

## **Personality Traits and Body Appreciation among Undergraduates in Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Body image which is considered a critical public health issue is observed to affect physical, mental, social, digital and spiritual wellness among young people. This is because favorable level of body appreciation among young men and women on the university campus could go a length in determining positive health behaviors and overall health. There could be link between body appreciation and personality among university students. A dearth of empirical researches in this line of inquiry limits knowledge and possible interventions in Nigeria. This study therefore, investigated the relationship between personality traits and body appreciation among 298 undergraduates of Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria. The Body Appreciation Scale ( $\alpha = .819$ ) and Big Five Personality Inventory ( $\alpha = .783$ ) were used to collect primary data for the study. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were employed in data analysis. Result revealed that the correlations between personality traits and body appreciation showed: extraversion ( $r = -.156$ ); agreeableness ( $r = .175$ ); conscientiousness ( $r = .190$ ); neuroticism ( $r = -.232$ ); and openness to experience ( $r = .858$ ). The researcher recommends more actions in terms of psychotherapy, counselling/guidance, advocacy and media literacy in order to sustain high level of body appreciation among university students for positive health behaviors and overall wellness.

*Keywords:* Personality traits, body appreciation, wellness, undergraduates in Nigeria

### **Introduction**

Body appreciation among young people has been a topical issue owing to the place of physical attractiveness in determining state of the mind observed in the present generation. Many university

students are observed to be at a time in their life where their major preoccupations are centered on looks and body image. The university campus which is observably a place for learning and socialization, has many young people in the adolescence and young adulthood stages of life. One of the developmental tasks of adolescents according to Havighurst (1976) is accepting their physique, which means that the emerging adults contend with happenings in physical/biological domain of development and it affects their body image and behavior. Young adults who are mostly focused on their social relationship with the view to attract a potential spouse may also have physique concerns. University students are exposed to media messages where they view different people's images and internalize comments over these images. According to Rymarczyk (2021), the mass media promote certain standards of physical attractiveness, and may intensify certain behavioral traits in people. To Rymarczyk (2021), these specified attitudes and behavior, are expected to assist individuals in obtaining how their body should like (ideal body image), e.g., excessive concentration on body image, weight control, increase in physical activity.

The will to accept and appreciate one's body may be lacking among young people who believe that there is a standard of beauty and attractiveness. Students on university campuses who place much value on appearance seem to neglect other aspects of their wellbeing as they constantly are preoccupied with appearance and weight, basing their self-worth on their body image. The problem with lack of body appreciation could arise when young people are desirous of change in their bodies through enhancement practices including cosmetic surgeries. This problem could emanate from social comparisons due to media images and messages of seemingly flawless people. The pressure then gets worse if they see others around them with seemingly better physique and body presentation. These sets of students may become more mentally confused as to why they cannot look like their peers or friends. Lack of body appreciation and acceptance could indeed set adolescents and young adults on university campuses up for weight preoccupation, anxiety, depressive mood and perpetual body image disturbances.

Body image has been described and established as a critical public health problem (Bucchianeri & Neumark-Sztainer, 2014), while other scholars such as Silva, Campos and Marôco (2018) and Thomas and Warren-Findlow (2020) have affirmed that physical/biological, mental and social

health of early adults in higher education have links with different aspects of body image. Body appreciation conceptualised by Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015), describes one on hand, acceptance and having favourable opinions toward-, and respecting one's body, and a resistance of sociocultural pressures to accept the stereotyped standards of beauty and handsomeness. These scholars also went further to assert that body appreciation also refers to appreciating the functionality and health of the body irrespective of shape, size, colour, weight, height and presentation (appearance).

The body image literature has more focus on women, but in the present time, men are seen to also have concerns over their physique. Observably, young male students in the university care so much about they look and internalize certain standard of being handsome. Romantic relationships in the university, attracting and keeping a potential spouse also may make young men develop unhealthy body image concerns. This behavior is also common to women who may develop body appreciation or otherwise in relation to dating, courtship, marriage and being able to retain a mate. According to Halliwell (2015) and Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015), women and men who are more specifically appreciative towards their body might be more capable of positive health behaviors, making body appreciation vital in overall health. This holds true indeed, because once a person develops respect and admiration for their body, they become more prone to act in ways to care for the body and invariably their health. Males however, have been found to show a stronger body appreciation compared to females when considering positive body image constructs (Lemoine, Konradsen, Jensen, Roland-Lévy, Ny & Khalaf, 2018).

Leanne et al (2020) submitted that there is an important role of body image in optimism, happiness, wellbeing, life satisfaction and general blossoming and flourishing in men and women. Similarly, a growing body of research (Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005; Atari, 2016; Lemoine et al., 2018; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015b; Swami, García, & Barron, 2017) has found out that body appreciation is positively associated with indicators of well-being (such as, self-esteem, provocative coping, life satisfaction and optimism). Also, these discoveries pointed to a negative association with both symptoms of eating disorders (e.g., Cotter, Kelly, Mitchell, & Mazzeo, 2015; Avalos et al., 2005; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015b) and psychological distress that affect overall

health (e.g., Gillen, 2015; Rawana, McPhie, & Hassibi, 2016; Iannantuono & Tylka, 2012;). Body appreciation has also been discovered to seemingly be a protective factor against negative experiences such as body dissatisfaction (Halliwell, 2013; Andrew, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2015). It is therefore of importance to identify and study factors related to body appreciation, especially those factors that could be protective or risk factors for acceptance and appreciation of one's body. Thus, recommendations on this could assist practitioners in public health domain regarding implications of positive body image on mental wellness.

While there have been advances in body image studies in other countries, body image and body appreciation researches are still coming up in Nigeria. The problems emanating from negative body image and its varied consequences especially among young people in Nigeria have not been well reported in literature. Similarly, the importance of having positive attitude towards one's own body and many advantages this has for overall health among university students in Nigeria is expected to have been well featured in the body of knowledge. Studies centered on body image are important in this present-day Nigeria owing to the heavy investment by young people on looks and appearance and the neglect on other aspects of their lives.

Body appreciation has been correlated with self-perception factors like self-concept and self-esteem (Obi, 2019). However, there are gaps in the knowledge of personality traits and its relationship with body appreciation. It has been suggested that associations between personality dimensions and body image constructs have not been conclusively established (Swami et al., 2013). Allen et al. (2020) also pointed out that the relationships between personality facets and body image constructs has not been well investigated. In this study, personality traits are correlated with body appreciation in order to establish the level of relationship between each dimension of the five factor personality traits (openness to experience, neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness). No doubt, people's personalities are different but it is expedient to empirically establish those dimensions of personality that could relate with body appreciation in order to contribute to knowledge in the areas of personality traits and body appreciation, especially among university students who are still developing and could still modify some aspects of their lives for good

The role of personality traits in the development and sustenance of body appreciation among university students in Nigeria has not been well pointed out in literature. Other studies on personality are seen to have focused on the typology (personality types), which may be too narrow somewhat. The internationally known Big Five Model of Personality (McCrae & Costa, [2008](#)) could be better in a study as this. This is because it describes personality traits and factors, mainly from a psychometric point of view, and has universality and applicability in different regions, being well understood linguistically and has sociocultural fairness (Soto & John, [2016](#); Dong & Dumas, [2020](#)). Nearly all regions of the world could the personality traits and adapt it to their literature because the big five model relates well with different experiences of humans in all developmental lifespan, including the perception of body image throughout life (Davis et al., [2020](#)). Davis et al (2020) also added that the traits theory and scale of personality enables measurement and evaluation at different stages of life and with specific population of study and units of analysis (sample).

The big five personality dimensions could have specific relationships with body appreciation. For instance, neuroticism is significantly associated with actual-ideal weight discrepancy (positively) and body appreciation (negatively) when body mass index and social status are taken into consideration (Swami et al, 2013). It is also established that neuroticism is a trait of public health significance which body image scholars could study in-depth considering its indication for mental health problems (Swami et al, 2013). Further scholars (Cassin & von Ranson, 2005; Swami, Tran, Brooks, Kanaan, Luesse & Nader, 2013; Kvaem, von Soest & Skolleborg, 2006) who studied certain personality traits such as neuroticism, impulsiveness, and avoidance discovered increase in the susceptibility to body dissatisfaction while agreeableness and extraversion are negatively associated with body image concerns. These testimonies in literature go on to give empirical evidence on how different personality traits have different relationship patterns with body appreciation, and how these findings require varied interventions by body image scholars.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are many consequences for lack of body appreciation among university students, ranging from poor self-care which could lead to physical health problems, to mental health issues like

social physique anxiety, mood problems, personality disorders and social problems like poor relationships and low social motivation. There is indeed paucity of researches on personality and body image as Obi (2016) and Murphy (2012) pointed out that more research is needed in the areas of personality and body image. There is a dearth of empirical studies in the research area of personality traits and body appreciation among university students in Nigeria. This study is set out to fill this gap in literature and point to areas of needed interventions by counselling psychologists.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objective of the study is to examine the relationship between personality traits (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism Openness to experience) and body appreciation among undergraduates in Lead City University.

### **Hypothesis**

H<sub>01</sub>: There will be no significant relationship between personality traits (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism Openness to experience) and body appreciation among undergraduates in Lead City University.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted the descriptive research design of correlational type. There was no manipulation of variables in the study. The researcher only aimed at describing, as well as explaining varying factors, and answering the raised research questions. The study population consisted of all the 1801 male and female university students in 200 level in Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria. A sample of 328 male and female 200 level Lead City University students were selected as participants for the study, using the Simple random sampling technique after using Taro Yamane sample size calculation formula. The researcher made use of a Questionnaire to collect the needed primary data for the study. This questionnaire has four sections: Section A covers the bio-data (socio-demographic data). Section B contained the Body Appreciation Scale (BAS-2), section C featured the Big Five Inventory (BFI).

### **Method of Data Analysis**

Completed and returned questionnaires were sorted and collated. The scores were then inputted on the computer system for analyses. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical

tools. Frequency count, percentage, Pearson’s product moment correlation analysis was used analyses the data in order to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

**Result**

**Hypothesis Testing**

**Correlations**

	Body Appreciation	Extraversi on	Agreeablen ess	Conscientiousn ess	Neuroticism	Opennes s to experien ce
Pearson Correlati on	1.000	-.156	-.057	-.273	-.135	.125
Body Appreciation		1.000	.175	-.362	-.765	-.772
Extraversion	-.156		1.000	.190	-.181	-.404
Agreeableness	-.057	.175		1.000	-.232	.226
Conscientiousn ess	-.273	-.362	.190		1.000	.858
Neuroticism	-.135	-.765	-.181	-.232		1.000
Openness to experience	.125	-.772	-.404	.226	.858	
Sig. (2- tailed)		.003	.163	.000	.010	.015
Body Appreciation			.003	.000	.000	.000
Extraversion	.003		.001	.000	.000	.000
Agreeableness	.163	.001		.000	.001	.000
Conscientiousn ess	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
Neuroticism	.010	.000	.001	.000		.000

	Openness to experience	.015	.000	.000	.000	.000	.
N	Body Appreciation	298	298	298	298	298	298
	Extraversion	298	298	298	298	298	298
	Agreeableness	298	298	298	298	298	298
	Conscientiousness	298	298	298	298	298	298
	Neuroticism	298	298	298	298	298	298
	Openness to experience	298	298	298	298	298	298

### Discussion of Findings

From the result of the hypothesis in this study, openness to experience has the highest relationship with body appreciation, followed by conscientiousness and agreeableness. Neuroticism and extraversion have negative relationship with body appreciation. This result means the different traits of personality have different levels of relationships with body appreciation. Openness to experience which signifies flexibility and adventurous trait may make students not bottle up negative feelings about themselves and their environment, thereby highly linking to body appreciation. Conscientiousness and agreeableness also may point to careful, detailed trait, and conformity with conventions, thereby making them correlate with body appreciation albeit low level. Neuroticism, a rather negative trait has inverse correlation, and so also, extraversion, an outgoing and carefree trait. Among the Big Five factors, only neuroticism exhibited the highest significant correlation with body dissatisfaction, which is consistent with the findings of Swami et al. (2013), where neuroticism was significantly positively associated with body image in women (the higher scores on the scale indicate greater actual-ideal weight discrepancy) and significantly negatively associated with body appreciation (the higher scores on the scale reflect more positive body appreciation).



In the study on male subjects, Benford and Swami (2014) confirmed a positive relationship between neuroticism and muscularity drive or motive; while body appreciation was negatively related to neuroticism and positively to extraversion. Body appreciation is a positive construct and evidently goes deeper with the trait of extraversion which has to do with outgoing, pleasant and sociable personality. People with high level of extraversion are seen to be free-spirited with externalizing feelings. Thus, they do not take to heart comments, comparisons and ideal state of issues, rather they flow with the reality and quickly move on regarding any life matter whatsoever. The systematic reviews by Allen and Robson (2020) and by Allen and Walter (2016) which aimed to verify the relationship between personality factors and body image discovered high expression of neuroticism showing a consistent association with negative body image, and the factors conscientiousness and extroversion revealed a positive association with satisfaction with body image. These studies attested that negative traits of personality relate directly with negative body image. This connotes that people who are neurotic will most like develop and sustain body image problems because of their gloomy outlook to life. While on the other hand, careful, mindful and meticulous personalities with cheerful mindset will more often than not, develop admiration, acceptance and appreciation for their body and social evaluations of how they look. Interestingly, Allen and Robson (2020) found that the neuroticism factor is strongly negatively correlated with satisfaction with the body. The effect of the relationship is negative no doubt, revealing the greater the level of neuroticism in a person, the less body satisfaction with specific parts and perception of the general body appearance. High levels of neuroticism indeed show greater negative feelings, vulnerability, impulsivity, maladaptive traits, anxious states and depressed symptoms. This result is in agreement with other studies that investigated the relationship between these variables in the university population (Alcaraz-Ibáñez et al., 2019; Embacher et al., 2018; MacNeill et al., 2017; Tok et al., 2010). In addition to studies with university students, results with other populations also concluded this negative relationship between neuroticism, a trait of negative mental health and body image perception and evaluation (Allen & Robson, 2020; Allen & Walter, 2016). Furthermore, a study confirmed a relationship between all aspects of neurotic personality and body dissatisfaction, reinforcing the consistent findings of a relationship between these variables,

and pointing to urgent attention from experts in these areas (Allen & Robson, [2020](#)). All these therefore, when considered together, indicate that literature is unanimous on the existence of a correlations between personality traits and body appreciation and more specifically, the trait of neuroticism and body image, irrespective of the population studied. Several studies allow the conclusion that the high expression of neuroticism is related to different negative outcomes in individuals' lives since being neurotic may not augur well for positive behaviours and mental health (Kroencke et al., [2020](#)).

The extroversion trait factor was positively correlated with three dimensions of body satisfaction in a study: satisfaction with muscles, external parts, and lower parts in an earlier study. There are conflicting results regarding association between extroversion and body image in different populations. For instance, the association of the extroversion trait with body satisfaction in university students finds divergent results in the literature, with studies that found a positive correlation between these two constructs (Alcaraz-Ibáñez et al., [2019](#); Tok et al., [2010](#)) and researches that do not find a relationship between them (Embacher et al., [2018](#); Soohinda et al., [2019](#)). The divergence in these results may be explained by differences between the research instruments used, regions, nature of research and other methodological variations in the studies.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The high level of body appreciation among undergraduates in Lead City University implies that experts in counselling and clinical psychology should identify factors related to body appreciation and work to strengthen these factors among young people for overall health. The dimensions of personality traits have different relationships with body appreciation. The traits of extraversion and neuroticism which have negative (inverse) correlation with body appreciation require attention of body image and public health experts.

### **Recommendations**

1. Counselling psychologists should organize psychotherapeutic programmes to enhance body appreciation

2. Self-development training targeting personality advancement and growth should be organized by body image experts and coaches.
3. University-based awareness programmes should be periodically carried out by university counselling psychologists in collaboration with public health experts, on the relevance of some aspects of students' lives that may influence their overall wellbeing.
4. Media literacy can be used to foster positive body image and body appreciation among young people, especially university students.

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