

BODY IMAGE AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING AS PREDICTORS OF CELEBRITY WORSHIP AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of body image and psychosocial wellbeing in predicting celebrity worship among undergraduate students in south-eastern Nigeria. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 377 participants (44 males, 333 females; Mean = 21.06, SD = 2.83). Participants completed standardized measures of body image (BISS), psychosocial wellbeing (PSWBS), and celebrity worship (CWS). Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to examine the predictive relationships. Results indicated that neither body image nor psychosocial wellbeing significantly predicted celebrity worship. These findings suggest that while celebrity worship is prevalent among young people, it may not be significantly influenced by body image satisfaction or psychosocial wellbeing. The study contributes to the existing literature by offering culturally specific insights into the nature of celebrity admiration among Nigerian undergraduates.

Keywords: Celebrity Worship, Body Image, Psychosocial Wellbeing

Introduction

Celebrity culture has become increasingly influential in contemporary society, with athletes, musicians, actors, religious figures, and social media influencers shaping public opinions, lifestyles, values, and perceptions of success and attractiveness. For some individuals, admiration can develop into celebrity worship a one-sided, parasocial attachment characterised by increasing emotional and psychological investment in a celebrity (McCutcheon et al., 2002). Celebrity worship exists along a continuum, ranging from entertainment-social interest to intense-personal attachment and, at its most extreme, borderline-pathological involvement, where individuals struggle to control their thoughts and behaviours toward the celebrity.

Although celebrity admiration may provide entertainment and social connection, excessive involvement has been associated with psychological and behavioural difficulties, including anxiety, depression, obsessive thoughts, disordered eating, and challenges in maintaining intimate relationships. Factors such as personality, self-esteem, religiosity, attachment style, body image, and patterns of internet use may influence the development and intensity of celebrity worship (Brooks, 2021; McCutcheon & Aruguete, 2021).

Of particular relevance is body image, defined as an individual's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about their physical appearance (Grogan, 2016). Contemporary media frequently present celebrities as models of beauty, attractiveness, and physical perfection, potentially encouraging individuals to compare their bodies with idealised celebrity images. Such comparisons may contribute to body dissatisfaction, particularly where celebrities are valued primarily for their physical appearance (Aruguete et al., 2014).

Psychosocial wellbeing may also be important in understanding celebrity worship. It encompasses psychological and social functioning, including positive relationships, self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Keyes,

2006; Ryff, 1989). Individuals experiencing lower psychosocial wellbeing may turn to celebrities as sources of identification, validation, belonging, or temporary escape from personal difficulties. In this context, celebrity worship may provide short-term emotional relief while potentially reinforcing detachment from one's own social and personal realities. Despite growing interest in celebrity culture, the psychological factors that contribute to excessive celebrity worship remain insufficiently understood, particularly within the Nigerian context. Therefore, the present study examines the predictive roles of body image and psychosocial wellbeing in celebrity worship, with the aim of contributing to a better understanding of the psychological processes underlying individuals' attachment to celebrities.

Statement of the Problem

Celebrity admiration can provide entertainment, inspiration, and positive role modelling when maintained within healthy boundaries. However, excessive attachment may develop into celebrity worship, characterised by intense emotional and behavioural involvement with a celebrity (McCutcheon et al., 2002). This is concerning because celebrity worship has been associated with anxiety, depression, obsessive thoughts, disordered eating, and difficulties in interpersonal relationships (McCutcheon et al., 2021; Vinney, 2023). Evidence from Nigeria suggests that celebrity worship is particularly relevant among young people. Among 1,577 adolescent undergraduates, 63.4% were classified as celebrity worshippers, while 56.7% demonstrated borderline-pathological celebrity worship (Nnubia et al., 2022). In the same population, 72.5% reported poor or languishing mental health (Nnubia et al., 2022). These figures suggest that celebrity worship may represent an important psychosocial concern among Nigerian undergraduates.

Body image is another potential concern. Celebrities are frequently portrayed through idealised standards of beauty and physical attractiveness, which may encourage social comparison and dissatisfaction with one's appearance (Aruguete et al., 2014). In Lagos, 63.5% of 865 university undergraduates reported body-image dissatisfaction, while 93.3% reported engaging in some form of weight-management practice (Olatona et al., 2023). These concerns are important because celebrity worshippers may idealise celebrities' physical appearance and then evaluate their own bodies against these ideals (Aruguete et al., 2014). Psychosocial wellbeing may also influence celebrity worship. Individuals experiencing difficulties with self-acceptance, relationships, purpose in life, or social belonging may use celebrity attachment as a source of validation, identification, or temporary escape from personal challenges (Keyes, 2006; McCutcheon & Aruguete, 2021; Ryff, 1989).

Despite increasing research on celebrity worship, limited Nigerian evidence has examined body image and psychosocial wellbeing simultaneously as predictors of celebrity worship among undergraduates. This gap warrants empirical investigation. Therefore, the present study examines the predictive roles of body image and psychosocial wellbeing in celebrity worship among undergraduates.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

1. Body image will significantly predict celebrity worship among undergraduate students.
2. Psychosocial wellbeing will significantly predict celebrity worship among undergraduate students

Literature Review

Body Image and Celebrity Worship

A study by Aruguete et al. (2014) examined the relationship between celebrity worship, self-objectification, sexualisation, and eating disorders among 279 university students. The findings showed that celebrity worship was associated with eating-disorder tendencies and enjoyment of sexualisation, particularly among male participants. The study suggests that strong admiration for celebrities may be associated with unhealthy attitudes toward the body.

Similarly, Lin et al. (2023) investigated 593 young adult celebrity worshippers in China and found significant positive relationships between celebrity worship and muscularity-oriented body dissatisfaction among both men and women. Celebrity worship was also significantly associated with disordered eating, while body-image inflexibility mediated the relationship between celebrity worship and disordered eating. These findings indicate that stronger celebrity worship may be associated with greater body-image concerns.

Also, Shabahang et al. (2020) examined 300 university students and found significant relationships among celebrity worship, body-image concerns, and cognitive flexibility. The findings further showed that celebrity worship had an indirect effect on body-image concerns through cognitive flexibility, suggesting that cognitive processes may influence how celebrity attachment relates to concerns about physical appearance.

Psychosocial Wellbeing and Celebrity Worship

A study by Maltby et al. (2004) examined celebrity worship in relation to personality, coping, general health, stress, affect, and life satisfaction among 372 respondents. The findings showed that intense-personal celebrity worship was associated with poorer mental health, particularly in relation to neuroticism and disengagement coping. This suggests that intense attachment to celebrities may be associated with poorer psychological wellbeing.

Similarly, Shabahang et al. (2020) examined the relationship between celebrity worship and psychological wellbeing among university students. The findings revealed a significant negative relationship between celebrity worship and psychological wellbeing, with cognitive flexibility playing a mediating role. This indicates that excessive celebrity attachment may be linked to difficulties in psychological functioning and that cognitive processes may influence this relationship.

In addition, Maltby et al. (2001) also found that higher levels of celebrity worship were associated with greater anxiety, depression, and dissociation, as well as lower self-esteem and life satisfaction among 170 adults in the United Kingdom. The authors suggested that celebrity worship may be associated with psychological distress and maladaptive coping.

Theoretical Review

Absorption Addiction Model

The Absorption Addiction Model, developed by McCutcheon et al. (2002), explains how ordinary admiration of celebrities can develop into intense and potentially problematic celebrity worship. The model proposes that individuals initially engage with celebrities for entertainment and social reasons, but where psychological needs are inadequately fulfilled, they may become increasingly absorbed in the celebrity's life. This absorption can progress to

intense-personal involvement and, in extreme cases, borderline-pathological behaviours characterised by compulsive thoughts and difficulty controlling fantasies or activities relating to the celebrity (McCutcheon et al., 2002). The model is relevant to the present study because individuals with low psychosocial wellbeing may seek celebrities for validation, belonging, identity, or escape from personal difficulties; at the same time, dissatisfaction with one's body may increase identification with celebrities who represent idealised standards of physical appearance.

Empirical evidence supports the model's central assumptions. Foreign studies have linked intense celebrity worship with poorer mental health, including depression, anxiety, lower self-esteem, and reduced life satisfaction (Maltby et al., 2001, 2002), while more recent evidence indicates that celebrity worship is associated with psychological difficulties and problematic behaviours.

Nigerian research has also reported substantial levels of celebrity worship among undergraduates and associations with mental health, suggesting that the phenomenon is relevant within the Nigerian context. The model's major strength is that it was specifically developed to explain celebrity worship and provides a continuum for distinguishing ordinary admiration from excessive involvement. However, the model has been criticised for potentially overemphasising the pathological nature of celebrity worship, since celebrity admiration is not necessarily harmful, and much of the supporting evidence is correlational. Furthermore, relatively limited Nigerian research has tested the model in relation to body image and psychosocial wellbeing simultaneously. Thus, the present study addresses this gap by examining whether body image and psychosocial wellbeing predict celebrity worship among undergraduates.

Methods

Design

A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted for this study. This design allows data collection from a large sample at a single point in time, making it suitable for examining relationships between variables such as body image, psychosocial well-being, and celebrity worship.

Participants

Participants in the present study were 377 (male = 44, female = 333) conveniently drawn from undergraduates in Nigeria, selected using convenience sampling. Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 30 (mean = 21.06, SD = 2.83). Faculty of Agricultural Science 53(13.3%) which has the following departments: Food Science and Technology 14(3.7%), Soil Science 7(1.9%), Agric Economics 5(1.3%), Agric Extension 9(2.4%), Crop science 2(0.5%), Nutrition and Dietetics 10(2.7%), Home Science 5(1.3%), and Agric and Bioresources 1(0.3%). Faculty of Arts 59(14.9%) which has the following departments: English and Literary Studies 15(4.0%), History 7(1.9%), Linguistics 13(3.4%), Theatre and Film Studies 8(2.1%), Archaeology 2(0.5%), Foreign Language 1(0.3%), Combined Arts 5(1.3%), and Mass Communication 8(2.1%). Faculty of Biological Sciences 37 (9.5%), which has the following departments: Plant Science and Botany 9(2.4%), Biochemistry 11(2.9%), Zoology 2 (0.5%), Combined Biological Science 1(0.5%), and Microbiology 14(3.7%). Faculty of Education 38 (11.1%), which has the following departments: Art Education 17 (4.5%), English Education 1(0.3%), Science Education 9(2.4%), Social Science Education 3(0.8%), Library and Information Science 7(1.9%), and Igbo Education 1(0.3%). Faculty of

Engineering 10 (2.9%), which has the following departments: Met & Mat Engineering 1(0.3%), Electronic Engineering 8 (2.1%), and Biomedical Engineering 1 (0.3%). Faculty of Health Sciences 9 (2.7), which has the following departments: Medical Laboratory 6 (1.6%), Nursing 1 (0.3%), Medical Rehabilitation 2 (0.5%), Faculty of Pharmaceutical Science 10 (2.7%). Faculty of Physical Sciences 10 (2.7%), which has the following departments: Pure and Industrial Chemistry 4(1.1%), Computer Science 3(0.8%), and Science Lab Tech 3(0.8%). Faculty of Social Sciences 123 (32.9%), which has the following departments: Economics 28 (7.4%), Psychology 65 (17.2%), PALG 12(3.2%), Social work 5(1.3%), Sociology 4(1.1%), Political science 3(0.8%) and Combined Social Science 6(1.6%). Faculty of Veterinary Medicine 23 (6.1%), Faculty of Vocational Education 5 (1.5%), which has the following departments: Home economics and hospitality 5(1.3%). For Level: 100 level 113 (30%), 200level 69(18.3%), 300Level 51(13.5%), 400Level 120(31.8%), 500Level 20(5.3%), 600Level 4(1.1%).

Instruments

Body Image State Scale: Body Image State Scale (BISS), developed by Cash (2002), is a psychological assessment tool designed to assess an individual's present level of body image satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Sample item: Right now, I feel ____ with my appearance). It is intended to capture a person's subjective feelings, ideas, and attitudes toward their own body at a certain point in time. The scale typically consists of a sequence of statements or items that respondents rate on a 9-point (1=extremely dissatisfied to 9= extremely satisfied), bipolar, Likert-type scale, expressing how much they agree or disagree with each assertion. The primary objective of the BISS is to provide a picture of an individual's body image state, allowing researchers or clinicians to study the immediate experiences and emotions associated with body image. It can be applied in a variety of settings, such as research investigations, clinical assessments, and interventions addressing body image issues. Internal consistency of the BISS was .77 for women and .72 for males. The BISS is scored and interpreted using the sum or average of individual item responses. Higher scale scores often imply better body satisfaction or a positive body image state, whereas lower scores indicate a negative body image condition. Items on the Body Image State Scale yielded good internal consistency reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .87 when the items were piloted in a sample of 66 students of the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus (UNEC).

Psychosocial Wellbeing Scale: The Psychosocial Wellbeing Scale (PSWBS), developed by Negrini et al. (2014), it is a psychological assessment tool designed to assess individuals' perceptions of their own lives in terms of their psychological and social functioning. This scale's measure consists of 22 items (Sample item: The demands of everyday life often get me down) on a seven-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree). The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the PSWB was evaluated for the optimal factor solution and confirmed using confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs). Internal consistency of the Psychosocial Wellbeing Scale was .97. High scores imply a high level of wellbeing. Items on the Psychosocial Wellbeing Scale yielded good internal consistency reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .85 when the items were piloted in a sample of 66 students of the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus (UNEC).

The Celebrity Worship Scale: The Celebrity Worship Scale (CWS) is a frequently utilized self-report tool that assesses people's levels of celebrity worship, which refers to intense and personal involvement with celebrities. The scale was developed by Maltby et al. (2003) and has been widely utilized in research on celebrity culture and its psychological effects. This

scale's measure consists of 17 items (Sample item: I am obsessed with the details of my favourite celebrity) on a five -point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). Items on the Celebrity Worship Scale yielded good internal consistency reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .94 when the items were piloted in a sample of 66 students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka Enugu Campus (UNEC).

Procedure

The researcher used a convenience sampling technique. The self-report questionnaires were distributed among students of different departments of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Participants were approached in their classrooms and hostels by the researcher and asked to participate in the study. Those who consented were given the questionnaires to fill. The researcher explained the nature of the study to the participants, what they were required to do, and who was undertaking the research. Participants were informed that they were free to withdraw at any stage of the study, without any prejudice, and that their personal information would remain confidential. They were also encouraged to answer the questions as honestly as possible. All the participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and were not provided with any reward for participation. It was observed that the length of the questionnaire items was not a problem to the respondents in the current research, as there were no such complaints during the study. Each section in the questionnaire had clearly stated instructions on how it should be completed. All the items in the questionnaire were written in simple English, and hence most of the participants did not find it hard to understand. Despite this, the researcher educated the participants when explanations were needed. The questionnaire was returned by the participants as soon as it was completed. The researcher encouraged participants to respond to all the items in order to obtain complete data. In total, 400 questionnaires were administered, but 377 were properly completed and returned to the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using SPSS vs 27. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics, while hierarchical multiple regression was employed to test the predictive joint influence body image, psychosocial well-being, and celebrity worship. Pearson's correlation was also used to examine the associations between key variables.

Results

Table 1 showed the correlations between the demographic variables and the main study variables. Table 2 is the regression results for the test of hypotheses.

Table 1: Pearson's correlations of demographic variables, body image, psychosocial wellbeing, and celebrity worship.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
CWS	42.20	15.51	-				
Gender	.13	.36	.05	-			
Age	21.06	2.83	.10*	.19*	-		
BISS	41.10	10.84	-.12*	-.12	.00	-	
PSWBS	21.06	18.31	-.08	-.05	.15**	.33**	-

Note. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; Gender (1 = male, 2 = female); CWS = Celebrity Worship Scale, BISS = Body Image State Scale, PSWBS = Psychosocial Wellbeing Scale.

The results in Table 1 show that celebrity worship was negatively associated with Body Image ($r = -.12$, $p < .05$) and Psychosocial Wellbeing ($r = -.08$), but was positively associated with Gender ($r = .05$) and Age ($r = .10$, $p < .05$).

Hypotheses Testing

Table 1 displays result of the joint prediction of Celebrity Worship by Body Image and Psychosocial Wellbeing, with age and gender as control variables using the hierarchical multiple regression.

Table 2: Hierarchical multiple regression predicting Celebrity Worship by Body Image and Psychosocial Wellbeing, with age and gender as control variables

Predictors	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	β	<i>T</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>T</i>
Gender	2.78	.06	.1.22	2.12	.05	.96	2.12	.05	.93
Age	-.67	-.12	-2.34	-.66	-.12	-2.31	-.63	-.12	-2.18
BISS				-.16	-.11	-.14	-.14	-.08	-1.83
PSWBS							-.03	-.03	-.58
R^2		.16			.28			.29	
$R^2\Delta$		.16			.12			.00	
<i>F</i>		3.06			3.58			2.76	
$F\Delta$		3.06			4.56			.335	

Note. ***BISS = Body Image State Scale, PSWBS = Psychosocial Wellbeing Scale.

Results of the hierarchical multiple regressions for the test of the hypotheses are shown in Table 2.

In Step 1, gender and age were added as control variables. Gender was a positive predictor of celebrity worship, $\beta = .06$. The *B* showed that for each unit rise in gender, celebrity worship increases by 2.78 units. Age was a negative predictor of celebrity worship, $\beta = -.12$. The model was $F = 3.06$, $R^2 = .16$. The R^2 of .16 indicated that 16% of the variance in celebrity worship was explained on account of the control variables.

In Step 2, Body Image was a negative predictor of celebrity worship, $\beta = -.11$. The model was $F\Delta = 4.56$, $R^2 = .28$. The $R^2\Delta$ of .12 indicated that 12% of the variance in celebrity worship was explained by Body Image.

In step 3, Psychosocial Wellbeing was a negative predictor of celebrity worship, $\beta = -.03$. The *B* showed that for each unit rise in Psychosocial Wellbeing, celebrity worship decreases by -.03 units. The model was $F\Delta = .335$, $R^2\Delta = .00$. The $R^2\Delta$ of .00 indicated that 0% of the variance in celebrity worship was explained by religious beliefs. All the variables in the study explained 28% of the variance in celebrity worship.

Summary of the Findings

- Body Image was a negative predictor of celebrity worship, indicating that low Body Image evaluation was associated with high celebrity worship.

- ii. Psychosocial Wellbeing was a negative predictor of celebrity worship, indicating that a decrease in Psychosocial Wellbeing was associated with high celebrity worship.

Discussion of Findings

The current study aimed at examining the role of body image and psychosocial wellbeing on celebrity worship among undergraduates. The first hypothesis, which stated that body image would have a significant negative effect on celebrity worship among undergraduates, was rejected. This finding is in contrast to earlier studies by Aruguete et al. (2014), Shabahang et al. (2020), and Utami (2019). A possible reason why body image did not significantly predict celebrity worship among undergraduates is that this demographic is frequently exposed to diverse depictions of beauty and body positivity that challenge traditional beauty standards, as supported by Manning and Mulgrew (2021). As a result, their celebrity worship may be influenced by factors beyond physical appearance. Another possible reason why body image would not significantly predict celebrity worship among undergraduates in Nigeria may be that contemporary Nigerian celebrities represent diverse body shapes and sizes, proving that a rigid adherence to Westernized aesthetic standards is not a prerequisite for local fame and influence. Another possible reason body image would not significantly predict celebrity worship among undergraduates in Nigeria may be the country's diverse cultural landscape, composed of multiple ethnic groups with unique beauty standards. In many indigenous Nigerian societies, traditional ideals historically equate bodily fullness and curves with health, affluence, and vitality rather than rigid thinness, leading to less emphasis on a singular, globalized body ideal as a prerequisite for admiration (Ogunbor & Omoregie, 2023). Another possible reason for the result is the lack of a direct relationship between body image and celebrity worship within this specific population. This outcome stands in stark contrast to established Western empirical data, such as the experimental findings of Brown and Tiggemann (2016), which demonstrated that celebrity worship typically exacerbates body dissatisfaction. This divergence strongly suggests that media influence operates differently among Nigerian youth, reinforcing the need for culturally specific frameworks when analyzing media effects.

The second hypothesis, which stated that psychosocial wellbeing would have a significant negative effect on celebrity worship among undergraduates, was rejected. This finding is in contrast with previous studies such as Maltby et al. (2001, 2002) and Shabahang et al. (2020), which found a significant relationship between poor psychosocial wellbeing and elevated celebrity worship. A possible reason why psychosocial wellbeing would not significantly predict celebrity worship among undergraduates may be that the influence of media representation, social media, and peer interactions can dominate the predictive influence of psychosocial wellbeing on celebrity worship. Another possible reason for the result is that celebrity worship can serve adaptive functions; for instance, Maltby et al. (2007) observed that certain forms of intense-personal celebrity interest are actually positively related to self-esteem and social identity verification. Furthermore, as Schiappa et al. (2007) demonstrated in their meta-analysis, parasocial attachments are a normal consequence of media consumption rather than a reflection of psychological deficiencies, explaining why poor psychosocial wellbeing did not act as a strong predictor in this sample.

Recommendation/Implications of the Findings

- i. The results of this study illustrate the role of body image and psychosocial wellbeing on celebrity worship among undergraduates and may be of use to families and mental health practitioners. The study suggests that there is no significant predictive

relationship between body image and psychosocial wellbeing on celebrity worship among undergraduates. These findings challenge existing assumptions or theories that proposed a link between body image and psychosocial wellbeing in celebrity worship among undergraduates. It indicates that other factors or variables not considered in the study may be more influential in explaining celebrity worship among undergraduates.

- ii. The results of this study may point to the fact that the relationship between body image and psychosocial wellbeing in relation to celebrity worship among undergraduates is complex and influenced by various factors that were not captured in the study. This highlights the need for further research and a more comprehensive examination of the variables and their potential interactions.
- iii. Mental health organizations should support individuals with celebrity worship disorders through information, therapy, and treatment.
- iv. Media outlets should use appropriate journalistic practices for genuine celebrity portrayal. Social media platforms should discourage celebrity worship, offering tools, helplines, and content control, while celebrities address issues through fan groups and mental health awareness, self-acceptance, and critical thinking. Celebrities may also highlight the harmful effects of celebrity culture in interviews or through their artistic work.

Limitations of the Study

The cross-sectional design of this study restricts conclusions on causal patterns between variables. The sample size was relatively small, may not be effective in generalising to Nigeria as a whole as the sample population was limited to only students of the University of Nigeria Nsukka and Enugu Campus. As a result, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution, as they may not be applicable to other samples both within and outside of Nigeria.

Suggestions for Future Studies

- i. Sample size should be larger in future studies. Future research should consider carrying out a large-scale survey of undergraduates from different geographical locations.
- ii. Also, research replicating the present study could be performed to either confirm or repudiate the findings of the study.
- iii. Such studies should adopt longitudinal designs and seek ways of controlling for possible confounding factors that may influence the nature of findings. Future studies should consider using more representative samples that cut across different occupations and experiences.

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