Theoretical Reflections on Social Determinants and Effects of Indecent Dressing among Female Undergraduates in Higher Institutions of Learning in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined the social determinants and effects of indecent dressing among female undergraduates in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Some factors that influence indecent dressing include home environment, peer group influence, negative influence of internet, changing social values. Effects of indecent dressing include sexual harassment and rape, contraction of HIV/AIDS, prostitution, ritual killing, poor academic performance, unwanted pregnancy etc. The paper is anchored on modernization theory and social learning theory. It was recommended that parents should be role models to their children and monitor the films their children watch. Also, the school management should ensure that laws and rules guiding indecent dressing in the higher institutions are enforced.

Key words: *dress code, female undergraduates, higher institutions, indecent dressing, social determinants*

Introduction

Recently, it has been observed that Nigerian universities are battling with the wave of indecency, notably among female students. The reign of skimpy dresses on campus has turned many campuses to fashion runways. However, besides wearing short skirts, some female undergraduate students throw caution to the wind by displaying their boobs as a cheap means of getting attention. Dress to kill is now a popular slogan in lecture halls with the intention of looking sexy or classy, forgetting that they ought to look responsible (Obilo & Okugo, 2013).

Indecent appearance has come to characterize the dress pattern of many students on the campus of higher learning in Nigeria. There is hardly any higher institution of learning in this country that is not faced with this nauseating problem. Students on these campuses of learning particularly the

female ones, dress seductively. What the girls call skirts that they wear is just "one inch" longer than their pants. When they put on such dresses, they struggle to sit down, find difficulty in climbing machines, cross gutters as well as pick anything from the ground. Apart from the skimpy and tight fitting nature of these dresses, they are again transparent; revealing certain parts of the bodies that under normal dressing patterns ought to be hidden away from the glare of people (Omede, 2011).

Globalization and modernization effect in the third world countries has permeated almost all facets of indigenous values and norms. It has become so obvious that if you do not behave, dress or speak like the Europeans, you are seen as primitive, unexposed and sometimes a deviant. One major social category that the craze for modernization has transformed is the youths. The youths in Africa now want to be exactly like their European counterparts in dressing, speaking and behavior (Uzobo, Olomu & Ayimoro, 2014). The dressing patterns of female undergraduates have been viewed as anti-African and are invented. This un-African dressing pattern among undergraduates of this generation has generated a lot of concerns and worry among the citizens. The dressing patterns of female undergraduate students are determined by factors such as mass media, peer pressure, religion, culture etc (Olori, 2003).

 Foster (1996) opined that indecent dressing is a major factor that influences sexual harassment among female adolescents. He observed that girls who frequently wear indecent dresses perceive themselves as special, thus their predisposition to be sexually harassed. Also, indecently dressed persons are involved in the behavior as a reaction to more beautiful persons in order to attract the attention of the opposite sex (Buunk, Siero & Vanden, 2000). This un-African dress pattern among the youths has generated lots of concern among the citizenry of the country. Religious institutions as well as institutions of learning are not resting on their oars to watch this immoral act being perpetuated but they speak against it. In a study conducted by Igbinovia (2005) it was observed that 60% of female undergraduate students in Nigerian universities dress indecently. Anadi, Egboka and Aniorobi (2011) opined that it is the overwhelming indecent dresses of the girls that attract much public concern and emphasis on the part of the girls. Anadi and Egboka (2007) also investigated indecent dressing among female undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. Indecent appearance has become the order of the day among female students in

tertiary institution. All the higher institutions in Nigeria are affected by this problem. Female undergraduates dress provocatively and seductively Obeta et al (2015) carried out a study in tertiary institutions in Abia State, Nigeria and results of their study showed that the female undergraduate students dress patterns are greatly influenced by imitation of western dress styles, peer/social group pressure, mass media, imitation of film actresses, fashion in vogue. Furthermore, findings of the study indicated that female students were exposed to being raped/sexual harassments, the image of the students/family were being tarnished, students being addressed as prostitutes and irresponsible, stealing, exposure to deadly diseases e.g. HIV/AIDS were the major effects on the students. The findings also showed that decay in human standard, spread of diseases among others is the effects of indecent dress patterns accepted by the students on the society.

It is worthy to note that the tertiary institutions are described as both an academic and social institution. It is regarded by the public as a panacea for the ills of the society. It is also expected to solve one's social, economic and political problems (Esiowu & Igbo, 2008). Due to influence of peers and other environmental pressure in higher institutions of learning, they have exaggerated need to appear and belong. Most Nigerian ladies have abandoned their traditional clothing styles and embraced foreign styles. Many youths have dropped their cultural clothing styles and adopted western dress styles for everyday wears. These dress patterns or styles are regarded as sexy fashion which will allow a degree of display of the body for male appraisal and approval. The female undergraduate students have completely shifted to this crazy dress pattern that makes them appear half naked most of the time (Obeta & Uwah, 2015). This theoretical paper examines the social determinants and effects of indecent dressing among female undergraduates in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Review

The objectives of this review are as follows.

1. To ascertain the forms of indecent dressing among female undergraduates in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria.
2. To examine the social determinants of indecent dressing among female undergraduates in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria.

3.   To identify the effects of indecent dressing on female undergraduates in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria

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Overview of the Problem of Indecent Dressing among Females in Higher Institutions of Learning in Nigeria

Indecent dressing has been considered as a major cause of the various assaults and sexual harassments recorded in the society overtime. Papoola and Kandi (2013) went on to address an adage which says "dress the way you want to be addressed" which means that the way one dresses speaks a lot about the person. Indecent dressing is an abnormal way of dressing which shocks or offends people. That is, the act of dressing that exposes some of the vital parts of the body usually sexual organs that should be covered. Indecent dressing which is the prevailing fashion among Nigerian youth is a relegation of morality and also a misplacement of priority all in the name of modernity. As a result of civilization, most ladies dress half naked to occasions or lectures all in the name of fashion and is contrary to the prestige placed on African women. For instance in Nigeria, ladies derive pleasure in wearing clothes such as miniskirts, bumper shorts, armless that directly expose one's body to the public and this might in some cases lead to sexual harassment (Anthony & Gershon, 2013).

The role of indecent dressing among Nigerian university students in government universities is causing a lot of concern to education stakeholders. There has been increase in dropout rate, carryover rate and outright failure rate among the students (Ifedili & Ifedili, 2015). Indecent dressing has been identified as the major factor influencing high rate of failure among undergraduate students. This dress pattern among female undergraduates in higher institutions of learning causes distractions and disruptions. Many unethical things have been attributed to dress code and they include cultism, student not focused, poor academic performance, constant breaking of rules and regulations, poor self image. Arowosola (2013) opined that indecent dressing simply means dressing in a way that is likely to shock or offend people especially when you are supposed to be in a learning environment. It is very common to see female undergraduates going to classes with their breasts being exposed and even wearing jean trousers that expose their underwear when they sit or bend. This manner of dressing attracts insult, assaults and sexual harassment.

Many of these students because of how they dressed had at one time or the other become victims of rape, lured into prostitution, used for ritual purpose, unable to complete their education or training and also engaged in other ancillary social and moral problems like cultism and lying to mention but a few (Omede, 2011). Indecent dressing is an exposure which is obviously a deliberate act to look sensuous, tantalizing and stimulating so as to draw the attention of the opposite sex and is more prevalent among singles (unmarried women). Olori (2003) sees this form of dressing as provocative, improper and unacceptable. These dress patterns by female students are morally offensive and reveal the high rate of moral decadence in the society.

According to Uzobo (2014), most worrisome of this dressing pattern is the adaptive culture of the youths manifested in indecent dressing both in public gathering and around their environment which is strongly contrary to the traditional socio-cultural values of dressing. The dressing pattern of female undergraduates has gone from bad to worse as each year passes by. Most of them seem to have become addicted to indecent dress patterns.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is anchored on modernization theory and social learning theory. These two theories are relevant in explaining the phenomenon of indecent dressing among female undergraduate students in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria.

Modernization theory refers to a model of a progressive transition from a pre-modern or traditional to a modern society. It is a description and explanation of the processes of transformation from traditional value system to modern value system. Modernization theory originated from the ideas of German Sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) who provided the basis for the modernization paradigm developed by Harvard Sociologist Talcott Parsons (1902-1979). Modernization is the process of change towards those types of social, economic and political systems that have developed in Western Europe and North America from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth and have then spread to other European countries and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the South American, Asian and African continents respectively (Armer & Katsillis 2000). In developing this theory, Armer and Katsillis (2000) maintained that the underlying description of social features and changes that are thought to characterize modern urban industrial societies are

theoretical assumptions and mechanisms to explain the shift from traditional to modern societal types. However, these explanatory systems draw upon the dominant theoretical perspectives in the 1950s and 1960s growing out of classical evolutionary, diffusion and structural functionalist theories. Diffusionsts added the ideas that cultural patterns associated with modern society could be transferred via social interaction (trade, war, travelers, media etc.). In relating this theory to the phenomenon at hand, indecent dressing by female adolescents can be attributed to adoption of western culture by our youths. Influence of media on youth has affected their dressing pattern. Female adolescents associate their dress pattern with modernity and have abandoned our cherished cultural manner of dressing.

Social learning theory was developed by Bandura (1977). This theory stemmed out of work by Miller and Dollard in 1941. Their proposition posits that if humans were motivated to learn a particular behavior that particular behavior would be learned through clear observations. By imitating these observed actions the individual observer would solidify that learned action and be rewarded with positive reinforcement (Miller & Dollard, 1941). The proposition of social learning was expanded upon and theorized by Albert Bandura from 1962 to the present. This theory posits that people learn from one another through observation, imitation and modeling. According to Bandura (1977) people learn through observing others behavior, attitudes and outcomes of those, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. Social learning theory explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural and environmental influences. It is a theory of learning and social behaviour which proposes that new behaviours can be acquired by observing and imitating others. Social learning theory also known as social cognitive theory is the idea that people learn by watching what others do and human thought processes are central to understanding personality. In relating social learning theory to indecent dressing among female undergraduates one can rightly say that these female adolescents learn the dress pattern from peers and film actresses by observing, imitating and modeling. They learn these western values of dressing from internet, television, magazine and newspaper.

Review of Related Literature

(a) Forms of Indecent Dressing among Female Undergraduates in Higher Institutions of Learning in Nigeria

Bojos and Marquet (2000) identified common types of indecent dressers on campuses. According to them, they include the elitist, the amorous, the unprincipled and the compensatory indecent dressers. The elitist seductive dressers are usually from privileged and economically empowered background. They usually flaunt their salient features like the breast and pubic in attempt to promote themselves which make them very prone to sexual harassment Bojos et al (2000) noted that most of such students' parents are in upper classes.

Amorous indecent dressers are sexually seductive but often avoid real intimacy. They simply play games by deceptively seducing their preys for economic purposes. The unprincipled indecent dressers are unscrupulous, deceptive, arrogant and exploitative while the compensatory indecent dressers do so to cover up for their feelings of inferiority. They only try to create illusions of being superior and exceptional on campus by dressing indecently. Findings about indecently dressed females indicate that they have maladaptive ideas about themselves particularly the belief that they are pleasurable and deserve to be treated as such.

Omede (2011) identified different forms of indecent dressing among female students in Kogi State College of Education. They are:

1. Sleevless tops
2. Body hugs
3. Short knickers
4. Transparent clothes
5. Bogus fashion jewelries
6. Spaghetti tops
7. Off shoulders
8. Wicket straps
9. Mono straps
10. Mini skirts
11. Dress and skirt with slit above the knees

12.   Tight trousers and dresses

13.   T-shirts and jean which carry immoral messages

14.   All clothes that reveal sensitive parts of the body such as the burst, chest, belly, upper arms and buttocks

15.   Rosy chicks

16.   Eye shadow

17.   Excessive lipsticks

18.   Rastafarian hairstyles

19.   Nail attachments

Below are some pictures of indecent dressing among female undergraduate students.

Fig. 1: Pictures of female indecent dressers in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria.

(b) Social Determinants of Indecent Dressing among Females in Higher Institutions of Learning in Nigeria

There are various factors that influence indecent dressing among female undergraduates and they include:

Home Environment: Every child in a community whether good or bad has a home as well as parents. The influence of home environment on the development of children is not in any way doubtful (Omede & Odiba, 2000). The home is every child's first window to the outside world. What the parents do with the child at this level in terms of training and orientation go a long way to determining what the child becomes tomorrow. Children live or die, thrive or wither, due to the decision of their parents (Gushee, 2004). It is from the parents that the child is taught these through

instructions, observations and practices from parents and other siblings particularly the senior ones. The implication of this is that parents must be seen to be morally exemplary.

According to Whitehurst (2004) the most important people in their children's lives are their parents. But how many parents have good moral character? How many of them give attention to their children? Children are kept incommunicado as a result of perpetual and prolonged absence of either or both parents from home, business and other engagements. Most parents have no time to check their children's wardrobes and the implication of this is that they can wear anything in form of dress.

Apart from this issue of neglect, many parents especially mothers buy anything in the form of dresses for their children, they do not see the need to be discreet and modest in the choice of dresses they buy. Today it is not possible to see a university lady tie wrapper apart from the one they use as coverlets in the night. Improper home upbringing is a major factor responsible for this moral problem. When right values, beliefs and attitude are concretely laid at the childhood stage such a child is more likely to grow and develop later in life healthy.

Peer Group Influence: Peer group as an agent of socialization has an overwhelming and tremendous influence on young people. The desire to belong and the fear of rejection have led many youths into evil or immoral acts sometimes against their will. Some of them can be influenced by their peers that dress indecently leading them to do the same because they want to belong to the group. Some of them lack the strong will to say no to evil for fear of being isolated. Apart from isolationism, peer conformity could be the result of faulty foundational home training. A child with healthy home training should be able to quickly resolve identity crises, distill between rights and wrongs no matter how the wrongs are coloured and then maintaining his/her integrity and the good name of the family (Omede, 2011).

Negative Influence of Internet: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has helped to revolutionize the community tremendously. It has via the use of internet, communication satellites, mobile phones etc. helped to bring people together, culture or language notwithstanding. Through the activities of home videos, satellites and other media agents, values (faulty or correct), fashions (modern, modest and immodest) are traded across culture and nations. In as much as ICT

is helpful consequential to human and societal developments, the rate of abuse and the irregular ways they are used, call for great concern. Most of the youths and children that are exposed to some of their contents are most times negative to quickly fall vulnerable. The parents of these children and their senior siblings in Diasporas are the ones promoting indecent and immoral practices and they are relayed through videos, pornography and music as well as advertisement and fashion parade. In as much as ICT is good and beneficial to humanity. The associative evil needs to be checked and resisted (Omede, 2011).

Changing Social Values: Africa has a very rich culture that she needs to be proud of and preserve for posterity but the unfortunate situation is that most cherished African values are fast fading due to non-patronage and modernization or acculturation. Today youths cannot tell well what these values are. For instance, the beautiful hair braiding typical of African ladies are being traded for hair "roasting" in saloons, modern and dignifying dress pattern are giving ways to skimpy, transparent and provocative dresses found all around today. Many of these youths that dress immodestly may not even know what is wrong with the dress because nobody suggests to them that it is wrong. Their parents applaud them in those dresses, do not even ask how the dresses came about and when they appear in public. They are cheered by their mates and friends and to make the matter worse, all around them what they see on people is not different from what they wear. Their home videos, televisions and internet programs do not differ when the society has no good moral values as legacies to bequeath to them? It is odd for a vulture to look different in the midst of other vultures (Omede, 2011).

(c) Effects of Indecent Dressing

Indecent dressing could lead to the following: sexual harassment, HIV/AIDS, prostitution, ritual killing, poor academic performance, unwanted pregnancy.

Sexual Harassment: There is the likelihood that ladies who dress indecently or provocatively could be prone to sexual harassment or rape. These forms of dresses suggest that such ladies need attention and that they are irresponsible and so there are always irresponsible men to dialogue, lure or force them to bed for sex.

Contraction of HIV/AIDS: This is another risk factor that immodestly dressed ladies could be prone to. When such ladies are forced into sex against their will they may be exposed to Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS because of lack of protection (Omede, 2011).

Prostitution: Skimpy, transparent dresses are known in ancient Africa to be the dress pattern of prostitutes or whores, most ladies found in such dresses are always negotiated for sex or social intimacy because they are most times though to be without husbands. Apart from this notion, most campus ladies that dress this way engage in prostitution and commercial sex to be able to sponsor and sustain this form of dresses. The cumulative effect of this is unwanted pregnancies, HIV/AIDS infection and death.

Ritual Killing: Some female undergraduates who dress indecently have fallen victims of ritual killers. Many of them based on their mode of dressing had been invited for a supposed sex only to be murdered by ritual killers.

Poor academic performance: Most female undergraduate students who dress indecently have poor academic record because they pay more attention to their appearance than their academic work. Omede (2011) opined that most students tend to have little or no time for their academic work. Their concern is how to look good and appear in the latest fashion. Many of them have carry over courses with the consequences of staying longer in the school than is normal to graduate, graduate with very weak grades and some may not even graduate at all having outlived their studentship in the university and not being able to pass some prescribed courses. Some of these students get frustrated and they become armed robbers, prostitutes, home or marriage breakers, drug addicts or traffickers.

Unwanted pregnancy: A female student who dresses indecently may be raped or forced into sex and pregnancy may result. Such pregnancy is unwanted and this may hinder the student's academic studies. Some of these students who are faced with unwanted pregnancies resort to abortion. In some cases, they lose their lives as a result of dangerous abortion.

Conclusion

The mode of dressing by female undergraduates in tertiary institutions is worrisome and unacceptable. The rate at which indecent dressing has infiltrated into the moral fiber and academic progression of university students is alarming. Most female students are more preoccupied with what to put on to seduce the opposite sex than to read to pass their examinations. This ugly trend in dress pattern should be addressed by different agents of socialization such as the family, school, mass media and religious institutions.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for possible implementation.

1. The mass media is a very strong agent of socialization. Televisions, radio, magazines and newspapers should be used as channels of communication to control the rate of indecent dressing among females. The display of some indecently dressed young girls for adverts should be discouraged.

2. The school management in tertiary institutions should organize seminars, conferences, workshops and public enlightenment programmes regularly to sensitize and enlighten undergraduates on the need to dress decently in the society.

3. As role models, parents should dress decently. The behavior of parents impacts on their children more greatly than what they tell them to do or not to do. Parents should monitor the films their children watch. Proper parental upbringing is very important to prevent children from succumbing quickly to pressure from peers.

4. University management staff, lecturers and security personnel should ensure that rules on dress code are enforced in higher institutions. Some universities in Nigeria have introduced dress codes for their students; the problem is not making the rules but enforcement. The university should set up disciplinary committee to handle cases of indecent dressing among female students.

5. Religious institutions should also help to check the rising trend of indecent dressing among youth by preaching and counseling them on the implications and consequences of this dress pattern.

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