

PERCEPTION OF CROSS-DRESSING CULTURE AMONG STUDENTS: A STUDY OF NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perception of students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka on cross-dressing culture. The study objectives were to determine the types of cross-dressing, to find whether or not cross-dressing exists in the University and the cause(s) of cross-dressing. A descriptive survey research design was used. Data were collected from 265 respondents using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages were used for analysis, while the research hypotheses were tested with Chi-square (χ^2) test statistics at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that noticeable level of cross-dressing was practised among students. Assumed cross-gender identities commonly take the form of wearing clothing that is usually associated with the opposite gender and social media display of an opposite-gender identity. Peer influence and social media exposure were identified as contributing factors to the problem. The results of Chi-square test of hypothesis show that there is a significant occurrence of cross-dressing influenced by social media. It was recommended that the management of the university should mount awareness programs, counselling, and enforce policies prohibiting negative cross-gender cultural orientations on campus.

Keywords: cross-dressing, culture, gender, social expectations, perception

INTRODUCTION

Social expectations, established by every society, are among the most significant unwritten rules globally. Cultural traditions define these expectations due to a fascination with the way people act, talk, and look. The concept involves the gendered clothing of individuals, and the signalling of the person reflects the societal idea of the connection between identity and conformity (Oakley, 2016). These excellent and powerful social rules contain various elements of identity, such as behaviour, status, appearance, as well as the principles, for instance, signalling and rules.

Cross-dressing involves numerous elements of history, for instance, wearing opposite-gender clothing to represent ritual, entertainment, and survival. The practice contains several repeating patterns from historical military strategies and the masquerades in the background (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). African societies used traditional theatre which created a

cultural texture and represented female characters; however, the contemporary era contains slightly different personal expressions. Numerous shifts give the practice shape outlining areas where community rituals turn to fashion trends and theatre changes to individual identity.

Globalization and social media have transformed youth culture nowadays. Through TikTok, Instagram, movies and music videos, the youth get exposed to diverse gender systems different from old binary boxes of masculine and feminine (Connell, 2009). Universities have become venues for experimentation where free-thinking and alternative lifestyles are validated, negotiated, or disrupted by students and authorities.

Consider an example from Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK). The students come from diverse ethnic, religious and social backgrounds, making it a vibrant body. This diversity is expressed in radically different attitudes on what is acceptable clothing. Some students view cross-dressing as a form of self-expression. Some people find it morally wrong and culturally offensive. These conflicting ideas result in actual friction on campus. Though this issue is now clearly visible, no one has paid any attention to what Nigerian university students think about it.

Despite the visibility of cross-dressing in media and the growing discourse around gender identity, limited empirical research exists on how students in Nigerian universities perceive and engage with this phenomenon. At UNIZIK, little is known about the forms cross-dressing takes, how prevalent it is, the attitudes of peers and authorities, and the psychological and social consequences experienced by students. This gap hinders evidence-based policy formulation and informed institutional responses.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this study is to investigate perceptions of cross-dressing among students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University. However, the specific objectives include:

1. To identify the forms of cross-dressing practiced among students.
2. To determine the occurrence and prevalence of cross-dressing in UNIZIK.
3. To examine the consequences of cross-dressing on student life and wellbeing.
4. To analyze factors influencing cross-dressing among university students.

5. To propose solutions and policy recommendations to address challenges associated with cross-dressing.

STUDY HYPOTHESES

1. Cross dressing does not significantly occur among male and female students
2. Social media does not significantly influence cross dressing among students

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on cross-dressing culture have increased in recent years, particularly with the rise of social media and digital entertainment. Researchers have examined public perception, media representation, and the social consequences associated with cross-dressing, especially within youth populations. Below is brief review of these contexts.

Awareness of Cross - Dressing

Ukadike (2023) conducted a study on the awareness and influence of cross-dressing on the knowledge, attitude, and practice of social media users in the South Eastern Zone of Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design and found that awareness of cross-dressing was relatively high among respondents due to exposure through social media platforms. However, despite this high level of awareness, the majority of respondents expressed negative attitudes toward cross-dressing. Many participants associated the practice with moral decline and the promotion of same-sex relationships. The study concluded that increased exposure does not necessarily translate into acceptance, as cultural and religious beliefs strongly shape perceptions.

Factors Influencing Cross-Dressing

Several factors influence cross-dressing among university students. Media exposure plays a significant role, as global fashion trends increasingly blur traditional gender boundaries (Connell, 2009). Fajoye, Sanusi, and Omipidan (2023) examined media portrayal of cross-dressers in Nigeria and its impact on society. Their findings revealed that Nigerian media often present cross-dressers in stereotypical and sensational ways. Such portrayals were found to reinforce stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion. The study also highlighted possible psychological consequences, including anxiety and emotional distress experienced by individuals who are publicly ridiculed. However, the researchers noted that balanced

media representation could promote tolerance and understanding. The study concluded that media framing plays a significant role in shaping public perception of cross-dressing culture

Psychological factors, such as identity exploration and the search for self-acceptance, also contribute to cross-dressing practices (Butler, 1990). Additionally, institutional culture and societal attitudes determine whether students feel safe or threatened when expressing themselves through dressing. Peer influence also shapes behaviour, as individuals are more likely to adopt non-conforming styles when they feel supported by friends.

Attitudes towards Cross- Dressing Practices

In another study conducted outside Nigeria, Operario and Rapada Jr. (2024) investigated attitudes toward cross-dressing among senior high school students in the Philippines. Using a quantitative survey method, the researchers found that students' perceptions were significantly influenced by gender and religion. Male students were more likely to express negative attitudes compared to female students, and strong religious affiliation was associated with lower acceptance levels. Interestingly, age was not found to be a significant factor in shaping perception. The study further revealed that cross-dressers often experience discrimination and social discomfort within school environments.

Furthermore, Amodu, Ikeokwu, and Ekundayo (2026) analyzed public reactions to cross-dressing in Nigeria through linguistic analysis of social media comments. Their findings showed that public discourse surrounding male cross-dressers was largely negative. Many online commenters justified their opposition using cultural, moral, and religious arguments. The study concluded that cross-dressing remains highly controversial within Nigerian society, with strong resistance rooted in traditional gender norms.

Consequences of Cross-Dressing

The consequences of cross-dressing vary depending on social context and individual experiences. On the positive side, scholars argue that freedom of expression can enhance self-esteem and psychological well-being, especially when individuals feel accepted within their social environment (American Psychological Association, 2022). Cross-dressing may also encourage creativity, self-discovery, and confidence among young adults.



Conversely, in conservative societies, cross-dressing often attracts stigma, discrimination, and social rejection. Students who engage in the practice may experience verbal harassment, bullying, or exclusion from peer groups, which can negatively affect their mental health and academic performance (Meyer, 2003). Institutional reactions, including disciplinary measures, may further compound these challenges.

Summary of Literature Review

From the reviewed studies, it is evident that awareness of cross-dressing culture is increasing, particularly among young people exposed to digital media. However, acceptance remains limited due to cultural, moral, and religious influences. The literature also indicates that cross-dressing may lead to social consequences such as stigma, discrimination, and psychological distress. Despite these findings, there is limited research focusing specifically on university students in Nigeria, particularly in institutions such as Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining the perception of cross-dressing culture among students within a university context.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a descriptive and inferential research design. The descriptive aspect of the design enabled the researcher to describe and summarize students' perceptions, opinions, and attitudes toward cross-dressing culture, while the inferential aspect made it possible to draw conclusions about the population based on data obtained from the sample through a structured questionnaire, designed by the researcher, which served as the sole instrument for data collection. Responses were measured using a four-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

The survey design involved the use of a structured questionnaire administered to students in the Department of Sociology. This design was considered suitable because it allows data to be collected from a relatively large number of respondents at the same time without manipulating any variables. In addition, the design facilitated the use of statistical techniques to analyze the data and make meaningful interpretations of the findings.

The area of the study is Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised all undergraduate students at the Awka campus of Nnamdi

Azikiwe University. However, a representative sample was selected for the study as it would be impractical to study the entire population. Sociology Department was purposively selected because of their exposure to social and cultural issues relating to gender, identity, and human behaviour. The Department has 784 registered students which constituted the target population.

However, a sample size of 265 students was determined using Taro Yamane (1967) formula, which is appropriate for large populations. The sample ensured adequate representation of the entire population.

Table 1: Number of students in Sociology Department

Department: Sociology	Population Size	Sample sizes
Level 1	197	67
Level 2	196	66
Level 3	195	66
Level 4	196	66
Total	784	265

The questionnaire was administered directly to students in the Department of Sociology by the researchers and retrieved immediately to ensure a high response rate.

FINDINGS/RESULTS

A total of 265 copies of questionnaire were administered and returned valid for analysis. Field data were analysed using frequency tables and percentage while Chi-Square statistical tool was used to test hypotheses with the aid of SPSS at 0.05 level of significance

Analysis of Study Objectives

Study Objective 1: To identify the forms of cross –dressing observed among students

Table 2: Observed Forms of Cross – Dressing

Forms of Cross-Dressing	Frequency	Percentage
Wearing clothes of opposite gender	172	64.9
Use of makeup by males	158	59.6
Use of wigs and artificial hair by males	149	56.2
Masculine dressing style by female	181	68.3
Social media display of opposite gender identity	167	63.0

Table 2 reveals that the most commonly observed form of cross-dressing is masculine dressing style by females (68.3%). Wearing clothes associated with the opposite gender (64.9%) and social media display (63.0%) was also highly reported. This indicates that cross-dressing among students is mainly expressed through fashion patterns and social media influence.

Study Objective 2: To determine the occurrence and prevalence of cross-dressing in UNIZIK.

Table 3: Occurrence of Cross-Dressing

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	98	37.0
Agree	87	32.8
Disagree	46	17.4
Strongly Disagree	34	12.8
Total	265	100.0

From Table 3, 69.8% (Strongly Agree and Agree) confirmed that cross-dressing occurs among students. This shows that cross-dressing is visibly present in the university environment.

Study Objective 3: To examine factors that influence cross-dressing among students

Table 4: Peer Influence on cross-dressing among students

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	92	34.7
Agree	88	33.2
Disagree	51	19.2
Strongly Disagree	34	12.8
Total	265	100.0

Table 4 shows that 67.9% of respondents agreed that peer influence contributes to cross-dressing. This implies that students are influenced by their friends and social groups.

Table 5: Social Media Influence on cross-dressing among students

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	101	38.1
Agree	84	31.7
Disagree	45	17.0
Strongly Disagree	35	13.2
Total	265	100.0

Table 5 shows that 69.8% of respondents agreed that social media influences cross-dressing behavior. This shows that online exposure plays a significant role.

TEST OF HYPOTHESES

Chi- square statistical tool was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Decision Rule: Reject H_0 : if p-value < 0.05.

Hypothesis 1:

H_0 : Cross dressing does not significantly occur among male and female students.

H_1 : Cross dressing significantly occurs among male and female students

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	43.63 ^a	3	.0003
Likelihood Ratio	44.12	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.43.32	1	.004
N of Valid Cases	265		

Decision

Since p-value (0.00) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected and concludes that there is a occurrence of cross dressing among students.

Hypothesis Two

H_0 : Social media does not significantly influence cross dressing among male and female students

H_1 : Social media significantly influences cross dressing among male and female students

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	44.56 ^a	3	.0000
Likelihood Ratio	45.02	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.44.1	1	.000
	2		
N of Valid Cases	265		

Decision

Since p-value (.000) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Conclusion

Social media significantly influences cross-dressing among students.

SUMMARY

This study investigated students’ perception of cross-dressing culture in Nnamdi Azikiwe University. The research focused on identifying the common forms of cross-dressing among students, determining whether the practice exists within the university, and examining the factors that influence such behaviour.

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Data were collected from 265 respondents through a structured questionnaire. The collected data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, and Chi-square (χ^2) statistical analysis with the help of SPSS at a 0.05 level of significance.

The results of the study showed that cross-dressing is present among students and is noticeable on campus. The findings indicated that common forms include dressing in clothing traditionally associated with the opposite gender, masculine-style dressing among females, and the display of opposite-gender identity on social media platforms. The study also revealed that many students perceive cross-dressing as occurring frequently within the university.



RECOMMENDATION

- a. It is recommended that the management of the university should mount awareness programs, set up or strengthen counselling units to help students make informed decisions regarding cross-dressing.
- b. University management should enforce policies prohibiting negative cross-gender cultural orientations on campus.
- c. The Students Union Government and the university authority should collaborate as partners in progress to curb cross-dressing practices that are detrimental to social norms and academic regulations.

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