Slay Queenhood, Dressing Sexy and Media Objectification of Women

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Abstract: *Issues surrounding fashion and how women and girls are depicted in provocative dress in the media has remained a recurrent area of interest for scholars in the social sciences. This is largely because of the potential consequences of those depictions, such as objectification, and how it affects the life chances of women in society. The slay queen culture and the tendency to dress sexy and provocatively has further amplified the concerns on how the female gender is sexually objectified and what it portends for women and girls. This study, relying on a cross-sectional survey design involving 600 respondents from three universities in the south-south region, examined the notion of slay queenhood in relation to dressing sexy, media objectification and their augmented realities on female lifestyles. The objectification theory was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study, while data collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods were analysed with descriptive statistics and narrative analyses. Findings show that slay queenhood and the depiction of women in provocative dress in the media contributes to the sexual objectification of women, and also affects courtship behaviour where most men now prefer transactional and sex-driven relationships with women. It is recommended, inter alia, that considering the influence of materialism and the celebrity culture on slay queenhood, and media objectification of women, it is imperative for the media to focus more on the positive aspects of the entertainment industry that depicts industry, diligence, prudence, while reducing the intensity of the unfavourable lifestyle of famous people on the media.*

Keywords: *Media; Slay queen; Sexy dressing; Celebrity; social media; Objectification theory*

1. INTRODUCTION

Augmented realities are becoming more prevalent in media outlets covering women's fashion and leisure. The social media is today replete with users, social influencers and celebrities displaying illusive fantasy of glitz and glamour as well as competing for attention and social recognition. This new fashion trend has highlighted the concept of 'slay queen', which characterizes a breed of trendy ladies who dress in the most exotic and sensual attire. The concept of 'slay queen' is a relatively new and pervasive lexicon associated with the youth subculture of Black and Latin LGBTQ community. According to Aspen (2022) and Mukwa (2021), whereas the concept originated as a backlash to racial prejudice and popularized by Beyonce in her hit song "Formation", it is today used to define a person who is largely superficial, stylish and dresses provocatively. The term 'slay' was hitherto construed to depict the inspiring, vehement expression of style and boldness, competitive display of amazing body supplements and skills with reference to commodification of the female body on stage (Amanwi 2018, Mukwa 2021); however, in contemporary times, slay queenhood is derogatorily used to describe women's false beliefs of grandeur, self-centredness and bloated sense of self-importance, and a deceptive self-consciousness about one's media personae, public appearance, perception, status or social recognition.

Women, fashion and the place of dress in sexual objectification have sparked research interests in various disciplines. These new breeds of women are not just the main focus of objectification but self-objectifiers (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005) whose hyped up lifestyles and personal identities are tied to media gaze and attention. In the context of self- objectification, Ward and Friedman (2006); Peter and Valkenburg (2007) and Gordon (2008), observed an association between the exposure to sexually objectifying media gaze in the determination of African American women's value or personality and the white woman's self-objectification and cultural standard of beauty. Relating with oneself or others

as a sexual object to be assessed based on appearance for another persons' use is key to sexual objectification. Dressing sexy implies dressing provocatively by using all body adornments or supplements that depict sexually suggestive looks and displaying private parts of the body (like the navel, breasts, buttocks and genitals).

Growing body of research on sexual objectification have explored the experiences of women who work in environments that encourage sexual objectification, given interpretations on the motivations for dressing sexy and made inferences on the relationship between the use of revealing or sexy dress and sexual violence. Tiggemann and Andrew (2012) asserted that women self-objectify through the choice of fashion over comfort and the perception of sexualized female bodies as objects (Bernard, et al. 2012) is a consequence of dressing sexy. Whereas dress is central to objectification, sexually suggestive or body-revealing dress is linked to sexual objectification (Lennon & Johnson, 2018). There is a significant body of research on the growing intensity of subjective imaginaries of female lifestyles in the mediated public space (Roberti, 2022). Consequently, the notion of sexy dressing and the augmented realities of media space on female lifestyle particularly slay queens have received either limited or no academic research attention. This study critically engages in the research on sexualized dresses and objectification by expanding understanding about how slay queenhood engenders sexy dressing, objectification and commodification of the female body and its impact on female lifestyle. Specifically, the aim of the study is to examine the notion of slay queenhood in relation to dressing sexy, media objectification and their augmented realities on female lifestyles. In order to achieve this broad objective, the following research questions were interrogated: what is the public perception of a slay queen? What are the drivers of the slay queen culture? What influence does the media space of trendy lifestyle exert on users? What is the impact of sexy dressing on commodification of the female body?

2. METHOD

2.1 Research design

In order to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis, a cross-sectional survey design was chosen for this study. A cross-sectional survey is a sort of observational study, or descriptive research, that uses information gathered from a cross-section of a population at a specific moment to analyse cluster experiences of chosen demographics. In this kind of study, participants are chosen based on certain socio-demographic factors of interest. This design made it easier to determine the inclusion criteria for sampling, the type of data to be gathered, and the techniques for data analysis. Age, sex, religion, educational qualification, employment, and income level were thought to be crucial factors for a study of this nature.

2.2 Sample size and Techniques

The population of the study includes male and female students in selected universities in the South-South region of Nigeria. Using a multistage sampling procedure, three (3) universities were purposively selected from Bayelsa State, Rivers State, and Akwa Ibom State; namely: Federal University, Otuoke (FUOTUOKE), University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT), and University of Uyo (UNIUYO).

Table1. *Sample size and Attrition rate*

S/N	Universities	Population	Sample	Per cent
1.	*Federal University, Otuoke*	11, 040	200	33.3
2.	*University of Port Harcourt*	37,500	200	33.3
3.	*University of Uyo*	25,676	200	33.3
4.	*Total*	63,176	600	99.9

Source: Field survey, 2023

As depicted in Table 3.1, these institutions have a combined enrolment of 63,176 students, according to information on their websites. However, from this population, a sample size of 600 was chosen for the study. The sample size was determined using the non-proportionate quota sampling. In selecting the respondents for the study, a convenience sampling technique was used to administer the questionnaires while twelve respondents (4 per university) were selected from the sample for the IDIs. The inclusion criteria for the IDI limits the selection of respondent to persons who are (i) females (ii) at least 18 years old, (iii) students of the given university (iv) and have spent at least a session in their respective universities.

3. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Primary data for this study were gathered through the use of a mixed questionnaire and in-depth interviews (IDIs). The questionnaire was designed in sections to collect the socio-demographic information of the respondents, the awareness level of the respondents about the concept of slay queenhood, the perception of the respondents about the implications of objectifying women and their social experiences. A pilot study was conducted with 10% of the sample size in one of the Universities, (i.e., University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State); thereafter, adjustments were made where necessary before proceeding with the actual study. The reliability of the quantitative data was determined using Cronbach's alpha which yielded a coefficient level of α = 0.7 indicating strong reliability with a high level of internal consistency based on the average inter-item correlation. Data collected for the study were analysed using descriptive statistics. Methods such as percentage analysis and charts were used to analyse all variables considered suitable for univariate analysis, while narrative analysis was used for the interviews.

4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the context of social research, ethics refers to a set of values that have an impact on a study's concepts, methods and outcomes. These values include informed consent, anonymity, privacy, and the open sharing of results. All of these values work to ensure the safety of participants, the accuracy of the research procedure, and the validity of the study's findings. As recommended by Nigeria's National Code of Health Research (NCHR) and the Helsinki Declaration of 1964, which regulates human participants in human-related research, this study strictly complied with the following principles: informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, data confidentiality, non-malfeasance to participants, and privacy.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Socio-Demographic information of the Respondents

Table 2. *Distribution of socio-demographic information of Respondents*

Categories	Variables	Frequency	Per (%)
Age	18 – 27	151	25.2
	28 – 37	261	43.5
	38 – 47	122	20.3
	48 and above	66	11.0
Gender	Male	300	50.0
	Female	300	50.0
Marital Status	Never married	403	67.2
	Married	137	22.8
	Separated	44	7.3
	Widowed	16	2.7
Level of Education	Undergraduate	467	77.8
	Post Graduate	133	22.2
Religion	Christian	302	50.3
	Islam	187	31.2
	Traditional Religion	66	11.0
	Others	45	7.5

Source: Field survey, 2023

The survey, in Table 4.1, show that the sample consists of male and female respondents who were mostly between the ages of 28 – 37 years (43.5%), while only 11.0% were 48 years and above. Of the 600 respondents, 67.2% were never married as at the time of the study, while 22.8% were married and 7.3% were separated. Furthermore, 22.2% of the respondents were post-graduate students while the remaining 77.8% were undergraduate students. Although 50.3% of the respondents were Christians, 31.2% indicated that there were Muslims, 11.0% indicated that they belonged to the traditional religion, while 7.5% were of other faiths.

6. WHAT IS THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF A SLAY QUEEN?

To adequately examine public perception of a slay queen, the survey investigated how people define a slay queen. As shown in Figure 4.1, the common descriptions of a slay queen include a woman that

depends men for a lavish lifestyle (35.0%); a woman who dresses sexy and provocatively (30.2%); and a woman that is excessively materialistic.
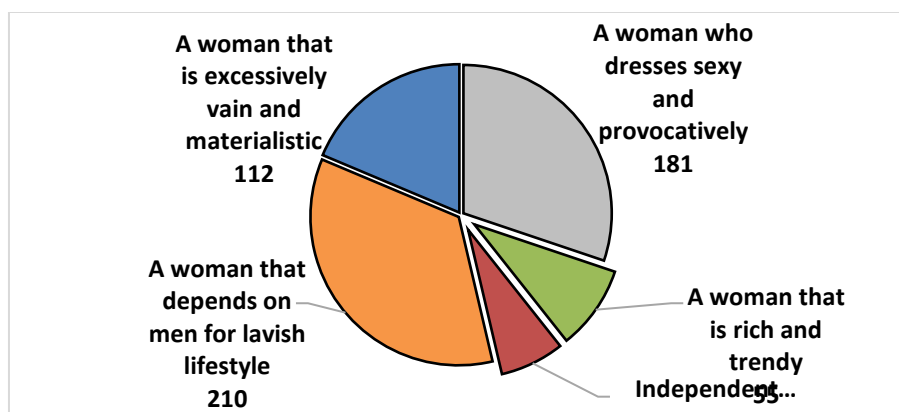

Figure 4.1: *Respondent's definition of a slay queen. Source: Field survey, 2023*

Data from the interviews further illustrates the public perception of slay queens. Some of the participants noted that:

"Well, if someone calls herself a slay queen, what comes to my mind is that she is a big girl that can afford all the nice things a lady wants. More like an independent lady (Lydia, 31 years, UNIPORT)"

"The question should be what are the attributes of a slay queen. If you see a girl always snapping pictures in hotels, in flashy cars, with celebrities, at ressorts and popular tourist places and displaying all sort designer bags, shoes and clothes; then you've seen a slay queen. (Tarila, 26 years, FUOTUOKE)"

"Slay queen is a lady that… er… loves to appear flashy and trendy. They dress in the latest hot and suggestive wears. Basically, that's the source of their livelihood: being sexy and attractive. The appearance is the market, you understand? (Princess, 28 years, UNIUYO)"

7. WHAT ARE THE DRIVERS OF THE SLAY QUEEN CULTURE?

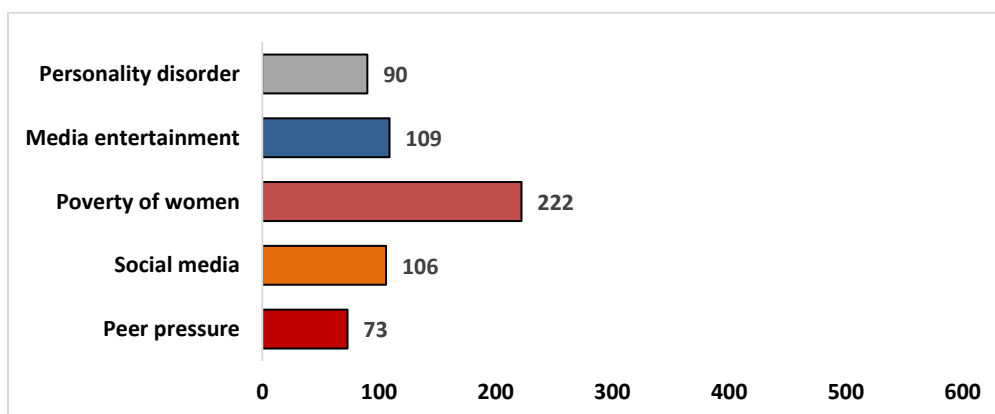The survey also investigated respondents' perception of the drivers of the slay queen culture.

Figure 4.2: *Drivers of slay queen culture. Source: Field survey, 2023*

As shown in Figure 4.2, 37.0% of the respondents suggest that poverty of women is a major driver of the slay queen culture. Another 18.2% of the respondents indicated that media entertainment, such as the content of movies and music, is a key driver of the slay queen culture. Others highlighted social media (17.7%), personality disorder (15.0%), and peer pressure (12.2%), as major drivers of the slay queen culture. Similarly, the in-depth interviews also substantiated the quantitative data on the drivers of the slay queen culture. For instance, some of the participants explained that:

"I agree that slay queens are mostly entitled women. They believe that they were not born to suffer; and others will have to pay for their luxury (sic). So, that feeling drives them into slay queen lifestyle (Martha, 23 years, FUOTUOKE)"

"The content of movies and music is a major factor here. It is terrible the kind of things displayed in most of them. The lifestyle displayed there impacts on the mindset of some girls; so, they believe the fantasy and also pursue that lifestyle (Edith, 26 years, UNIUYO)"

"In discussing these things, we must also acknowledge the role that poverty plays. Many women don't have the power to meet their needs, so they depend on men who have the money to meet their needs. Poverty plays a major role in the slay queen culture (Sarima, 29 years, UNIPORT)

8. WHAT INFLUENCE DOES THE MEDIA SPACE OF TRENDY LIFESTYLE EXERT ON USERS?

Two themes emerged from the interviews on how people are influenced by the media to adopt the slay queen lifestyle.

8.1 Slay queen lifestyle and Celebrity culture:

Celebrity culture is adequately sponsored and publicized by both traditional and the new media. According to Cashmore (2006) the celebrity culture is essentially characterized by a pervasive preoccupation with the lives of famous persons and the exaggerated value attached to the lifestyle of public figures whose actual accomplishments may be limited, but whose visibility is rather extensive in the media. Another notable feature of the celebrity culture, as debated by Driessens (2013), is the gradual shift of emphasis from achievement-based fame to media-driven popularity. As some of the participants illustrated, "*The eagerness to emulate celebrities and their 'soft life' as shown in the media also drives women to adopt the slay queen lifestyle. While they do not know the source of the luxury of these celebs, they, by all means, try to be like them (Katherine, 30 years, UNIUYO).* Another participant expressed that "*One common trend is trying to be like your favourite celebrity. Subsequently, whatever they project about themselves in the media appears to be real, and their fans adopt it too. In some cases, celebrities also motivate their fans to be like them. They encourage them to slay and be vain (Chizaram, 21 years, FUOTUOKE).*"

8.2 Slay queen lifestyle and Materialism:

The survey revealed that *materialism is another lifestyle that the media promotes which fosters slay queenhood. Materialism is used here to mean the inclination to prioritize material wealth and bodily comfort over other life needs and principles. Materialism describes the belief that buying and owning things is not only important, but also necessary for happiness in life. The survey revealed that materialism* is positively correlated with slay queenhood, particularly as most of the participants of the IDI indicated that they have experienced media pressure to accept the slay queen lifestyle. For instance, a participant noted that "*I wouldn't say that I've not been lured and tempted to be like the slay queens. I have. Everyone wants to be pampered, and this lifestyle tells you that you should seek your satisfaction and comfort in all your relationships. As in, there must be something materially tangible to gain from anyone you befriend or date (Goodness, 22 years, UNIPORT).*"

9. WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF SEXY DRESSING ON COMMODIFICATION OF THE FEMALE BODY?

Lastly, the study also investigated the impact of sexy dressing as occasioned by the slay queen lifestyle on the commodification of the female body.

Table 3. *Sexy Dressing, Slay queenhood and Sexual Objectification*

Variables	SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%	Total
18 - 27	40	6.7	91	15.2	5	0.8	5	0.8	10	1.7	151
28 - 37	77	12.8	142	23.7	8	1.3	17	2.8	17	2.8	261
38 - 47	23	3.8	90	15.0	3	0.5	4	0.7	2	0.3	122
48 above	18	3.0	30	5.0	4	0.7	10	1.7	4	0.7	66
Total	158	26.3	353	58.8	20	3.3	36	6.0	33	5.5	600
NB: SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), U (Undecided), D (Disagree), and SD (Strongly Disagree).											

Source: Field survey, 2023

As indicated in Table 4.2, the majority of respondents agree that the slay queen lifestyle and provocative clothing sexually objectify women in society. Particularly, 58.8% of the respondents agree that sexy dressing and slay queenhood contribute to the sexual objectification of women, and another 26.3% of the respondents also strongly agreed; while 5.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed, alongside another 6.0% that equally disagreed.

Table 4. *Sexy Dressing, Slay queenhood and transactional/sex-driven relationship with women*

Variables	SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%	Total
Male	121	20.2	129	21.5	9	1.5	23	3.8	18	3.0	300
Female	97	16.2	181	30.2	5	0.8	11	1.8	6	1.0	300
Total	218	36.3	310	51.7	14	2.3	34	5.7	24	4.0	600
NB: SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), U (Undecided), D (Disagree), and SD (Strongly Disagree).											

Source: Field survey, 2023

The survey, as shown in Table 4.3, investigated if sexy dressing as occasioned by slay queenhood impacts on how society perceive women. Interestingly, while 4.0% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 36.3% strongly agreed and another 51.7% that also agreed, that sexy dressing as occasioned by slay queenhood impacts on how society perceive women and the increase in transactional or sex-driven relationship with women. Some of the IDI participants also affirmed that:

"My experience is that with all these slay thing going on, most men now see women as only good for use. Rarely will you find an honest relationship with the male counterpart. What most of them (guys) want now is just intimacy, and once that's done, they move (Chioma, 31 years, UNIPORT)."

"I don't know about other places o… But here in UniUyo, love is scam... In fact, the whole of Uyo like this (laughs); forget true love, except luck shines (sic). And I can say that it is connected to how men now see women (sic). Men now see women as materialistic and vain; so, they come for temporary affairs only (Emem, 36 years, UNIUYO)."

10. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The key concern of this study was to examine the notion of slay queenhood in relation to dressing sexy omitted, media objectification and their augmented realities on female lifestyles. To achieve this, the study investigated the public perception of a slay queen, the drivers of the slay queen culture, the nature of influence that the media space of trendy lifestyle exert on users, as well as the impact of sexy dressing on commodification of the female body. Findings of the study show that the common descriptions of a slay queen include a 'woman that depends on men for a lavish lifestyle', 'a woman who dresses sexy and provocatively', and 'a woman that is excessively materialistic'. These metaphors tend to fit into the general description of slay queen as found in the works of Muli (2018) And Simwa (2018). For Muli (2018) and Simwa (2018), whereas its origins come from the Black and Latino LGBTQ+ ballroom culture in the 1970s and '80s, slay queen is today used pejoratively to describe women that like to show off their luxurious lifestyle in spite of little or no known source of income to afford such expenses. This portends that slay queenhood has assumed a rather negative description. For Muli (2018), slay queens can be easily identified by their display of designer wears, party pictures, pictures with celebrities, flashy cars, and costly resorts. Forson (2020), the term 'slay queen' now describe women who date wealthy men primarily to afford a lavish lifestyle.

The study also found that the major drivers of slay queenhood include: poverty of women, influence of media entertainment, such as the content of movies and music, the social media, personality disorder, and peer pressure. Similarly, the study revealed that the media space contributes to the subsistence of the slay queen culture through the promotion of celebrity culture and the culture of materialism. The celebrity culture is essentially characterized by a high-volume exposure to, and the pervasive preoccupation with, the lives of famous persons (Cashmore, 2006), and this has been noted to encourage people to want to emulate what they see (Fox, 2015; Driessens, 2013). In a different study, Teng, et al (2016), also noted that materialism as publicized in everyday life increases women's tendency to objectify themselves. The implication if this is that when women regard their sexual attractiveness as capital to gain positive life outcomes, they may be motivated to adopt the slay queen lifestyle (Ravhuhali, et al, 2020; Teng et al, 2016). Furthermore, part of the tools used by those who adopt the slay queen lifestyle include the use of sexy and provocative clothing. Interestingly, the study shows that dressing and slay queenhood not only contribute to the sexual objectification of women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), it also impacts on how society perceive women, as well as contemporary courtship behaviour where men now seek only transactional and sex-driven relationships with women.

11. CONCLUSION

Issues surrounding fashion and how women and girls are depicted in provocative dress in the media has remained a recurrent area of interest for scholars in the social sciences. This is largely because of the

potential consequences of those depictions, such as objectification, and how it affects the life chances of women in society. The slay queen culture and the tendency to dress sexy and provocatively has further amplified the concerns on how the female gender is sexually objectified and what it portends for women and girls. As found in this study, the slay queen culture is an outcome of multiple social concerns (including poverty of women, social media influence, peer pressure, and the depiction of women in the content of entertainment materials). However, the slay queen culture not only contributes to sexual objectification of women, it also contributes to the changing perception of the value of women in society, and the tendency for men to prefer transactional relationships with women. It is therefore recommended that the traditional and new media, as well as other entertainment sources, should downplay the emphasis on the slay queen culture as a way to reduce the influence of the media on social behaviour. Considering the influence of materialism and the celebrity culture on slay queenhood and media objectification of women, it is imperative for the media to focus more on the positive aspects of the entertainment industry that depicts industry, diligence, prudence, while reducing the intensity of the unfavorable lifestyle of famous people on the media.

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