

## **Body Image and Self- Esteem as Predictors of Binge Eating Disorders among Female Undergraduates**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigated the predictive nature of body image and self-esteem on binge eating disorder among female undergraduates. The participants consisted of 100 female undergraduates from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, specifically from the Faculties of Arts and management sciences, whose ages ranged from 18-26, with the mean age of 21.65 and standard deviation of 2.60. The Body Appreciation Scale-2(BAS-2), by Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015), Index of Self-Esteem by Hudson (1982), and Binge Eating Disorders Screener-7 by Tadeka (2019) were used to collect data for the current study. The study adopted a Predictive-Correlational design. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis were employed as the statistical tool to analyze the data. Result reveals that both independent variables have a significant predictive effect on the dependent variable. That is to say that, the first hypothesis which states that body image will not significantly predict binge eating disorder was rejected as body image perception predicted binge eating disorder among female undergraduates. Also the second hypothesis which stated that self-esteem will not significantly predict binge eating disorder was rejected, as results showed a positive correlation between self-esteem and binge eating disorders among female undergraduates. Recommendations were made among others that is a great need to create an awareness programme in Universities of the existence of Binge eating disorder, so that student would actually know and understand what the disorder is all about, and could easily identify binge eating signs and symptoms when they feel such craving to binge eat.

**Keywords:** Body Image, Self-esteem, Predictors, Binge Eating, Undergraduates.

## **Introduction**

Eating disorders (ED) are common among adolescents, but it is during the undergraduate years that young people, especially women, are at risk for developing them. According to Jacobson (2021), the storm occurs when the realities of campus life collide with anxieties, learning issues, or poor self-esteem. Eating Disorders refers to complex conditions that arise from a combination of long-lasting behavioural, biological, emotional, psychological, interpersonal, and social factors (National Eating Disorders Association [NEDA], 2012). While it may first appear to be solely about food and weight preoccupations, those suffering from them often try to use food to cope with feelings, emotions, personal struggles, painful memory and traumas that may otherwise seem overwhelming (NEDA, 2012). An eating disorder of interest, which is the binge eating disorder (BED), is characterized by an uncontrollable urge for eating and consumption of excessively large portions of food within a limited time frame (Mayo-Clinic, 2018). The volume of food consumed during bingeing episodes exceeds what might normally be consumed during a similar, non-bingeing period, after which the individual begins to feel guilt or shame. Binge eating disorder has a deep rooted connection with emotional baggage's and negative feelings, and as much as people with binge eating disorder endure these negative feelings, they are yet unaware of what is driving them to overeat, except that they find calm and comfort from food, hence the term "emotional eating" involves the process of using food to make oneself feel better, relieve stress and avoid dealing with trauma and painful emotions).

Binge eating disorder appears to be a particular problem among females, with an estimated prevalence rate of up to 19% (Lynch et al., 2000 as cited in Prather, 2015), and contrary to beliefs, binge eating disorder is not just about food, but rather, a signal of underlying issues that the individual might be facing which is usually associated with emotions like stress, fear, and anxiety, nor is it applicable to only people who are overweight and obese, there are still others that may be at a normal weight. A young woman who was able to manage stress and stay afloat as a result of hard work and support from her parents during her

secondary days might find herself drowning in the confusing and complicated world of the University (Jacobson, 2021).

### **Concept of Binge Eating Disorder**

Binge eating disorder is an eating disorder that is commonly known by compulsive overeating or consuming abnormal amounts of food while feeling unable to stop, and a loss of control. Binge eating disorder was introduced in 2013 in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). Although newly recognized as a distinct disorder, it is the most common eating disorder and is more common than anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa (Cowden, 2020). Binge eating disorder is an “expressive disorder” (that is, it is an expression of an underlying psychological problem) (Wu et al., 2014). According to the DSM-5, diagnostic criteria for binge eating disorder include:

- A. Recurrent episodes of binge eating. An episode is characterized by both of the following:
  - 1. Eating in a discrete period of time (for example, within any two-hour period), an amount of food that is definitely larger than most people would eat in a similar period of time under similar circumstances.
  - 2. A sense of lack of control over eating during the episodes (for example, a feeling that one cannot stop eating or control what or how one is eating).
- B. The binge-eating episodes are associated with three (or more) of the following:
  - 1. Eating much more rapidly than normal.
  - 2. Eating until feeling uncomfortably full.
  - 3. Eating large amounts of food when not feeling physically hungry.
  - 4. Eating alone because of feeling embarrassed by how much one is eating.
  - 5. Feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed, or very guilty afterwards.
- C. Marked distress regarding binge eating is present.
- D. The binge eating occurs, on average, at least once a week for three months.
- E. The binge eating is not associated with the recurrent use of inappropriate compensatory behavior (for example, purging) and does not occur exclusively

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during the course of anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder.

Furthermore, the DSM-5 has a severity grading, which is categorized based on frequency of episodes of binge eating, which includes

- Mild: 1 – 3 binge eating episodes per week.
- Moderate: 4 – 7 binge eating episodes per week
- Severe: 8 – 13 binge eating episodes per week.
- Extreme: 14 or more binge eating episodes per week.

It is important to note that weight or appearance is not part of the diagnostic criteria for binge eating disorder (Walden behavioural care, 2021). However, regarding its cause, researchers are studying whether brain chemicals or metabolism (the way our body uses food) play role in the development of binge eating disorder (Bhandari, 2019), however, some studies show that it aggregates in families and could be genetic, while other research suggests that it can also be caused by environmental factors and the impact of traumatic events. A frequent comorbidity of binge eating disorder is obesity with associated illnesses (McCuen-Wurst et al., 2019). It is assumed that about 65–70% of people fulfilling the criteria for binge eating disorder also suffer from obesity, defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as having a body mass index (BMI) of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or above. Concerning mental comorbidities, about 70–79% of patients suffering from binge eating disorder fulfills the criteria for other mental disorders such as affective disorders and anxiety disorders, and shows an elevated risk for suicide, even after controlling for depression. Other comorbidities such as substance abuse, posttraumatic stress disorder, body dysmorphic disorder, or personality disorders are also reported, but to a somewhat lesser extent.

## **Concept of Body Image**

Body image research has a complex and evolving history that has shaped the way the construct has been conceptually defined. The concept of body image as a psychological phenomenon was initially established in 1935 by the German Neuropsychologist, Paul Schilder (1935/1950), who said that the mental images that individuals have of their own bodies explain the way their bodies are introduced to them. According to Schilder, one's mental body image is established by the senses, ideas, and feelings that, most of the time, are unconscious, which consists of self-perceptions, cognitions, emotions, and behaviours related to one's physical characteristics (Kolzet, 2021).

## **Concept of Self-Esteem**

The concept of self-esteem has its origins in the 18th century, in the writings of David Hume, when he pointed out the importance to value and think well of oneself because it serves as a motivational function that enables people to explore their full potential. Self-esteem is in part a trait that is stable over time, with some people having relatively high self-esteem and others having lower self-esteem. But self-esteem is also a state that varies day-by-day and even hour-to-hour (Strangor et al., 2021). When we have done something that we think is useful or important, or when we feel that we are accepted and valued by others, our self-concept will contain many positive thoughts and we will therefore have high self-esteem. When we have failed, done something harmful, or feel that we have been ignored or criticized, the negative aspects of the self-concept are more accessible and we experience low self-esteem (Strangor et al., 2021).

## **Theories of Body Image:**

### **Objectification Theory**

Originally propounded by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), objectification theory attempts to explain the extreme and pervasive tendency to equate women with their bodies and why this can have such negative consequences for women's body image and beyond. The ubiquity of these objectification experiences socializes women to internalize an observer

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perspective upon their body (Rollero & De Piccoli, 2017), and as such, might lead to a form of self-consciousness in which they develop identities strongly rooted in (and defined by) their physical appearance (Boursier et al., 2020). The adoption of this external vantage point on the self is theorized to manifest behaviourally in the habitual monitoring of one's appearance, known as self-surveillance. This continual monitoring of one's appearance may lead a woman to realize that there is a discrepancy between what her body actually looks like and what she would ideally like to look like, which in turn may be associated with negative consequences, including increased body dissatisfaction.

### **Social Comparison Theory**

Social comparison is a normal behavior strategy where we seek to better understand our status relating to ability, opinion, emotional reaction, and more, by comparing ourselves to other people (Nortje, 2021). Festinger's (1954) who propounded this theory posits that humans have a natural drive to assess their standing in life, and thus, they engage in social comparisons with others to understand how and where they fit into the world. Social comparison can be useful because it provides us with a way to determine if we are "on track," but it can also be extremely harmful and result in negative thoughts and behaviours. Instead of the desired effect, where we assess our abilities and opinions against a realistic, achievable benchmark (or role models), social comparisons can result in the opposite outcome, where we compare our behavior to an unrealistic benchmark and subsequently develop a low self-esteem (Nortje, 2021). Research in the area of social comparison has shown that people make comparisons with others regarding many aspects of the self, including appearance, weight, and eating habits, and that different comparison appraisal might be used depending on the context of the comparison. These appraisals include self-evaluation, self-improvement, and self-enhancement. Self-evaluation comparisons are used to gather information about one's standing with others in terms of attributes, skills, and social expectations. Self-improvement comparison on the other hand is employed to learn how to improve a particular characteristic, or for solving a problem, while self-enhancement comparisons protect self-esteem and self-worth and allow the individual to maintain positive views about self.

## **Set Point Theory**

Set point theory was developed by Gurin and Bennett (1982) to explain why repeat dieting from patients were unsuccessful in producing long-term weight changes in a patient's shape and overall weight (Elli, 2017). It states that our body has a genetically and biologically determined "set point" weight range that it is predisposed to maintain, such that it is at such weight range, as designed by our genes that the body is programmed to function optimally. It further states that in maintaining this set point, a complex variety of bodily systems are constantly at work to maintain the set point, including metabolism and hunger, and Situational or environmental factors. Set point theory further proposes that because of media portrayal of thinness as ideal body image, Most people are set to maintain weight within what is considered to be a normal range, although this "normal" range may not be what an individual considers as an ideal or desired range (Namara, & Richard, 1989).

## **Theories of self-Esteem**

### **Socio-meter Theory**

Mark Leary and colleagues developed the socio-meter theory to explain the nature and function of the self-esteem system. According to them, self-esteem is a psychological gauge of the degree to which people perceive that they are relationally valued and socially accepted by other people. In conceptualizing self-esteem as the output of a system that monitors and responds to interpersonal acceptance and rejection, socio-meter theory differs from other explanations of self-esteem in suggesting that people neither need self-esteem nor are motivated to pursue it for their own sake. Rather, according to the theory, when people do things that appear intended to protect or increase their self-esteem, their goal is usually to protect and enhance their relational value and, thus, increase the likelihood of interpersonal acceptance (Leary, 2012). As such, high self-esteem signifies that the self has traits such as competence, likability, moral virtue, and physical attractiveness that enhance one's relational value and promote acceptance by other people (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020).

## **Theories of Binge Eating Disorder**

### **Escape Model**

Heatherton and Baumeister's (1991) Escape Model offered a promising contribution to understanding the causal mechanisms underlying binge eating. In this theory, they suggested that individuals who binge eat, do so to escape from self-awareness. They explained that these individuals hold high personal expectations about their weight and shape, wish to be perceived favourably by others, as being self-conscious, and it is assumed that others are judging them. As a result, they develop a pattern of high self-awareness and self-criticism and negative self-evaluation. The escape theory suggests that the binge eating episodes provide relief from these negative internal experiences by focusing the individual's attention on positive sensation about self (Burton & Abbott, 2017).

### **Emotional Regulation Theory**

Beary et al. (1986), also viewed binge eating as serving the function of reducing awareness of aversive emotional states but also proposed that binge eating might provide a way of coping with stressors. In his model, Lacey described predisposing factors as being adverse family circumstances, family history of weight and eating problems, a focus on physical appearance, and reliance on external standards to judge self-worth. Lacey proposed that these predisposing factors led to impairments in the individual's interpersonal functioning and their sense of identity, resulting in a sense of ineffectiveness and loss of control over their own body. Thus, binge eating is maintained by the consequence of reducing negative affect (Lacey, 1986 as cited in Burton and Abbott, 2017).



### **Body Image and Binge Eating Disorder**

Tamhane (2017) examined the relationship between body image, dieting, binge eating and self-esteem in order to understand the ways they interact with each other. For this reason, 60 female participants aged 18 – 26 were recruited from Eastern Illinois University and asked to fill out four surveys measuring body image, dieting, binge eating, and self-esteem. Results of the survey suggested that under certain circumstances, the relationship between body image and dieting was mediated by self-esteem, and also the relationship between dieting and self-esteem was mediated by binge eating.

In another study, involving two hundred and thirty-one (231) girls from two private Northern California High Schools, Stice and Shaw (2002) found that increased dieting, body mass, body dissatisfaction, appearance over evaluation, perceived pressure to be thin, modeling of eating disturbances, and depressive symptoms predicted increased risk of bingeing. These factors indicate that bingeing may be rooted in the need to conform to the thin ideal (Tamhane, 2017).

### **Self-Esteem and Binge Eating Disorder**

Fremder (2009) carried out an experiment to determine if gender or self-esteem contributed to the development of eating disorders. 100 students who participated completed a survey that examines self-esteem, dietary habits, and experience with eating disorders. Results indicated that participants who reported higher self-esteem also reported less experience with eating disorders. Additionally, it was found that females rated themselves lower for self-esteem and were more likely to report experience with an eating disorder than males did. Therefore, it can be said that students with high self-esteem are less likely to have an eating disorder, and that women are more likely than men to suffer from eating disorders.

## **Body Image and Self-Esteem**

In an attempt to explaining the relationship between body image and self-esteem, Abamara and Solomon (2014) examined the relationship between body image and self-esteem. 400 female undergraduate students of Enugu State University of Science and Technology were randomly selected from the five departments that made up the Faculty of social sciences. The Body Image Questionnaire and Index of Self-Esteem were administered. Result of the analyzed data revealed a significant relationship between body image and self-esteem. That is to say, one's perception of shape and weight affects one's sense of judgment and feelings about self.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is not surprising that binge eating disorder is a growing problem among undergraduates. Due to the rigorous course requirement, loneliness, loss of support, uncertainty about the future, and internal and external pressures, many students often turn to food to ease their pains and discomforts. Consequently, with the strikingly high incidence of eating problems among female undergraduates, it is also not unreasonable to suspect that an even larger number of female undergraduates experience concerns about their appearance, especially their weight, size, and shape. At the highest level of dissatisfaction, this may result in significant impairment in social, educational, and/or occupational functioning. These characteristics can be exacerbated by the condition of a society that is obsessed with, and rewards thinness and rejects and stigmatizes those who might be overweight or obese. These skewed standards of body image not only contribute to the already distorted body image of those already dealing with poor body image, often intensifying the shame that is felt after binge episodes but can also lead to feelings of low self-esteem and inferiority complex, and in extreme cases, depression.

However, since the perception of body image is a socially constructed and subjective phenomenon, and that body image dissatisfaction and related consequences is a western societal phenomenon, one would therefore wonder the applicability of this belief and perception of acceptable body image to the Nigerian culture. On the hand that in Nigeria,

the perception of beauty is not like the western portrayal of thinness, rather, the plumpness of the flesh, roundness of the buttocks, and fullness of the breasts is emphasized. Also, as much as many female undergraduates spend a considerable amount of their time on social media, a majority may likely adopt media portrayal of physical appearance as a standard for attractiveness that they become pathological. However, the extent to which these lifestyles are adopted, such that they become, or not become pathological could be attributed to their self-esteem or perception of themselves.

Therefore the study tend to investigate the predictive nature of body image and self-esteem on binge eating.

### **Research Questions**

In line with the problem statement, the researchers presents the following questions:

- Will body image predict binge eating among female undergraduates?
- Will self-esteem predict binge eating among female undergraduates?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to investigate the predictive nature of body image and self-esteem on the tendency to binge eat among female undergraduates.

Specifically, this study will:

- Examine how body image predicts the tendencies to binge eat.
- Examine the predictive nature of self-esteem towards the tendency to binge eat.
- Provide findings on the prevalence of binge eating among Nigerians, since based on the knowledge of the researchers, no study has out-rightly investigated the prevalence of binge eating disorder in Nigeria.

### **Operational Definition of Key Study Variables**

- **Body Image:** It is the perceptions and attitudes one holds toward one's own body, especially, but not exclusively on one's physical appearance (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2004 as cited in Mountford & Koskina, 2015), as measured by the Body Appreciation Scale-2 (BAS-2) (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).
- **Self-Esteem:** It can be considered as a sort of measure of how a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes himself or herself (Ackerman, 2015), as measured by the Index of Self-Esteem developed by (Hudson, 1982).
- **Binge Eating Disorder:** It is a severe, life-threatening, and treatable eating disorder characterized by recurrent episodes of compulsive and excessive eating, without any compensatory behavior to avoid possible weight gain (Nicoli, 2011), as measured by the Binge Eating Disorder Screener-7 (Takeda, 2019).

### **Hypotheses**

- Perception of body image will not significantly predict binge eating disorder among female undergraduates.
- Self-esteem will not significantly predict binge eating disorder among female undergraduates.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The participants of the study comprised of one hundred (100) female undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, who were in the third and fourth year of academic studies. Their ages ranged from 18 to 27 years, with a mean age of 21.65 and a standard deviation of 2.60. Their socio-demographic details revealed that 47 (47%) of the participants were in the age group 18 -20, 48 (23.3%) were within the age group 21 – 25, while 5 (5%) were within the age group 26 – 30. Marital status information showed that 95 (95%) of the participants were single, whereas 5 (5%) were married. Also, their academic

levels showed that 24% of the participants were in their third year, 56% were in their fourth year.

Of the eight Faculties in the permanent site of the University, two Faculties which included the Faculties of Arts and Management Sciences were randomly selected. Of these two Faculties, the researchers adopted the purposive sampling (also known as judgment sampling) method for data collection. This choice was based on the researchers' belief that to accurately measure the qualities expected from the research, participants should be selected from third and fourth year female undergraduates. The researchers was of the opinion that unlike first and second year students, these sets of students, by virtue of years spent in the University, they would likely be influenced by pressures from peers, on acceptable standards of appearance and attractiveness as presented by the University environment.

### **Instruments**

The participants were given self-administered instruments that were made up of two parts. The first part contained basic socio-demographic information such as age, marital status, and academic level, while the second part consist of three sets of instruments, such as the Body Appreciation Scale-2, which was developed by Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015), the Index of Self-Esteem, which was developed by Hudson (1982), and the Binge eating Disorder Screener-7, developed by Tadeka (2019).

The researchers carried out a pilot study on the instruments so as to ascertain the appropriateness of these instruments for the sample of choice. This was because previous researches reviewed by the researcher were all based on researches from Western countries. The researcher could not find any research conducted using Nigerian samples, as such, there was need ensuring that the instruments were comprehensible and appropriate, and that the questions were well defined, clearly understood, and presented in a consistent manner. The researcher obtained a Cronbach alpha coefficients of .91 for the Body Appreciation Scale, .76 for Index of Self-Esteem, and .57 for Binge Eating Disorder Screener-7, respectively.

### **Body Appreciation Scale-2**

The Body Appreciation Scale-2 (BAS-2) was developed by Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015). It is a short and reliable measure of body appreciation (that is, the ability to relate with one's body in an accepting and loving manner and to appreciate its uniqueness, regardless of the identification of certain aspects which may be inconsistent with the societal-prescribed beauty ideals). It measures four aspects of body image, such as favourable opinions of one's own body, acceptance of the body by rejecting unrealistic media ideals, and respect for the body. The BAS-2 consists of 10 positively worded items that provide a good measure of body appreciation. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-format scaling measures ranging from "never" to "always", where 1= never, 2= seldom or rarely, 3=sometimes, 4= often, 5=always. This scale only measures positive attitudes, perceptions about the body where higher scores represent higher levels of body appreciation which is implicated in a positive body image, while lower scores represents lower or reduced level of body appreciation which is implicated in negative body image.

### **Index of Self-Esteem**

Index of Self- Esteem (ISE) is a 25-item inventory developed by Hudson (1982) for the measurement of the self-perceived and self-evaluative component of self-concept which is the sum-total of the self-perceived and the other perceived views of the self-held by a person. The inventory is designed for individuals above 12 years of age. The ISE measures both positive and negative feelings about the self; hence the inventory is believed to be one-dimensional. The inventory was prepared based on five points scale of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 and the response format was rarely or none of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, a good part of the time, and most or all of the time respectively. As provided by Hudson (1982), there is direct scoring and reverse scoring of the items. Scores of negatively worded items were reversed, while scores of positively worded items were not reversed. For example, Scores of 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 15, 18, 21, 22, 23, and 25 were reversed while scores of items 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, 24 were not reversed during

scoring. Hudson (1982), developed the ISE and provided the original norms or means score for Male (M) & Female (F) ( $n=1,745$ ) = 30, and obtained a coefficient alpha of .93 and a two-hour test-retest coefficient of .92. While validating the ISE for Nigerian use, Onighaiye (1996) provided the Nigerian norms or mean scores for Male (M) ( $n=80$ ) = 30.89 and Female (f) ( $n=80$ ) = 32.04.

### **Binge Eating Disorder Screener-7**

The Binge Eating Disorder Screener-7 was developed by Tadeka (2019). It is a self-report screening tool that is designed to screen for binge eating disorder symptoms rather than to make a diagnosis. It has been validated against DSM-5 diagnostic criteria. The Binge Eating Disorder Screener-7 consists of 7 items asking about episodes of overeating during the last three months and the feelings after these episodes. Depending on the answers, participants are categorized into two categories (presence of binge eating symptoms or normal) following the suggested algorithms.

### **Procedure**

Prior to the main study, a pilot study was conducted to ascertain the appropriateness of the instruments. In the main study, the researchers selected her participants from third, fourth years, through the purposive sampling method. This was to accurately measure the qualities expected from the research participants. All participants were approached on an individual basis, and were briefed about the study design and objectives, and were informed about the type of data that would be collected, with affirmation on the optional participation. Thereafter, the instruments were distributed to those who indicated interest, for which were collected at the completion of the exercise.

### **Design and Statistics**

The study adopted a Predictive-Correlational design. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (Pearson  $r$ ), and Linear multiple regression analysis were employed as the statistical tool to analyze the data of the study. The SPSS version 25 was used to manage the data.

**Results**

**Table 1:** summary of Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD) and Correlation Coefficients of body image and self-esteem on binge eating disorder

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3
Binge eating disorder	18.99	38.97	1		
Body image	59.44	16.69	.28**	1	
Self-esteem	40.37	13.42	.38**	-.11	1

Note, \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \* =  $p < .05$ ; \*\* means that the test is significant at .01 level of significance

The Table one above shows that perception of body image positively and significantly correlated with binge eating disorder at  $r = .28, p < .01$ . This means that as perception of body image increases and binge eating behaviour also increases. For example, female students who perceive that their body shape and weight does not meet societal standard for beauty and attractiveness may overeat or adhere to certain type of food or junks in order to achieve the desired social standard. Also, self-esteem positively and significantly correlated with binge eating disorder at  $r = .38, p < .01$ . Thus, this indicates that students' sense of self-worth sometimes determines their tendency to binge eat.

**Table 2:** Summary of Linear Multiple Regression analysis on predictors of Body Image and Self-esteem on Binge eating disorder among undergraduates

<i>Model</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Adj R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>B</i> (UC)	<i>β</i> (SC)	<i>T</i>	<i>Sig</i>
<b>Variable</b>	<b>.50</b>	<b>.25</b>	<b>.23</b>	<b>2(97)</b>	<b>15.91**</b>	<b>-74.33</b>		<b>-4.301</b>	<b>.000</b>
Body image						1.21	.42	4.69	.000
Self-esteem						.75	.32	3.63	.000

Note, \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \* =  $p < .05$ ;  $R^2$  = R square; Adj  $R^2$  = Adjusted r square; B (UC) = Unstandardized Coefficients;  $\beta$  (SC) = Standardized Coefficients Beta.



Table 2 presented the result of the linear multiple regression analysis using an enter method. From the observation, it was found that body image significantly predicted binge eating disorder among female undergraduates at ( $\beta = .42, t=4.69, p<.01$ ). Thus, hypothesis one which stated that body image will not significantly predict binge eating disorder among undergraduate is hereby rejected. This indicates that female students who are more concern about their body weight and shape are more likely to develop binge eating disorder. Similarly, self-esteem significantly predicted binge eating disorder among female undergraduate ( $\beta = .32, t=3.63, p<.01$ ). Hence, hypothesis two which stated that self-esteem will not significantly predict binge eating disorder among female undergraduate was rejected. This implies that female students who think less of their self-worth may likely manifest binge eating disorder. However, both predictor variables accounted for 23% variation in binge eating disorder, (Adjusted  $R^2 = .23$ ),  $F(2, 97) = 15.91, p<.01$ .

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The study examined body image and self-esteem as predictors of binge eating disorder among female undergraduates. In line with the objectives of the study, two hypotheses were stated and tested. Hypothesis one which stated that perception of body image will not significantly predict binge eating disorder among female undergraduates was rejected. The findings goes in line with the Festinger's social comparison theory which suggests that, because of an innate drive to often appear acceptable and better, people often evaluate themselves in comparison to others. They make all kinds of judgments about themselves, and constantly evaluate their attitudes, abilities, and traits with others. This comparison often times than not results in a negative perception of body image when they believe that they fall short of the standard against others. One reason for this comparison could be attributed to what Frederickson and Roberts (1997) pinpointed when they proposed the objectification theory, which highlights the consequences of being female in a culture that sexually objectifies the female body. Thus, it could be said that because of the pervasive objectification of the female body, many female undergraduates compare themselves with body image of models as presented in magazines and the media, and when the judge themselves as not having a body similar to theirs they ruminate over these negative

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thoughts and may likely engage in binge eating as a means of finding consolation. The findings from hypothesis two which stated that self-esteem will not significantly predict binge eating disorder among female undergraduates was also rejected. This goes in line with the assumption, and based on the Maslow's esteem needs, that humans constantly crave to gain recognition, admired, appreciated, and respected by both themselves and by others. Based on this assumption, human would always engage in acts to satisfy these needs, which they believe would boost their dignity, confidence, competence and freedom. An inability achieving this would often make them perceive themselves as failures, incompetent, not good enough and they may begin to perceive themselves as lacking the acceptable body features. They may feel inadequate because they perceive themselves as not good enough, they will begin to read and harbor negative evaluation of self and as well believe that other people perceive them as insufficient, and as such may engage in negative, compensatory behaviours (such as compulsive exercise, body altering medical and surgical operations, drinking special teas containing laxatives, fasting or restricting food intakes and so on), for which binge eating is very imminent.

The rejection of the second hypothesis which says that self-esteem will not significantly predict binge eating disorder among female undergraduates also goes in line to support the opinions of the Mark Leary and colleagues socio-meter theory of self-esteem, according to them, self-esteem is a psychological gauge of the degree to which people perceive that they are relationally valued and socially accepted by other people, if people or individuals perceive that they are of little or no worth to their friends, colleagues, family and so on, such perceptions may lead to feelings of insufficiency, incompetency and a sense of worthlessness, which may be manifested in compensatory behaviors which may include the development of a binge eating disorder.. since the socio-meter theory of esteem differs from other explanations of self-esteem in suggesting that people neither need self-esteem nor are motivated to pursue it for their own sake, rather, according to the theory, when people do things that appear intended to protect or increase their self-esteem, their goal is usually to protect and enhance their relational value and, thus, increase the likelihood of interpersonal acceptance (Leary, 2012). As such, high self-esteem signifies that the self has traits such as competence, likability, moral virtue, and physical attractiveness that enhance

one's relational value and promote acceptance by other people and when they fail to perceive that people view these traits in them, they may regress to harmful practices, (binge eating episodes inclusive) as a coping strategy.

## **Recommendations**

From the findings of this study, the researchers hereby recommends the following:

- There is a great need to create an awareness programme in Universities of the existence of Binge eating disorder, so that student would actually know and understand what the disorder is all about, and could easily identify binge eating signs and symptoms when they feel such craving to binge eat.
- Creating awareness also emphasizes the need to create and establish a psychotherapeutic help center where students who experience problems with binge eating, of poor perception of self could easily consult for help.
- It also suggests to the University management of the importance of Psychological Services Centre in Universities and should not take for granted, the existence of psychological-related problems among undergraduates.
- Finally, it calls for more research, since this study has revealed that binge eating disorder is not just a disorder for the "whites," but can also exist among Africans and Nigerians in particular.

## **Conclusion**

The first which stated that perception of body image will not significantly predict binge eating disorder among female undergraduates was rejected. In the same line also, the second hypothesis which stated that self-esteem will not significantly predict binge eating disorder was also rejected.

Finally, the study concludes that perception of body image and self-esteem are significant predictors of binge eating disorder. The researcher attributes it to the pervasive belief among females that acceptance by peers or groups are highly dependent on their

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appearance and attractiveness. As such, they dedicate considerable amount of time trying to look good. This becomes devastating to them when after the efforts put into to look good, they do not get the amount of attention they crave for. This makes them evaluate themselves in a negative light as incompetent and not deserving of anything good, while not considering other qualities they possess, which under normal circumstances could boost their perception of self and as a result help prevent the development of eating disorders as well as improve their general overall wellbeing.

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