

High School Confidential



The Cost Of Fitting In

By Alice Donoghue

Fitting in has always been a top priority for most teenagers. There are several ways this can be accomplished -- by wearing the right clothing, befriending the right people and engaging in the right activities. Those who master this calculated lifestyle boast happy, stress-free, fulfilling lives. Right?

The media onslaught is directed primarily at today's youth. After all, with abundant time and spending money, impressionable minds and a desire to be socially accepted, they are prime targets for marketing. Recent research suggests the average 12 to 13-year-old spends \$1,500 per year, while 16 to 17-year-olds may spend as much as \$4,500 per year. (See plasmaplusmedia.com/teen_spending.html for more information). School is certainly an ideal venue for displaying the recently purchased merchandise. With in excess of a thousand students at most schools, there are plenty of observers to witness the unveiling of a new outfit or hairstyle. By the same token, there are numerous peers to ridicule the unfortunate ones who do not, or cannot, conform to the current trends. For some, wearing name

brand clothing simply isn't financially feasible. For others, refusing to conform is a deliberate rebellion against the corporate machine.

Teenagers tend to be self-absorbed, even if they are not aware of the fact. Although they may not be narcissistic, most teens have a nagging fear that people will notice if they aren't dressed to impress. Anyone who has had an embarrassing experience in a public place knows the mortification that accompanies it, the reputation gained. This self-consciousness is a normal part of adolescence, and is a driving factor in the quest to fit in.

The pursuit of perfection is an unachievable and dangerous endeavour. Obsession with one's appearance contributes to the epidemic of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Perceived flaws are corrected with plastic surgery, instead of the old fashioned method of acceptance. More and more teenagers are resorting to extreme methods of attaining the correct 'look'.

Of course, part of fitting in is about spending one's time socializing with others of equal or greater status. Peer pressure mounts, and many teens find

themselves engaging in activities they had abstained from previously, such as drinking and taking drugs.

An innocent interest or an all-consuming obsession? Is social acceptance worth the cost -- both financially and emotionally? The answers depend on the extent to which the codes of behaviour are followed.

From local observations, today's youth portray themselves as both culturally aware and morally guided individuals. Perhaps the small-town setting of Stouffville has been a positive influence, emphasizing the importance of nature and community. No matter the region, however, teenagers are constantly exposed to a bombardment of media images which no doubt raises comparisons between the 'average' teen and a digitally altered model.

The important thing to remember is that although the teenage years are formative and can lay the foundation for good lifelong habits, one's wardrobe and popularity are merely material concerns that will be forgotten with age, or when the next trend comes along.

Alice Donoghue is a student at Stouffville District Secondary School.

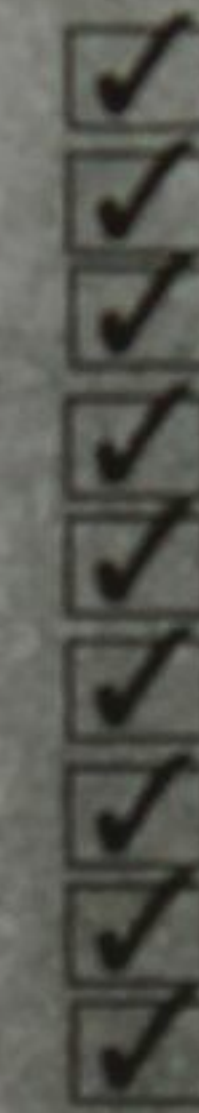
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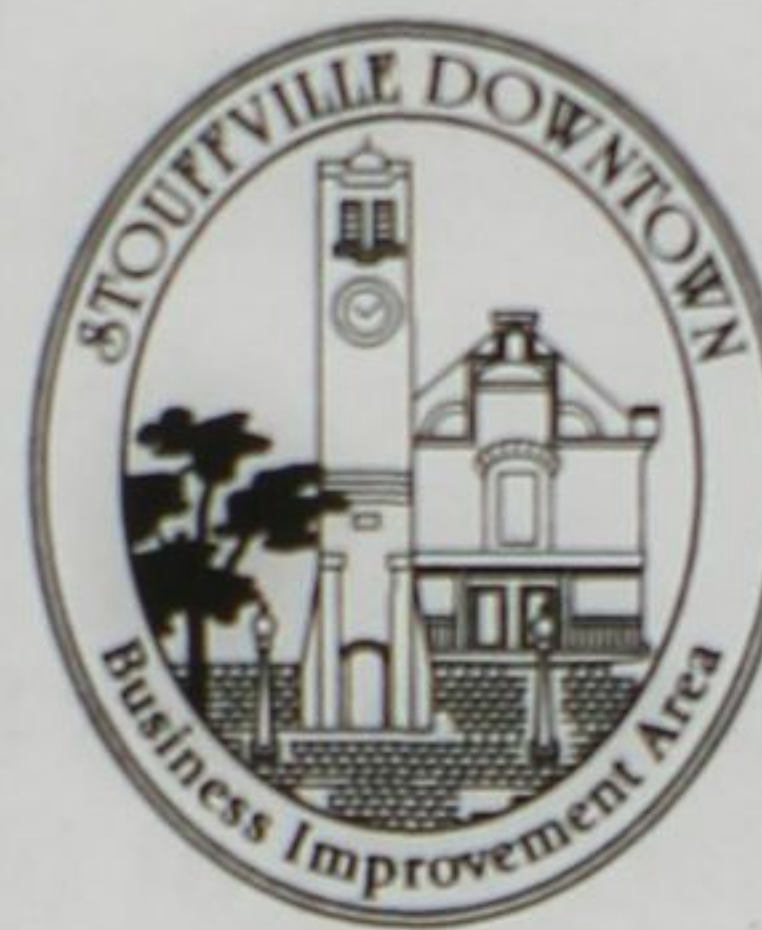


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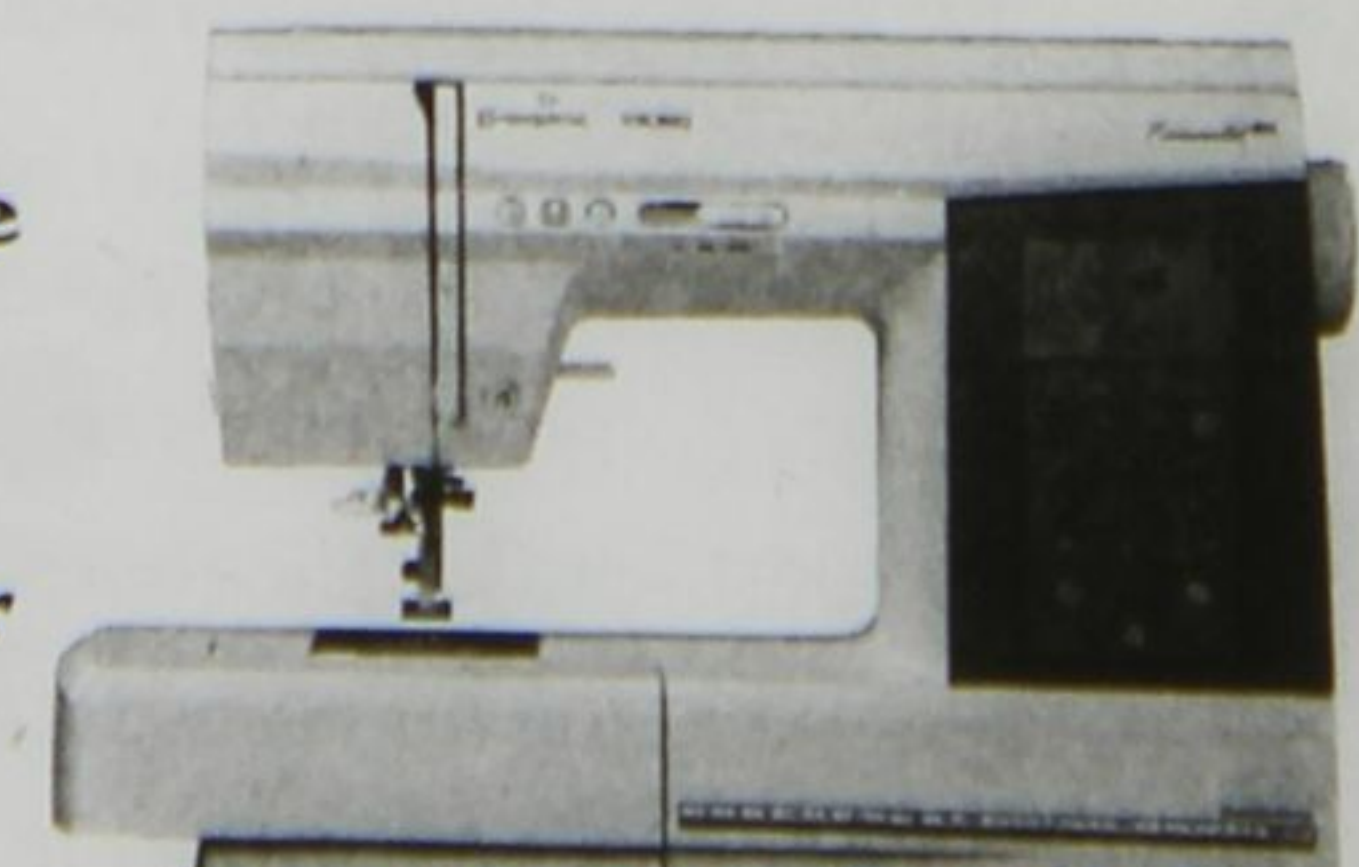
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