



SPORT AS AN INFLUENCE ON WOMEN TROUSER FASHION: A CASE OF IGBO IN SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Igbo are found in the South-Eastern Nigeria. Their women are known for their elaborate and colourful cultural dress. During the pre-colonial period, their formal clothing was the same as their modern-day clothing though made with less expensive materials. But after the westernization, their clothes became more modern, in that clothes like skirts, shirts, trousers, knickers, shorts, gowns of different sizes and styles, jackets, coats, and pieces of jewelry were found being utilized by the women in fashion. Although some modern females wear trousers for various purposes including sports, they are still frowned upon in some cases especially if worn when attending their towns' meetings. Thus the usage of trousers in sports has forced its acceptance by some people due to the ease and decency it offers the wearer. From wearing trousers during sports activities, some females have now fully accepted wearing trousers as one of their garb by using different fabrics used by the Igbo women as cloth for constructing pairs of trousers worn to different occasions. This study is qualitative research. It employed the use of interviews, participant observations, and photography to collect some data. It hinged on the theories of social change and cultural diffusion for analysis and found out how trousers became accepted by some of the Igbo, and also the reasons why some are still rejecting them to date. It summarily suggests that the wearing of trousers should know no gender, it should not be seen as a taboo but rather a feminine way of protecting the body against some weather cues and for easy movement, especially on road travel considering the insecurity one faces on road travels in Nigeria.

Keywords: sportswear, trousers, Igbo land, apparel for females in Igbo land, fashion, clothing.

Introduction

The fashion industry is challenging traditional gender expectations, breaking down barriers, and embracing versatility. Unisex and gender-neutral fashion lines are gaining traction, promoting the idea that clothing should not be confined by gender.

This shift reflects a society that values individuality and inclusivity, which is evident in the Igbo women's trouser fashion in South Eastern Nigeria.

It is challenging to track the development of African attire due to the scarcity of historical evidence. Early African clothing history has been reconstructed from art, oral traditions,



and ongoing customs within communities. Clothing serves as a way to express gender visually and differs significantly from culture to culture. Gender-specific dressing goes beyond just playing complementary roles; power dynamics are closely intertwined. For instance, the adoption of trousers by Western women signifies a significant redefinition of femininity, although it may not necessarily alter the existing power dynamics (Goughnour 2014). Sport has been a powerful force in shaping cultural norms and practices around the world. In many societies, the influence of sports has extended beyond the playing field to influence fashion and clothing choices. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among the Igbo people in South-Eastern Nigeria, where the participation of women in sports has contributed to a shift in traditional clothing practices, particularly concerning the wearing of trousers. This paper aims to explore the impact of sports on the adoption of trousers by Igbo women, shedding light on the cultural and social factors at play. By analyzing the historical context and contemporary trends, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the intersection between sports and clothing choices among the Igbo community.

The Igbo tribe is one of the most highly populated tribes found in Nigeria and the major tribe in South Eastern Nigeria. They are found in Imo, Anambra, Ebonyi, Abia, Enugu State, and some parts of Rivers and

Delta States (Culture Trip, 2018). They have a rich cultural heritage, and one of the various ways in which they exhibit it is through their indigenous dress culture. They are adorned with this mode of dressing during special occasions and for religious purposes, for instance, marriage ceremonies, kingship coronations, chieftaincy title taking, the naming of a newborn child, Sunday services, birthday celebrations, uniforms for different groups of men and women to mention but a few. The traditional garb for men is usually a jumper paired with a pair of trousers or a piece of George material tied at the waist with a sort of trouser/ knickers underneath, the jumper could be made from a fabric decorated with the designs of some non-abstracted heads of leopard, tiger, horse, dog, and others called *isiagu*, laces, and some other western fabrics inform of polished cotton, suede is also used to construct some fashionable styles for the men. An Indigenous hand-woven fabric known as Akwete is also used to construct some wear for the men folk (Chudi-Duru 2017).

The Igbo women are known for their devotedness to high-class fashion as regards their cultural values in dressing. They can effortlessly be noticed and identified in any ceremonial events by their attires which are solely distinctive. There are also modern trends in those attires for specific occasions. A sample is placed below on plate 1.



Plate: 1. An Igbo Lady dressed in a gown made of George fabric. The lady accessorized her apparel with some notable accessories peculiar to an Igbo woman in contemporary fashion. Source: asoedbiguest.com

In proper Igbo women's dress fashion, she is expected to be adorned with two sets of wrappers; usually tied on top of each other, the longer one which is the inner is tied from the hips to the ankle while the shorter one (the upper) that is on top is tied from the waist down to the knee region. These sets of double wrappers could be fashioned out of George materials (Indian madras) both plain and decorated, laces, African wax printed fabrics, and Akwete hand-woven fabrics. This is complemented with a beaded or lace blouse to match. Other accessories are headgear, beads around the neck, earrings, a horse whip (for brides and titled women), a hand fan, shoes or sandals and a handbag, handkerchiefs, bangles, anklets, and others (Chudi-duru, 2024). This study observes that a core Igbo woman ties her double wrapper for the general village meetings and various women group meetings including the husbands' kindred meeting, burial ceremonies, August general meetings for

women, *Umuada* meetings (daughters of the land), and *ndinwunyedi/ndinyom* (married women), church meetings and so many others.

This study observes that no woman dares put on jean trousers or another type of trousers made from any fabric for the above-named meetings and occasions, and if any ventures, she is being frowned upon and walked out perhaps a fine will be paid. Whereas during sports or exercises, wearing trousers is encouraged. One question that comes is this: why can't those who frown at wearing trousers by women advise them to put on their double wrappers while carrying out their sporting and gymnasium activities? Some major objectives of this research are to find out if patriarchy, cultural or religious beliefs play major roles in this practice or not and to find out if sports as a factor was among the reasons why some women adhere to the wearing of trousers even when they are not in the field performing some sporting



activities. To achieve this, the researcher utilizes interviews, participant observation, and photography as research instruments to collect some data. It further revealed some factors that led to the wearing of trousers and tights by some women in Igbo land without being mindful of what their culture supports. In discussing this topic, she considered some theories such as social

change and cultural diffusion, which are based on socio-cultural dynamics of clothing and gender. Through this exploration, one can gain valuable insights into the broader implications of sports on cultural practices and identity among the Igbo people. The two wrappers tied by a group of Igbo for an occasion are placed in plate 2.



Plate 2: Umuada Amawbia Inc. (the daughters from a community called Amawbia, a town in Anambra State, during a burial ceremony of their traditional ruler. They are tying the double wrapper with African wax printed fabrics worn with a white or black blouse depicting a mourning mood. Source: C. Chudi-Duru (2022)

Theoretical framework

One theory that can be used to analyze the influence of sports on the wearing of trousers by women in Igbo culture is the theory of social change. The theory of social change has been discussed and developed by various sociologists and social theorists, including Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Talcott Parsons (1902-1979), and Max Weber (1864-1920). According to Durkheim, people's norms, beliefs, and values make up a collective consciousness, or a shared way of understanding and

behaving in the world. He also considered society to have developed from a traditional to a modern society through the development and expansion of the division of labour. These thinkers have explored how societal changes impact social structures, norms, and behaviors. This theory suggests that sports may have led to a shift in traditional gender roles and clothing norms within the Igbo community, as women became more involved in physical activities traditionally associated with men. As a result, the acceptance and adoption of trousers by women may be seen as a



reflection of changing gender dynamics influenced by the introduction of sports.

Another theory that could be applied is the theory of cultural diffusion. The theory of cultural diffusion has been studied by anthropologists and cultural theorists such as Franz Uri Boas (1858-1942) and Ruth Benedict (1887-1948). Boas is of the view that culture developed historically through interactions of groups of people and the diffusion of ideas. They have examined how cultural traits, including clothing styles, are transmitted and adopted across different societies through interaction and contact. This theory emphasizes the spread of cultural traits, including clothing preferences, through contact and interaction between different cultures. In the case of Igbo women wearing trousers, sports could have served as a channel for the introduction of new clothing styles associated with sports participation from outside the traditional Igbo culture, leading to the integration of trousers into Igbo women's attire. These theories provide some insight into the potential influences of sports on the wearing of trousers by women in the Igbo community in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Apparels for females in Igbo land

Before the advent of the Europeans in Igbo land, little girls were usually nude till when they reached their teenage hood and started developing breasts and pubic hair. An unmarried Igbo maiden of marriageable age wore little clothing like a short piece of wrapper just to conceal some private parts. They also wore some beads (jigida) on their hips for different purposes mostly for body enhancement. Their necks and ears are accentuated with beads. The bodies were decorated with uli paintings which comprised some symbolic motifs based on

the Igbo worldview (Willis 1989). This dressing usually changes to covering up from the chest to the ankle making use of the double wrapper. One is tied from the waist down to the ankle, while the upper is tied from the chest through under the arm down to the knee. This dressing was accentuated with coral beads worn on the neck with the accompanying earrings and sometimes at the waist (Basden 1983).

By the time the Portuguese merchants in the 15th century came in contact with the Igbo and also the European missionaries, explorers, and colonists came to Igbo land in the 19th century and early part of the 20th century, some varieties of clothing were introduced. They dressed in their ways which were quite different from the Igbo. They discouraged the new converts from exposing their bodies basing it on the expected Christian mode of decent dressing and also gave them some clothes as gifts.

The missionaries dressed in their shirts and trousers, the school teachers had their smart dressing too, the priests had their specific way of dressing, and those that presided over some cases for the indigenes also were dressed in a pair of knickers usually made of khaki fabric, well tucked in shirts with a tie at the neck, shoes, and stockings (Achebe 1958). The females amongst them were not found decked in two-layered wrappers but rather they wore well-covered gowns, hats, hoses, scarves, skirts, blouses and some had gloves on. During this period was the first time sporty outfits like pairs of trousers were seen in Igbo land but were worn by the males, not females. The Igbo took to liking the clothes from the West. When the fairly used were imported into Nigeria through the coastal regions in Rivers State, those who could afford some, bought some of those clothing and started adorning themselves with them. The roots of Okrika culture in



Nigeria can be found as early as the 15th century when African societies made some of their earliest encounters with Europeans. Over time, as European traders, missionaries, and colonizers introduced Western clothing to the continent, locals began embracing Western styles. This embrace of Western clothing became more pronounced in the late nineteenth century due to several factors. For one, European clothing represented modernity and sophistication, carrying the allure of a different way of life that was associated with the colonizers. In early Nigerian societies, wearing Western clothing became a symbol of social status and assimilation into the changing times.

Omole (2023) buttressed the above statement and narrates that when Portuguese merchants first encountered the Igbo people in the 15th century, and later when European missionaries, explorers, and colonists arrived in Igbo land in the 19th and early 20th centuries, they introduced various types of clothing that differed from traditional Igbo attire. They encouraged converts to dress modestly according to Christian standards and gave them Western-style clothing. The missionaries, school teachers, and priests all had their distinct ways of dressing, and Western clothing, including sporty outfits, became popular among the

Igbo. As European clothing became more accessible in Nigeria, people began to embrace Western styles as a symbol of modernity and sophistication. Christian missionaries played a significant role in promoting Western clothing as a sign of religious conversion and assimilation into European culture. The late 19th century also saw the emergence of urban centers and formal education in Nigeria, leading to greater exposure to Western clothing through interactions with colonial administrators, missionaries, and other students. This growing demand for Western clothing led to the rise of a market for second-hand Western clothes, with the term "Okrika" originating from a town in Rivers State known for trading in second-hand clothing. The practice of buying and selling second-hand clothing, often referred to as "bend down select" or "boskoro," has evolved to encompass a diverse array of garments from different regions and fashion trends. Since that time, the Igbo woman learned how to wear varieties of clothing found in the bales of okirika imported into the country which different types of trousers are among. Some bales of okirika wear (bend down boutique/select, second new clothes) in a warehouse ready for dispatching, procurement, or shipping are placed on the plate below.

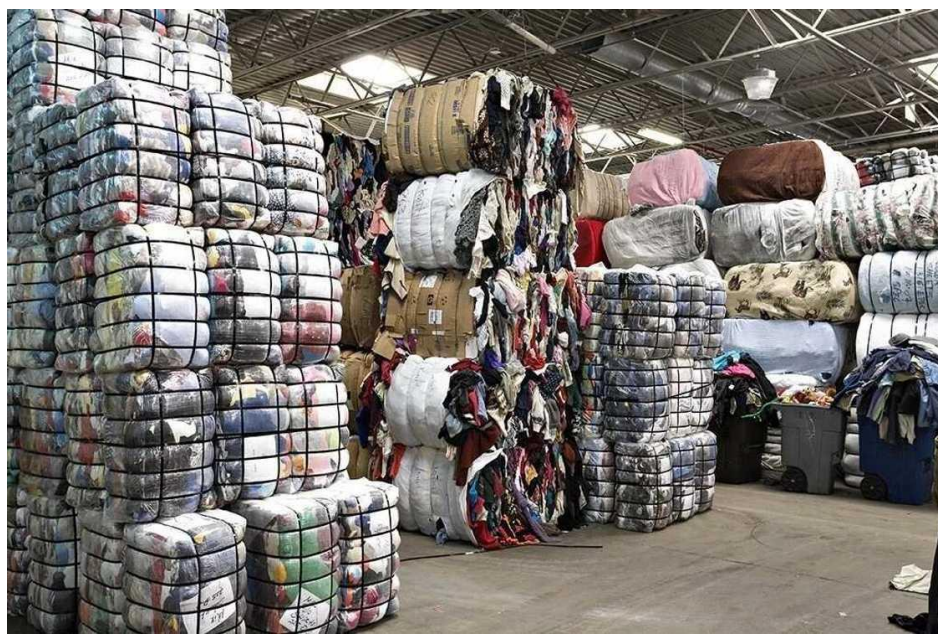




Plate 3: Bales of okrika wears. Source: buzznigeria.com Read more: <https://www.legit.ng/1174691-origin-okrika-clothes-nigeria.html>

Goerge fabrics also known as Indian madras, are very popular among Igbo women and are used for special occasions in the contemporary Igbo fashion such as weddings, thanksgiving services, traditional marriages, and other traditional ceremonies like chieftaincy title taking, new yam festivals, Ofala festivals and others. Embroidered George fabrics have noble and festive appearances and they found their way through the migration of some foreigners to Nigeria (chudi-Duru, 2021). They also wear some clothes made from laces for some specific occasions. These laces are used to construct different types of apparel, ranging from double wrapper and a blouse to match, skirts and blouses, short gowns (fitted or loose), long flowing gowns, fitted long gowns, pairs of trousers and tops, dinner wears and many others.

Another fabric used by the Igbo women to construct some apparel is the traditional hand-woven cloth of the Igbo known as Akwete. It is indigenous to them. These fabrics are employed in sewing two wrappers and a lace blouse to match. But in some cases, they could be constructed into skirts and blouses; depending on one's choice (Chudi-Duru 2017).

Having been influenced by the English way of dressing, this study observes that the women make use of natural and synthetic fabrics such as cotton, linen, silk, rayon, polyester, acrylic, wool, nylon, spandex, taffeta, and others to construct some English wears. Some also visit the boutiques to procure some already-made clothes. These already-made clothes are informed of skirts and blouses, trousers, gowns, jackets, blazers, sweaters, knickers, sportswear, nightwear, and dungaree.

African wax printed textiles are not left out, in that the women use these as uniforms for various groups they belong to. They also construct them into various styles of apparel. Some women prefer to construct them into long/short skirts and blouses, gowns of different styles and sizes, and trousers matched with their blouses, jumpsuits, jackets, kimono, palazzo, bags, footwear, pieces of jewelry, and others.



Plate 4(right): a pair of trousers and blouse made with African wax printed fabric. Source: Pinterest
Plate 4(left): African wax printed fabrics constructed into a jumpsuit. Source: Pinterest

There is a type of fabric used by both males and females known as *Isi agu*, which means the head of a leopard. There are others in this category that are decorated with the heads of a lion, leopard, dog, antelope, and deer, horns, and crowns. They come in various colours and of different fibres. The fabrics come in velvet, polyester, cotton, and others to be affordable to all who care to procure one. It is a prestigious cloth in Igbo land. Most times the Igbo are identified with it. The females use this fabric to construct

different types of wear for special occasions. A sample of an Igbo woman adorned in *Isi- agu* material is placed on the plate below.





Plate 5: An Igbo bride dressed in *Isi-agu* material. Source: Pinterest

Igbo females also dress up in some casual outfits which are in the form of skirt suits, trouser suits, corporate wear for office work, sportswear (t-shirts, tracksuits, skorts, and others), blouses, hats, scarves, different types of trousers made from all sorts of fabrics including jeans. Some also utilize these sportswear as casual wear for outings. Those t-shirts are used for commemorating special events like uniforms (aso-ebi) for

burial ceremonies, church anniversaries, reunion of alumni celebrations, political rallies, and others (Nwafor 2021). Some sportswear as a whole has been adopted as everyday wear especially pairs of trousers and shorts with their matching tops and t-shirts. Some of the styles adopted by the females influenced by sportswear are placed below:



Plate 6: pairs of sporty trousers adopted as casual wears.



Plate 7(right): sporty wear turned into fashionable crop top.

Plate 8(left): sportswear turned into casual wear.



Plate 9(right): jumpsuit made from adire. Source: Pinterest

Plate 10(left): distressed jean trouser matched with African wax-print blouse. Source: Pinterest



Plate 11: a group of women putting on trousers and sports t-shirts for a school reunion outing. Source: Chika Chudi-duru (2018)



Plate 14(right): A lady dressed in a pair of trousers with a matching blouse made of African wax-printed fabric. Source: Pinterest

Plate 15(left): a pair of skinny jeans trousers and a top made from African wax printed fabric. Source: Pinterest

The apparel called Trouser

Trousers have been an integral part of Western fashion since ancient times, evolving to become the most prevalent lower-body attire for men (King and Allen 2016). They further mentioned that renowned for their practicality and comfort, it is no surprise that they have transcended gender boundaries to become a staple of everyday fashion for both men and women. The inception of trousers stemmed from the need for a more comfortable attire for horseback riding, as traditional robes proved to be unwieldy in this context. Those who sported trousers during battles held a distinct advantage over their robed counterparts, leading to the widespread adoption of trousers across various civilizations. Notable mentions of trousers can be traced back to the observations of sixth-century BC Greek geographers, who were astute in noting the presence of Persian, Eastern, and Central Asian horse riders. The practicality and comfort that trousers offered during

extended periods of horseback riding rendered them a popular choice. Artifacts such as ancient ceramics depict both male and female horse riders donning trousers, as evidenced by images found on a vase showcasing an Amazon woman. Despite the practicality of trousers, the Ancient Greeks initially ridiculed them and dubbed them 'thulakos,' meaning 'sacks'. The Romans, deeply influenced by Greek culture, similarly disparaged trousers as attire worn by barbarians. However, as the Roman Empire expanded, trousers gained greater acceptance owing to their warmth and practicality. Initially confined to military use, trousers were available in the form of snug shorts or loose-fitting trousers that closed at the ankles. Later, in the late 14th century, they evolved into tight trousers with attached foot coverings, resembling hose, and were worn by knights under plate armor. King and Allen (2016) narrate that in the year 1500, clothing proportions started to become more exaggerated in that trousers



became voluminous, ballooning over the thighs and tapering in at the ankle. They were often made from ornate cloth with slashes to reveal the colorful lining underneath. As time went on, these trousers transformed into simple breeches fastened at the knee and later into ankle-length trousers worn by the working class. It wasn't until the 19th century that trousers resembling the ones we wear today surged in popularity. Edward VII, the eldest son of Queen Victoria, played a significant role in popularizing trousers as we know them today and was responsible for bringing trousers creases into mainstream fashion. Although trousers were worn by both sexes in ancient times, they were seen as a "masculine" garment for many centuries. Women instead wore long, voluminous skirts. However, in the 19th century, women started wearing a form of trousers again, primarily for horseback riding, with full skirts worn over them to conceal. By the 1880s, women in the Western world began wearing trousers for leisure activities, finding them safer and offering greater freedom of movement, especially for cycling, as well as being considered healthier to wear than the cumbersome skirts they typically wore. Despite their growing popularity, trousers were not widely accepted as women's attire until the 1970s. In some places, it was even illegal for women to wear trousers. Today, women in the Western world wear trousers for all occasions without any masculine connotations (King and Allen 2016). From this narrative, one can observe that sporty activities sprung up the utilization of trousers by men and women. Then after some years, they became accepted by most of them. Quite unlike in Igbo land where they are still frowned upon, especially in

some churches (based on doctrines) and women's meetings.

According to britannica.com, a trouser is an outer garment covering the lower half of the body from the waist to the ankles and divided into sections to cover each leg separately. It is usually tailored with a waistband, buttoned loopholes, and a fly front and made from various textiles. The synonyms of trousers are breeches, britches, pantaloons, pants, and slacks. There are different styles of pants made of different types of textiles namely corduroy, cotton, silk, chiffon, denim, rayon, twill, jacquard, baize, felt, poplin, georgette, charmeuse, taffeta, organza, tissue, lace, leather, hemp, damask, cashmere, crepe, sateen, velvet, linen, wool, acrylic, polyester, bamboo, nylon, and others. The different styles are pencil trousers, baggy trousers, straight, boot-cut, wide leg, pegged, stirrup, 5-pocket jeans, bush pants, cargo pants, sailor pants, jodhpurs, hot pants, skort, sweat pants, harem, jumpsuit, overall, palazzo, leggings, bell bottoms, culottes, joggers, cargo pants, capri pants, Bermuda.

Sporting activities performed by the women in Igbo land.

During the pre-colonial times, the Igbo women were not partaking in sports like their male counterparts, who organized marriage wrestling competitions among some suitors in some cases, and wrestling competitions among villages, rather their kind of sports were moonlight plays and energetic dancing competitions among various groups and villages. History has it that Western-influenced sports were first noted in Nigeria in the 1950s, there were numerous exercises that people engaged in during that time. In 1962, the National Sports Council was set up in Nigeria. After some years, the National Sports Commission was set up in different states of which the



eastern states where the Igbo ethnic group is found was among. They were charged with the following responsibilities, for instance, to raise the standard of performance in sports in Nigeria through coordinating and integrating some efforts. The commission also encourages the development, organization, and participation in Nigeria. Each state has a commission for sports, therefore, they make some arrangements on their behalf regarding competitions, technical assistance, and others. Some popular sports in Nigeria are Football, basketball, athletics, boxing, badminton, volleyball, baseball, archery, bowling, cricket, golf, handball, hockey, polo, lawn tennis, judo, wrestling, swimming, long jump, high jump, discus, javelin and so many others. There are some traditional sports which include mayo, abular, kokawa, dambe, langa and aarin, ncho, and many others. These are usually played by men and women alike.

The women engaged in sports/exercises or physical activities intending to overcome adversities and win. It also helps to release pressure, keep fit, and release tension in a healthy and controlled way. An individual could compete with another individual in sports or it could be a group competition in sports. Often, different sports competitions are organized at state, national, and international levels. Most times some prizes are attached to the winners in each category. Sporting events bring disparate people together by strengthening ties and celebrating the common ideals of fairness, sacrifice, and hope. It helps in uplifting a nation's economy, influences people's lives,

and helps promote a culture of fitness and healthier lifestyles.

In all these sporting activities, wearing the right apparel is encouraged by experts. Sports and apparel are inseparable. Apart from the observations of the experts, looking at the elaborate indigenous dress styles of the Igbo women, this study argues that they are not appropriate for any sporting activity. The right outfit helps to exercise but the wrong outfit will impede one's flexibility and make one uncomfortable. It also helps to motivate one, improves performance, and can help the recovery process in between workouts, provides comfort, reduces the risk of injury, boosts one's confidence, and is durable. The right kind of clothing can aid one in achieving the benefits of sports. Thus, the clothing one chooses affects one's performance.

The Igbo women performed all the sports that the men folk took part in with boldness. They are still great women in sports with the likes of Chioma Ajunwa (MON), an Igbo woman, a former track and field athlete and footballer notable for becoming the first Nigerian to win a gold medal at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia and the first black African woman to win an Olympic gold medal in a field event (long jump). Another Igbo sportswoman who made the Igbo and Nigeria, in general, proud is Mary Onyali, a sprinter, and 5x Olympian, from 1988-2004. She won the bronze medal in the 4x100 meters relay at the 1992 Olympic Games and also won the 1994 Commonwealth Games 100 meters title and others.



Plate 16: Mary Onyali, an Igbo sportswoman in her sportswear. Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=mary+onyali&client.....>

Sport as an influence for wearing trousers by women: A case of Igbo in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Discussions and findings.

During this research, participant observation was utilized while some interviews were granted to some people across the major states the Igbo occupy. Some women's meetings were also visited and focus discussion groups were utilized to collect some data for this study. The people interviewed were seen as representatives from all parts of Igbo land. They comprised both men and women. During an interaction with Prof. Francis Ikwuegbu (2023), from Anambra State, he mentioned that wearing trousers by Igbo women has never been in Igbo culture because, in those times, the women used little pieces of cloth to cover the necessary parts leaving almost the entire body open for uli body painting decorations. However, due to cultural diffusion, many females put on trousers as one of their garbs. So many are entangled with social media

where they interact socially with all sorts of human beings adorned in different kinds of wear. He further mentions that his mum of 85 years was among the Christian mothers who were against the wearing of trousers by women. He further declares that her motives of rejection were based on some Christian doctrines which she upheld and never referred to wearing of trousers in sporting activities. The story changed in that when she traveled to the USA, she kept on tying her double wrappers until she was advised to put on some pairs of trousers because of the cold weather and its effect on her age. This she did to keep warm, even when she came back to Nigeria she continued and never frowned at it again. She changed her ideology with the view that there was nothing strange in a woman being adorned in trousers, only that it's just another type of clothing that keeps a woman well covered.



Probably because she travelled abroad that's why her ideology changed. Basing this narrative on the theory of cultural diffusion which says that culture developed historically through interactions of groups of people and the diffusion of ideas, one could see that having traveled abroad and interacted with other people, she observed that other women around her were adorned in trousers, if for nothing else, for adequate protection from the harsh weather. Those other naïve ideas she had were overshadowed by mingling with other women who changed her narrative. He remarks that women should put on trousers during their sporting activities to cover themselves properly and for effectiveness. He further narrated that this practice has a lot to do with one's exposure. According to Michael (2018), married women are not allowed to wear trousers in any Igbo social gathering if they must be present. He narrates that Mrs. Esther Nweke, an Igbo woman has been sanctioned at a cultural gathering of Igbo people in Lagos state for wearing a pair of trousers to a meeting. He narrates that Esther didn't expect what she got at the meeting after she was asked to say some prayers while the meeting was rounding off. The traditional rulers, chiefs, and other leaders present at the meeting upon noticing that the woman was in a pair of trousers asked her to stop the prayers and pronounced that she had committed an abomination by putting on a pair of trousers. However, Mrs. Nweke insisted that since she had been nominated to say the closing prayer she would go on. This made the leaders walk out of the venue of the meeting

insisting that they would not partake in such a prayer which would attract curses on them. He further recounted that her appearance may attract further sanctions to serve as a deterrent to other women who might try such in the future. The researcher found out that some men though not the youths are not in support of women putting on trousers, because they believe that it is their type of dressing and it should be left for the men folk alone. The study also revealed that some men see women who put on trousers as if they are in a power tussle with them, although some are quite indifferent. They are of the view that women should appear in feminine clothing if they choose to. The researcher also observes this in a women's meeting she was part of, somewhere in Ehime Mbano, Imo state in the late nineties. A member came in strapping a little child at her back for the meeting, she was walked out and embarrassed because she was dressed in a pair of loose trousers. The woman was not aware that she would be frowned at. When asked, she said, she has always taken trousers as part of her wardrobe because of the comfortability. The other members frowned at her and openly addressed her rudely, shouting in a rowdy session by informing her that women do not wear pairs of trousers to meetings. That was how that member left that meeting arena and never returned. The study observed that the rejection was based on some religious doctrines. This study argues that these women are allergic to cultural diffusion, but this will only last for a few years because of the exposure to social media, enculturation, and migration.



Plate 16: a pair of trousers and a blouse made with African wax-printed fabrics. Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/728457308460039019/...>

During another interview with Lady Bernadine Mbelu, from Ogidi, Anambra State, she said that their women meeting in Ogidi still frown at the act of wearing trousers by women to their towns' meetings to date. According to her, they feel that the women might entice the male folk by showing off their curves. They prefer tying of wrappers, long skirts, and blouses, or ankle-length gowns, and knee-length gowns are prohibited. She mentions that the woman should look chaste with the approved mode of dressing instead of putting on trousers which portrays her as being wayward. She further mentions that if trousers are allowed, some might even go to the extent of putting on leggings and very tight trousers which might be very seductive and indecent to behold. This study is of the view that religion has nothing to do with this practice but a lack of exposure and individual differences. She concludes by saying that trousers are permitted to be worn by women during sporting activities but are yet to be

accepted as one of the dress codes for their meetings. Apart from the non-acceptance of trousers as a dress code, some of the elderly women view with askance anyone seen putting on some trousers as casual wear. The interviewee said that despite the people's stand, she still puts on her trousers during some casual outings and for sporting activities because that is the only way to be properly dressed for sports.

During an interview with Lady Love Uchegbu, a woman leader in Obohia, Ahiazu-Mbaise- an area in Igbo land, she reports that women are not allowed to wear trousers in their towns' meetings and to the church. She mentions that civilization and Western education are what gave rise to the wearing of trousers by women. She says that this practice is a borrowed culture that's the reason why people frown at it. She further mentions that her husband's kinsmen (amala) are opposed to it, in that they are still of the opinion that women are to dress



up in their wrappers while the men should be the ones to wear trousers. She narrated a story that in the late seventies, a woman wore her pair of trousers at one of the marketplaces in Ahiazu-Mbaise known as Ekeumedo. The market women threw heavy balls of cassava fufu and poured palm oil on her at the marketplace. She further narrates that since then some women have been afraid of wearing trousers to the village square and market places. However, recently in the 21st century, things have changed a bit, more women summoned up the courage to wear trousers without being attacked, but they are still not worn to women's meetings in villages and towns. She also narrated that during a football novelty match during a program in the church, the women were seen wearing tights underneath their wrappers or gowns with tights underneath. She believes that she could wear trousers outside the shores of Igbo land but not within since it is not her culture. This study understood that it is only during sports that trousers and tights are worn by these women underneath their wrappers and gowns, therefore sports is still a factor for their putting it on, because if not they would not. Another finding is based on religious grounds, Mr Okolo an interviewee narrated that he was on his way back from Onitsha when a lady sitting in front of him wanted to preach inside the bus, then a man sitting near him rudely shut her up and warned her never to preach while putting on trouser. She advised that she should dress like a child of God before trying to preach to others, showing that in his own belief, female Christians are not supposed to wear

trousers. An argument ensued among the passengers, some thought that what the lady was wearing was modest while some were against it. But the preaching came to a halt. In another part of Igbo land Abia state, to be precise, Mr. Nduka (interviewee) expressed that it is easier for a woman to partake in sports activities while wearing trousers or shorts than in long gowns or wrappers. He felt that a woman is more protected in a pair of trousers than in any other clothing. He further mentions that he prefers the female folk being adorned in trousers while in transit because of convenience and in case of any mishap. This study has observed that in contemporary Igbo society, the usage of shorts and trousers did not just happen, it started from their little beginnings as babies, when mothers wore for their female babies some already made coverall clothing and some pairs of baby trousers and t-shirts for warmth and this has resulted to their being used to this kind of clothing right from birth. Also from observations, the researcher found out that the female pupils in elementary schools and the students in secondary schools make use of tracksuits, shorts and skirts. Some also put on different jerseys paired with shorts and trousers during sports as sportswear. In higher institutions, specialized garments for different sports are utilized by sportswomen. Thus as female adults are still putting on trousers as sportswear and casual wear to date, this to some extent has resulted in their taking it as one of their garb. Some of them could be viewed on plates 11 and 12 respectively.



Plate 11: Nigerian female football jersey matched with a pair of distressed jean trousers.

Plate 12: Nigerian female football jersey matched with distressed jean pants.

Bar. K. Okere (interviewee) is of the view that if pairs of trousers could be worn as sportswear

for covering the woman's private body parts during sporting activities, why can't it be seen as part of a woman's clothing in contemporary Igbo society? She is of the view that it might not be worn to a meeting but the wearer should not be frowned at. She revealed that some men do not allow their spouses to put on pairs of trousers due to some reasons best known to them. She insists that wearing of pairs of trousers by the women folk should not be frowned upon since it is for a decent look. She affirms that from the days of her primary and secondary school, she has worn trousers for different purposes and it has caused her to be more attached to them as well as other female wears. This reason made her accept trousers and prefer them to other wear during her

travels. Ms. Nnenna (interviewee) expressed that most of her clothes are trousers with blouses to match, except when she is going to church. She confessed that she feels very confident and smart in them and they are cheaper and serve her better as a student. Sir Chudi (interviewee) asserts that during traveling, a female could be decked in trousers and a top to face any inconveniences she might meet on her journey but not to be worn for burial ceremonies. It will not tell well for any female to wear jeans and trousers for burial ceremonies, where people are mourning. He is of the view that it looks playful and also a mark of irresponsibility, lacks sympathy, and is devoid of seriousness. She could wear them for social interaction among her peer



groups and for informal meetings. He says that if she is to attend a function where she will meet her elders, trousers must not be worn as a sign of respect. He opines that trousers serve different purposes in a woman's life, it is left to the woman to know the right time to wear them or not. He is of the view that they should be worn at the correct time. He further mentions that it is not proper to wear them to church and that the wearing of trousers by females to church should be stopped at a particular age, once they are no longer children because it passes some negative messages. For instance, if a female wears a pair of trousers to church, it draws unnecessary attention to her body. He affirms that this practice was copied from the West and not Africa. He asserts that sports did not in any way contribute to the acceptance of trousers as a dress wear for the females in Igbo land rather trousers are just seen as casuals that



Plate 16: a lady on a crop top and a pair of trousers made from African wax printed fabrics. Source: Pinterest

From the discussion, one can conclude that one of the reasons why some of the females agreed to put on trousers is only when they are participating in sporting activities. Even most of the women that are still rejecting it

serve different purposes at different times. He gave an example of the use of pyjamas as nightwear, he says this is not enough reason to use them as clothes for outings. Therefore sportswear should remain as sports and casual wear for women, not for some special gatherings, and shouldn't be worn to some special occasions. He concluded his interview by saying that "every wear has a purpose, for a social outing with people of high caliber, a woman should be adorned in feminine wear but can wear trousers in a non-serious social gathering".

Conclusion

to date did so on religious grounds and gender inequality from the male. In the Igbo contemporary society, a good percentage of women are found decked in trousers for some occasions but not their towns' meetings. It should be noted that though wearing it by Igbo women is a borrowed



culture, some females still fancy and wear it to date while some are still adamant because their spouses are against it and refer to it as solely men's wear. The idea of Sports as a factor for wearing trousers by Igbo women was not accepted by some people as they still view it as a foreign culture. Wearing trousers during sporting activities has not in any way changed people's perception of accepting them for crucial meetings though many wear them for other functions. Religious doctrines to some extent do not have much influence on this because some religious sects allow females in trousers to worship with them, rather their indigenous and English wear for women is preferred as accepted cloth for religious ceremonies. Therefore this study insists that wearing of trousers by the women folk in Igbo land has come a long way and should be sustained because trousers are among the few clothing for women that give complete coverage and serve different purposes. It also stresses that

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those who wore them underneath their wrappers and gowns during church games, though hidden have also worn them. It further concludes that wearing trousers, tights, and others by Igbo women cannot be separated from sporting activities. Therefore, sporting activities are one of the major reasons why Igbo women started wearing trousers.

Recommendations

This study recommends that this dress fashion should be seen as indecent or frowned upon since it provides a complete cover-up for the female folk. It also recommends that some other research based on the adornment of trousers for several activities and their relationship with sports in other tribes should be carried out by dress history scholars and others since much literature is not available on this topic. In this way, the literature based on this aspect of dress history globally will be enriched.

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Some of the Interviewees:

Prof. Francis Ikwuegbu was interviewed on 31st of May 2023

Lady B. Mbelu was interviewed on 4th of June 2023

Mr. Okolo was interviewed on 17th of June 2023

Bar. K. Okere was interviewed on 30th of June 2023.

Sir Chudi was interviewed on 4th of September 2023

Ms. Nnenna was interviewed on 6th of August 2023

Lady L. Uchegbu was interviewed on 18th of August 2023

Mr. Nduka was interviewed on 23th of August 2023