	15	6
Policy by government	6	2
Reward and sanctions	2	1
Total	251	100.0

% based on number of responses

TABLE 19a: Relationship between Gender and General Perception of Female Fashion Trend on Campus

Relationship	DF	Value	Probably value
Gender and general impressions on the way female students dress	9	15.58	0.076

TABLE 19b: Relationship between Religion and General Perception of Female Fashion Trend on Campus

Relationship	DF	Value	Probably value
Religion and general impression on the way female students dress	36	31.04	0.703

Pearson's chi-square was used in testing the hypothesis at a significance value of 0.05.

References

Atiase, B. K. (2005), "Interview Forum -Indecent Dress among the youth." The Mirror, Saturday. Nov. 26, pp. 2.
 Azu, V. (2005), "Trends-The Dress to kill craze." The Mirror, Saturday, Dec. 10, pp. 16.
 Bruce, C. (2005) "Dress for success" -Joelfeather@ cc.usu.edu.
 Cooper, N. (2005), " Mzbel Again." Sat.Nov. 12, 2005 pp. 8.
 Dodoo, A. (2005), "Interview Forum – Can We Dress Anyhow?" Mirror Sat. Nov. 12, 2005 pp. 4.
 Gawne, J. E. and Oerke, B. (1969), "Dress - The Clothing Textbook." Chas. A. Bennet Inc. Peoria, Illinois pp. 18.
 Goodchilds, J. and Zellman, G. (1984), "Dress as a means of communication." Clothing and Textiles, Journal 17

(3) pp. 145.

Horn, M. J. (1968), "M. J. (1968), "The Second Scheme; An Interdisciplinary study of clothing." Houghton, Mifflin Company, Boston. pp. 11.

Kanyog, J. (2005), "No Tears for Mzbel." -Daily Graphic, Friday Nov. 18 2005. pp.3.

Kefgen, M. and Touchie- Specht, P. (1986), "Individuality in Clothing Selection and Personal Appearance 4th edition." Macmillan Publishing Company, New York; Collier Macmillan Publishers, London. pp.62:130.

Lennon, S. J., Johnson, K. K. P. and Schulz, T. L. (1999), "Forging leakages between dress and law in the U.S." Clothing and Textiles Research journal, 17 (3) pp. 144 - 156.

Middlemas, M. (1967), Caring for your Dress - Pergamon Press Limited, Great Britain pp. 4, 6.

Quansah, I. A. (2004), "My turn." -The Mirror, Saturday October 30 pp. 29.

Richards, L. (1991), "A Theoretical analysis of non verbal communication and victim selection for sexual assault." Clothing and Textiles Research Journal Vol. 9 pp. 55-64.

Tai, H. C. and Tam, L. M. (1996), "A lifestyle Analysis, Journal of International Consumer Marketing, Vol. 9. No1, pp. 25-42.