

# African Journal for the Psychological Studies of Social Issues

Volume 29 Number 3, AUGUST, 2026 Edition

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Journal of the African Society for THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF  
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# PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS, BODY IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG FEMALE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE.

Muibat Oyin, OLAOPA<sup>1</sup>, Adekunle Anthony, ADEGOKE<sup>2</sup>, Saheed Abiola, SAKA<sup>3</sup>,  
and

Teslim Alabi OLADEJO<sup>4</sup>

Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria<sup>1&2</sup>,

University of Ibadan<sup>3</sup>

Federal Teaching Hospital, Lokoja<sup>4</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*This study examined the relationship among physical attractiveness, body image, and self-esteem among female undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. The study utilized a descriptive survey research design in which none of the variables were manipulated. The independent variables were body satisfaction and body image, while the dependent variable was self-esteem. Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to a sample of 156 female undergraduates selected through convenience sampling techniques. Data analysis using the Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a moderate negative relationship between body image and self-esteem ( $r = -0.48$ ) and a strong negative relationship between perceived body satisfaction and self-esteem ( $r = -0.61$ ). Based on these findings, it was concluded that body satisfaction and body image have a significant impact on self-esteem among female undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University. Additionally, religious affiliation was found to have a significant influence on physical attractiveness, body image, and general body satisfaction among the target population.*

**Keywords:** Physical attractiveness, Body image, Body satisfaction, Self-esteem, Religious affiliation, Female undergraduates, Obafemi Awolowo University.

## INTRODUCTION

The way individuals perceive themselves is shaped by a complex interplay of internal beliefs and external social influences (Scalabrini et al., 2023). Among young women, particularly female students in tertiary institutions, self-concept is often significantly influenced by physical appearance, body image, and perceived attractiveness (Sarginson et al., 2024). These constructs not only influence how female students present themselves socially but also affect their emotional well-being, confidence, and academic engagement (Mallaram et al., 2023). With increasing societal attention on aesthetics and the idealization of beauty, young women are often subjected to subtle and overt messages about how they should look, which has profound implications on their self-esteem and mental health (Kamyab, & Hoseinzadeh, 2023).

Physical attractiveness is a socially constructed concept that refers to the extent to which a person's physical features are considered aesthetically pleasing or beautiful by cultural standards (Kim & Li, 2020). These standards are fluid and vary across societies and historical periods; however, modern media and globalization have contributed to the emergence of relatively homogenized ideals, such as slimness, clear skin, symmetry, and proportionality in facial and bodily features (Rhodes, 2006). For young women in academic environments, attractiveness is not just about appearance but has come to be associated with perceived social value, competence, and success (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972).

There is reported high prevalence of low self-esteem around the world as the prevalence was reported among medical students as 19.0% in Ethiopia (Gidi, Horesa, Jarso, Tesfaye, Tucho, Abera & Abafita, 2021), 24.6% was reported among adolescents in Austria (McLeod, Harrison, McAllister, et al (2014). In Nigeria, a study reported that low self-esteem was prevalent among the young population (Chinawa, Obu, Manyike et al.2014) and prevalence of 53% was reported among the same population (Coker, Okunrinboye, Adesokan. et al, 2019). There is a direct

linkage between physical attractiveness and body image as it affects self-esteem. the way people perceive others, level of physical attractiveness can have direct effect on body image (Tiggemann,2005).

Body image is the mental representation of how individuals see themselves and their thoughts and feelings of this perception. There are three aspects of body image, the perceptual, affective, cognitive, and behavioral. The perceptual body image, this is the way you see yourself; body image perception includes body size assessment; this is what a person perceives of his or her body size, body desirability estimation; this what the person considers the most attractive body size, and perceptions concerning one's own body shape and size. Body image has a significant impact on how people perceive themselves and their level of confidence. Positive body image can result in increased confidence. General wellbeing can improve people's mental health and general quality of life. In contrast, a body image dissatisfaction can result in low self-esteem and it is common among adolescents as the prevalence was reported to be 18.5% among adolescents in Ethiopia (Jebero, Elias, Billa, Ayalew, Alemayehu & Moga, 2025).

Body image has been defined as the perception of an anthropometric measurement, shape and contour of the body as well as the emotions correlated with the factors that influence one's happiness with the body (Silva, Ferriani&Viana,2019). Satisfaction of how one feels about one's body image comes from affective aspect of body image. This is the feelings and thoughts about one's body that leads to anxiety as a result of consequences of perceived or actual judgement from others. (Hart et al., 1989). This is where people experience a lot of shame and guilt concerning their body. They usually feel they do not belong in certain rooms because of how they look. Cognitive body image is the way we think about our body, this can lead to preoccupation with weight and size. Behavioural body image are behaviors we engage in as a result of how we perceive our body.

Body satisfaction is another factor that may likely predict self-esteem and it is defined as an individual feelings and attitude towards their own body shape, size and appearance either negative or positive assessment. Most women are dissatisfied with their bodies and they point to their body shape and weight as the causes of the dissatisfaction (Tiggermann,2004). Body dissatisfaction has been linked with low self-esteem, social anxiety, poor quality of life, depression (Paxton, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan&Eisenberg,2006; Cash&Pruzinsky, 2002a; Alleva et al., 2014) and also has been identified as causal factor in body dysmorphic disorders and eating disorders (Stice,2002).

The issue of body satisfaction, body image and how it affects their self-esteem are mostly prevalent among female's undergraduates. It is common knowledge that females prioritize how they look for several reasons, external validation, self-satisfaction and what not. The society has also placed a number of beauty standards on women and how they should look. These standards can be so unrealistic that they cause a large number of females being displeased with how they look, leading to several disorders such as body dysmorphic disorder, severe depression, eating disorders and so on. Many causes have been attributed to negative body image, namely; appearance or body-related bullying in childhood, well-meaning campaigns that urge people to lose weight, negative comment from family and friends on weight or diet, media and advertising images that promote particular appearance ideals. This study examined the relationship among body image, body satisfaction and self-esteem of female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship among the physical attractiveness, body image and self-esteem of female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria

## Hypotheses

- There will be no significant relationship between body image and self-esteem among female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
- There will be no significant relationship between perceived physical attractiveness and self-esteem among female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
- There will be no significant influence of religious affiliation on physical attractiveness, body image and self-esteem among female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

## METHODS

### Research design

The study utilized a descriptive survey research design. The questionnaire was used in collection of data from target respondents. None of the variables in the study was manipulated. The independent variables were body satisfaction and body image, while the dependent variable was self-esteem. The sample size was 156 female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife which was selected using convenience sampling techniques.

### Participants

**Table 1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

| Socio-demographic                                   | Categories     | Freq       | %             |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------|---------------|
| Age(mean $\pm$ standard deviation) 23.01 $\pm$ 3.45 | 18-20          | 18         | 11.50         |
|                                                     | 21-25          | 121        | 77.50         |
|                                                     | 26 and above   | 17         | 11.00         |
|                                                     | <b>Total</b>   | <b>156</b> | <b>100.00</b> |
|                                                     |                |            |               |
| Relationship Status                                 | Single         | 144        | 72.00         |
|                                                     | Situation ship | 10         | 5.00          |
|                                                     | Dating         | 44         | 22.00         |
|                                                     | Married        | 02         | 1.00          |
|                                                     | <b>Total</b>   | <b>200</b> | <b>100.00</b> |
| Religion                                            | Christianity   | 120        | 76.90         |
|                                                     | Islam          | 034        | 21.80         |
|                                                     | Others         | 02         | 01.30         |
|                                                     | <b>Total</b>   | <b>156</b> | <b>100.00</b> |
| Level of study                                      | 100            | 01         | 00.60         |
|                                                     | 200            | 03         | 01.90         |
|                                                     | 300            | 18         | 11.50         |
|                                                     | 400            | 79         | 50.60         |
|                                                     | 500            | 46         | 29.50         |
|                                                     | 600            | 09         | 05.80         |
|                                                     | <b>Total</b>   | <b>156</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

|             |              |            |               |
|-------------|--------------|------------|---------------|
| Weight (kg) | 40-60        | 63         | 43.38         |
|             | 70-80        | 49         | 31.41         |
|             | 81 and above | 44         | 28.21         |
|             | <b>Total</b> | <b>156</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

Table 1 present the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents show a mean age of 23 years with a standard deviation of 3.45. The majority, 77.5%, fall within the 21-25 age range, while smaller proportions are aged 18-20 (11.5%) and 26 and above (11%). In terms of relationship status, 72% of the participants are single, 22% are in dating relationships, 5% are in a situationship, and 1% are married, indicating that the majority of the respondents are not in formal or long-term relationships. Regarding religion, Christianity is the predominant faith, with 76.9% of the respondents identifying as Christians, followed by 21.8% who practice Islam. A small proportion, 1.3%, adhere to other religions. Academic level distribution shows that half of the respondents (50.6%) are in part 4 of study, followed by 29.5% in part 5, and 11.5% in part 3. Lower proportions are found in part 6 (5.8%), part 2 (1.9%), and part 1 (0.6%) levels, indicating a higher concentration of participants in advanced stages of their academic careers. In terms of physical attributes, 43.4% of respondents weigh between 40-60 kg, 31.41% fall within the 70-80 kg range, and 28.2% weigh 81 kg and above. Height distribution shows that 47.44% of participants are between 1.10-1.70 meters, while 42.30% are taller, standing at 1.81 meters and above. Only 10.3% are between 1.71-1.80 meters tall. This reveals a diverse range of physical characteristics within the sample.

## INSTRUMENT

The research instrument consisted of three standardized psychological scales put together in a questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into four sections. Section A was to elicit information on the socio-demographic factors of the respondents. Section B is a 10-item scale that measured global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self, Section C focused on body image satisfaction, while Section D measured body dissatisfaction.

### Socio-Demographic Information (SDI)

This section comprises of items that seek information on the study participant's personal profile such as age, gender, level, department, weight, and height. This socio-demographic factors are crucial in categorizing respondents and understanding the characteristics of the population. The respondents were asked to provide accurate and specific information to facilitate the analysis.

### The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

The Rosenberg Self -Esteem Scale was developed by Morris Rosenberg (1965). A 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is believed to be unidimensional. All items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from Strongly agree to strongly disagree. Items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 are reverse scored. Sum scores for all ten items. Keep scores on a continuous scale. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. Sinclair et al. (2010) reported high internal consistency for the RSES in an American community sample ( $\alpha = .91$ ), and good convergent and divergent validity. Reliability analysis was performed for the current study on RSES, revealing a high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha of .89.

### Body Image Satisfaction Rating Scale

The Body Image Satisfaction Scale by Holsen, et al. (2012) was developed in the context of examining body image satisfaction in 1132 Norwegian adolescent and adult males and females

measured at six times between ages 13 and 30. The Body Image Satisfaction Scale assesses participants' general satisfaction and dissatisfaction with body and appearance. The measure consists of 4 items and utilizes a 5-point scale with the following anchor points: "Strongly Agree" 1 point, "Agree" 2 points, "Undecided" 3 points, "Disagree" 4 points and "Strongly Disagree" 5 points. Cronbach's alphas for the scale at different ages were .84. Questionnaire to measure satisfaction with one's physical appearance. Scores are interpreted using a satisfaction rating table, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction.

### **Body Dissatisfaction Scale (BDS)**

The Body Dissatisfaction Scale (BDS) was developed by Mishal and Tazvin in (2015). It was used to measure body satisfaction. It is a 26-item scale that assesses body dissatisfaction on a 5-point Likert scale. The BDS has been found to have high test-retest reliability, indicating that the scores are consistent over time. Additionally, the internal consistency of the scale has been found to be high, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .85 to .94, indicating that the items on the scale are measuring the same construct. The BDS has been found to have good concurrent validity, as it has been shown to be highly correlated with other measures of body dissatisfaction, such as the Figure Rating Scale and the Body Areas Satisfaction Scale.

### **DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

Approval was sought from ethical committee of the University. The quantitative approach of data collection was adopted using a structured questionnaire with clear, concise questions, which was presented to respondents to express their agreement or disagreement with each of the items on the questionnaire.

Google Forms, an online survey platform was used to collect the data from respondents. The platform allows for easy distribution, data collection, and export of responses in various formats (i.e, CSV) for further analysis. A convenience sampling technique was employed, where the link to the online questionnaire was distributed via relevant channels (social media platforms, university email lists, student groups). The anonymity of respondents is maintained, and no personal identification information was captured, except for the email address used to participate in the survey. The Google Forms platform did not allow researcher access to this information, thus encouraging privacy. The survey was conducted over a period of twelve days within the campus of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, (SPSS) version 25. The analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics to present the socio demographic characteristics of the respondents, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and independent t-test. were used to test the hypotheses formulated for the study.

### **RESULTS**

#### **Hypothesis One**

The hypothesis one states that there is no significant relationship between negative body image and self-esteem among female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. This hypothesis was tested using correlational analysis as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Pearson Correlation on the Relationship between negative body image and self-esteem among female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University**

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>r</i> | <i>p-Val</i> |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------|----------|--------------|
| Body Image      | 42.57       | 6.49      |          |              |
| Self Esteem     | 36.29       | 5.59      | -.48     | <.01         |

Table 2 presents the correlation between negative body image and self-esteem among female undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University. The result of the correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed). The mean score for body image is 42.57, accompanied by a standard deviation of 6.49, indicating a moderate level of positive body image among the participants. In contrast, self-esteem has a mean score of 36.29 with a lower standard deviation of 5.59, suggesting that self-esteem levels are more closely clustered around the mean. The Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.48 points to a moderate negative relationship between body image and self-esteem, indicating that as body image perceptions worsen, self-esteem tends to decrease. The p-value of less than .01 confirms that this relationship is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, reinforcing the credibility of the findings. Hence the hypothesis that states there is a negative significant relationship between body image and self-esteem among female undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University is accepted

### Hypothesis Two

The hypothesis states that there will be no significant relationship between perceived body satisfaction and self-esteem in female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. This hypothesis was tested using Pearson correlational analysis and the result is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Pearson Correlation on the Relationship between perceived body satisfaction and self-esteem among female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University**

| <i>Variable</i>             | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>r</i> | <i>p-val</i> |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-----------|----------|--------------|
| Perceived body satisfaction | 42.57       | 6.49      |          |              |
| Self Esteem                 | 36.29       | 5.59      | -.61     | <.01         |

Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 explores the correlation between perceived body satisfaction and self-esteem among female undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University. The Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.61 reveals a strong negative relationship between perceived body satisfaction and self-esteem. The mean score for perceived body satisfaction is reported at 42.57, with a standard deviation of 6.49, suggesting a moderate level of perceived body satisfaction among the participants. Self-esteem, on the other hand, has a mean of 36.29 and a standard deviation of 5.59, indicating that while there are some variations, self-esteem levels are generally consistent among the respondents. The p-value of less than .01 further confirms the statistical significance of this relationship at the 0.05 level, underscoring the validity of the results. Hence hypothesis that states

there is a positive correlation between perceived physical attractiveness and self-esteem in female undergraduates is rejected.

### Hypothesis Three

Hypothesis three states that there will be no significant influence of religion on self-esteem, body satisfaction and body-image of female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Table 4 present the outcome of the analysis:

**Table 4. Independent t-test analysis on the influence of religious affiliation on body satisfaction, body image and self-esteem among female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University**

| Variable          | Religion Group | Mean  | Std   | df  | t     | p-val |
|-------------------|----------------|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|
| Self-esteem       | Christianity   | 36.99 | 5.07  | 154 | 2.94  | 0.004 |
|                   | Islam          | 33.94 | 6.60  |     |       |       |
| Body satisfaction | Christianity   | 41.78 | 6.01  | 154 | -2.83 | 0.005 |
|                   | Islam          | 45.19 | 7.38  |     |       |       |
| Body- image       | Christianity   | 51.94 | 15.10 | 154 | -2.65 | 0.009 |
|                   | Islam          | 60.25 | 20.60 |     |       |       |

Table 4 highlighted significant differences in self-esteem, body satisfaction, and body image between Christian and Muslim participants. Christians report a higher self-esteem mean of 36.99, in contrast to Muslims' 33.94, with a statistically significant p-value of 0.004. This suggests that Christians may experience greater self-worth in their cultural context. Conversely, Muslims rate their body satisfaction higher, with a mean score of 45.19 compared to 41.78 for Christians, which is also significant ( $p = 0.005$ ). This finding implies that cultural standards of beauty might be more favorable in Islamic contexts. Regarding body image, Muslims report a mean of 60.25, indicating a more positive self-image compared to Christians' mean of 51.94, confirmed by a p-value of 0.009. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there will be no significant religious difference in self-esteem, body satisfaction and body-image among female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examines the influence of body satisfaction and body image on self-esteem of female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State. The first objective which was to determine the relationship between body image and self-esteem among female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The study revealed that there is negative correlation between body image and self-esteem among the female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-ife, Nigeria. This finding is consistent with study by Thomas (2023) who reported the association between body image and self-esteem among the adolescents. Also, similar with finding of Yahaya, et al. (2021) who found out a significant relationship between body image and self-esteem among senior high school in Ghana. This explains that individuals that have negative body image will display low self-esteem issues It indicates that individuals who view their bodies more negatively are likely to experience lower levels of self-esteem. This implies that an undergraduate who is dissatisfied with their body image may feel inadequate or insecure, which can diminish their overall sense of self-worth.

The second objective which was to examine the relationship between body satisfaction and self-esteem among female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The study showed that there is a strong negative relationship between perceived body satisfaction and self-esteem among the female undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University. The study is in agreement

with Hysi (2024) who reported the inversely proportional correlation between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem among the undergraduates of University of Tirana. This finding is also in conformity with Mata and Castellano-Tejedor (2024) who found that there is significant positive correlation between body satisfaction and self-esteem among the early adulthood in Spain. This indicates that as perceptions of body satisfaction decline, self-esteem tends to decrease significantly. Exposure to images of idealized body types can contribute to body dissatisfaction, especially when individuals feel that these standards are unrealistic or unattainable and at times going extra length to attain these standards. If an undergraduate's sense of self-esteem is tied to their appearance, they may avoid social situations due to fear of judgment, which can lead to social isolation. Over time, this avoidance can create a negative feedback loop where they feel even worse about themselves because of perceived social rejection, they tend to feel underserving, dissatisfied with life, affecting their personal goals and even relationships with others. This low self-esteem as a result of body dissatisfaction have led many undergraduates especially celebrities among them to have engaged in several body surgeries such as enlarging the buttock and breast or even get slimmer to show the body curve.

The third objective was to examine the religious difference on body satisfaction, body image and self-esteem. The study revealed significant religious influence on body satisfaction, body image and self-esteem among female undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife Nigeria. This finding is similar with Demmrich, et al. (2017); Erken, et al. (2022); Giannous & Giannouli (2020); Gaol, et al. (2024). These studies established the significance relationship among the religion, self-esteem, body image and general body satisfaction. This study showed the significance of the two major religion (Christianity and Islam) in the perception of the body image, body satisfaction and the self-esteem. Many Christian denominations place less emphasis on the body as a symbol of personal virtue or religious devotion. While there are certainly teachings on modesty and respect for the body, the focus often leans more toward the internal aspects of faith such as spiritual well-being, salvation, and moral behavior. Additionally, in some branches of Christianity, particularly in the West, there has been a historical blending of religious and secular values that promotes self-acceptance and body positivity. In contrast, Islam has a strong focus on modesty and how the body is presented in public spaces, particularly through dress codes such as the hijab for women. Islamic teachings often encourage humility and modesty in physical appearance. This emphasis on modesty can sometimes create an internalized sense of pressure to meet religious expectations in how one presents themselves. Moreover, in more conservative Islamic cultures, strict adherence to modesty can sometimes limit individuals' opportunities to freely explore or express satisfaction with their physical appearance.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that body satisfaction and body image have significant impact on self-esteem among female undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University. Also, there is significant religious affiliation on self-esteem, body image and general body satisfaction among female undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended to encourage the representation of diverse body types, ages, and ethnicities in media, advertising, and social platforms. This can help normalize different standards of beauty and reduce the stigma associated with non-ideal body types. The use of therapeutic approach to such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and other therapeutic approaches that help individuals challenge negative beliefs about their bodies and self-worth.

Since media is so influential as of today, supportive online communities can be so helpful to develop or promote online platforms where individuals can connect, share experiences, and receive support related to body image and self-esteem. Moderated forums can provide a safe space for discussion, where individuals can talk freely without judgments or expectations.

By putting these detailed solutions into action, we can effectively tackle the problems related to body image dissatisfaction, and self-esteem. This can be achieved by focusing on education, creating supportive environments, offering mental health resources, and promoting positive media representations. These efforts can help people develop healthier views of themselves and enhance their overall well-being. This all-encompassing approach not only benefits individuals but also encourages a cultural shift towards accepting and valuing different body types, gradually removing unrealistic standards for women and more accepting of different body types and perceived attractiveness.

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