

**POSITIVE BODY IMAGE AND IDENTITY FORMATION AMONG SENIOR  
SECONDARY SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN IBADAN SOUTH-EAST LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT AREA, OYO STATE**

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*Abstract*

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterised by rapid physical, psychological, and social changes. For Nigerian adolescents, this period is further complicated by the interplay of cultural expectations, peer influence, and globalised media, which often impose conflicting ideals of appearance and identity. This study investigated the relationship between positive body image and identity formation among senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State. A correlational research design was employed, with a sample of 200 students drawn randomly from four public schools. Data were collected using the Positive Body Image among Adolescents Scale (PBIAS) and the Functions of Identity Scale (FIS). Descriptive statistics summarised adolescents' responses, while Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation tested the hypothesis at the 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed a generally high level of positive body image, with the strongest endorsements for self-acceptance and body respect, although coping with media-driven body ideals was weaker. Identity formation was reported at a very high level, with adolescents showing strong self-acceptance, value alignment, and parental influence, though many expressed uncertainty about future direction and life goals. The correlation results showed a significant moderate-to-strong positive relationship between positive body image and identity formation ( $r = .597, p < .01$ ), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The study concludes that positive body image enhances adolescents' ability to build coherent identities, while cultural and media influences interact to shape outcomes.

*Keyword: Positive Body Image; Identity Formation; Developmental Task; Adolescent Development; Self-Concept; Nigerian Secondary School Students.*

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## **Introduction**

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterised by rapid physical, psychological, and social changes. During this period, young people work toward forming a coherent sense of identity while also negotiating societal expectations and peer influences. One factor that strongly shapes this process is body image, which refers to an individual's perception and evaluation of their own physical appearance. Positive body image, in particular, reflects acceptance, appreciation, and respect for one's body and has been linked to higher self-esteem, resilience, and overall psychological well-being (Swami et al., 2018). Identity formation is another central developmental task of adolescence. Erikson's psychosocial theory highlights identity development as the cornerstone of navigating adolescence successfully, while contemporary scholars emphasise that it involves exploring personal values, roles, and goals in relation to one's social environment (Arndt et al., 2024; Al Hamad et al., 2024). When adolescents develop a stable and positive identity, they are more likely to experience emotional stability, academic engagement, and healthy relationships. Conversely, identity confusion can contribute to distress, risky behaviours, and mental health problems (Eisenberg et al., 2017).

In recent years, the influence of media and globalisation has intensified body image concerns among adolescents in Nigeria. Western ideals of slimness and muscularity often dominate social media platforms, creating pressure for young people to conform to unrealistic standards. Such pressures may lead to dissatisfaction with appearance, low self-esteem, and vulnerability to depression or eating disorders (Silva et al., 2020). These challenges intersect with identity development, as how adolescents view their bodies becomes a key component of how they view themselves. At the same time, cultural and familial factors remain powerful influences on Nigerian adolescents' identity formation. Family expectations, peer relationships, and traditional norms often shape young people's choices and self-perception. This means that adolescents in contexts like Ibadan are simultaneously influenced by global media images and by local cultural expectations, making their experience

of body image and identity formation particularly complex.

Identity formation is a central developmental task of adolescence. Erikson's psychosocial theory positions adolescence as the stage of identity versus role confusion, during which individuals attempt to consolidate a coherent sense of self (Crocetti, 2017). Success in this task fosters confidence, stability, and purpose, while failure may result in uncertainty and vulnerability to psychosocial distress. Extending Erikson's ideas, contemporary researchers emphasise identity formation as an ongoing process of exploration and commitment in multiple domains, including values, relationships, and career aspirations (Mitchell et al., 2021). Self-categorisation theory further explains identity as emerging through group membership and social comparison. Adolescents classify themselves according to salient social categories (e.g., gender, ethnicity, peer groups), and this categorisation shapes how they perceive their bodies and self-worth (Hinton et al., 2017). The theory highlights how belonging and recognition from others strengthen identity, while exclusion or negative comparisons undermine it. The social comparison theory provides another useful lens, suggesting that adolescents evaluate themselves by comparing with peers or media representations (Mann & Blumberg, 2022). Exposure to idealised images may foster dissatisfaction if one's body does not align with prevailing beauty standards. By contrast, adolescents with positive body image may resist harmful comparisons, supporting stronger identity formation.

The tripartite influence model emphasises the role of family, peers, and media as primary sources of body image influence (Hanan et al., 2023). These same contexts are also central to identity development, indicating a parallel process: how adolescents view themselves physically is intertwined with how they define themselves socially and psychologically. Positive body image extends beyond the absence of dissatisfaction. It involves respect for the body, appreciation of its functions, and resilience to negative appearance pressures (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Empirical evidence suggests that adolescents with higher positive body image demonstrate greater self-esteem, emotional well-being, and adaptive coping strategies (Eryılmaz et al., 2023; Savi-

Çakar & Savi-Karayol, 2015). In contrast, body dissatisfaction is consistently linked to low self-worth, depressive symptoms, and identity confusion (Palmeroni et al., 2020). For Nigerian adolescents, body image concerns are shaped by a blend of cultural and global influences. Traditional values often emphasise communal identity, family honour, and modest presentation, while Westernised media ideals promote slimness for girls and muscularity for boys. These conflicting messages may complicate how adolescents perceive their bodies and negotiate their identities. For example, research in sub-Saharan Africa shows that body satisfaction is often tied to social acceptance within families and peer groups, rather than purely individual standards (Pradeilles et al., 2022).

Research indicates that body image is a significant component of self-concept and thus closely related to identity formation (Fatima et al., 2022). Adolescents often internalise bodily experiences—such as puberty changes, peer feedback, and appearance-related social comparisons—as part of their evolving identities. A strong positive body image can protect against identity confusion by reinforcing self-acceptance and a stable sense of self (Bashir & Quratulain, 2023). However, the relationship is not always straightforward. Studies note that adolescents who engage in self-objectification or who heavily internalise media ideals may experience body dissatisfaction, which undermines identity development (Digennaro & Tescione, 2024; Speno & Aubrey, 2019; Trekels & Eggermont, 2021). Conversely, supportive family structures, positive peer networks, and media literacy can buffer against these risks, enabling adolescents to integrate bodily self-perception into a healthy and coherent identity. In Nigeria, limited empirical research has examined how positive body image relates to identity formation among adolescents. Most existing studies focus on Western populations, leaving a gap in culturally grounded understanding. Given the interplay of traditional expectations, peer influence, and the growing role of social media among Nigerian youths, exploring this relationship is crucial. For instance, adolescents in Ibadan are simultaneously navigating family-driven expectations (e.g., respect for elders, conformity to cultural norms) and globalised ideals of attractiveness on social platforms.

This dual exposure may create tensions that affect both body image and identity formation.

Despite the growing recognition of body image concerns in adolescent development, there is limited empirical evidence from Nigeria exploring the direct relationship between positive body image and identity formation. Most existing studies focus on Western populations, leaving a gap in understanding how these constructs interact in African contexts. Addressing this gap is important for developing culturally relevant interventions in schools and counselling practice. Therefore, this study investigates the relationship between positive body image and identity formation among senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State. By examining this link, the research seeks to provide insights that can inform strategies to promote adolescents' well-being, strengthen identity development, and support counselling interventions in Nigerian secondary schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Adolescence represents a period of heightened sensitivity to body image and identity-related challenges. For Nigerian secondary school students, this stage is further complicated by the intersection of traditional cultural expectations, peer influence, and the growing impact of globalised media. Many adolescents are caught between valuing communal and family-based identity markers—such as respect, modesty, and conformity—and aspiring toward Westernised ideals of slimness or muscularity promoted through social media platforms. This tension often creates confusion and dissatisfaction with oneself. In Ibadan, as in other Nigerian urban areas, secondary school adolescents increasingly engage with digital platforms that shape their body ideals and sense of belonging. At the same time, academic environments often offer limited structured support for self-exploration, while guidance and counselling services remain underutilised or under-resourced in public schools (Rodrigues, 2021). As a result, students may struggle to develop a stable sense of identity, particularly when faced with critical peer feedback, family pressures, and inconsistent societal expectations. Although international studies have established strong links between positive body image and

identity formation, there is a paucity of empirical research from Nigeria that directly explores this relationship (Abimbola, 2017).

Most local studies focus on body dissatisfaction or eating disorders, leaving identity development as an understudied outcome. This creates a knowledge gap in understanding how Nigerian adolescents, who operate within unique cultural and socio-economic contexts, integrate their perceptions of body image into their evolving sense of self. Given these realities, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between positive body image and identity formation among senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State. Findings from such a study can inform culturally relevant counselling strategies, help educators strengthen support systems within schools, and contribute to adolescents' overall psychosocial well-being.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Assess the level of positive body image among senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State.
2. Examine the level of identity formation among senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State.
3. Test the relationship between positive body image and identity formation among senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the level of positive body image among senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State?
2. What is the level of identity formation among senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State?

### **Research Hypothesis**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between positive body image and identity formation among senior secondary school

adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State.

### **METHOD**

This study employed a correlational research design within a quantitative framework. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to examine the relationship between positive body image and identity formation among senior secondary school adolescents without manipulating any variables. The target population comprised all senior secondary school two (SS II) students enrolled in public secondary schools within Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State. According to records obtained from the local education authority, the population included 2,159 male and 2,916 female students, giving a total of 5,075 students. A sample of 200 students (male and female) from four randomly selected secondary schools was used for the study. The sample size was determined to be adequate using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table, which indicates that a sample of approximately 200 is sufficient for a population of about 5,000 at a 95% confidence level. The simple random sampling technique, specifically the ballot method, was employed to ensure that every student had an equal chance of being selected. Two standardised instruments were adopted and adapted for this study: Developed by Maes et al. (2021), the Positive Body Image among Adolescents Scale (PBIAS) is a comprehensive 15-item assessment tool designed to gauge adolescents' perceptions and attitudes towards their bodies. Utilising a 5-point Likert scale where responses range from 'Never' (1) to 'Always' (5), the PBIAS evaluates key dimensions such as body acceptance, appreciation, and respect. The Functions of Identity Scale (FIS), revised by Olney (2021), is a measurement tool comprising 20 items designed to assess identity formation using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates "Never" and 5 denotes "Always." Both scales were subjected to a pilot study involving 20 students in a secondary school outside the study location to test reliability. Cronbach's alpha yielded coefficients of 0.741 for the Positive Body Image Scale and 0.740 for the Identity Formation Scale, confirming good internal consistency. Content validity was

established by experts in Guidance and Counselling, who reviewed the instruments for relevance, clarity, and suitability to the Nigerian adolescent context. Necessary adjustments were made before the final administration. Permission was obtained from the Oyo State Ministry of Education and the principals of the selected schools. Informed consent was sought from the participants after explaining the purpose of the study. The questionnaires were administered during school hours with the assistance of teachers. Students were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to encourage honest responses. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately after administration to minimise loss. The data collected were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 26). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard

deviations were used to summarise demographic data and responses to research questions. The hypothesis was tested using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) at the 0.05 level of significance to determine the relationship between positive body image and identity formation among the adolescents.

## RESULT

The results are analysed in line with the research questions and hypotheses to provide insight into the Body Image Acceptance and Identity Formation among Senior Secondary School Adolescents.

Research Question 1: What is the level of positive body image among senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State?

Table 1  
Descriptive statistics for Positive Body Image items (PBIAS), N = 150

Item	Short item text (PBIAS)	M	SD	% "Always"
1	I feel content with the way my body looks	4.34	1.15	71.3%
2	I love my body	4.83	0.60	90.0%
3	I accept different features of my body (they make me who I am)	4.35	1.07	67.3%
4	I feel content with how my body has changed/is changing during puberty	4.09	1.25	62.0%
5	I respect my body	4.73	0.84	86.0%
6	My body (appearance & what it can do) is part of who I am	4.45	1.05	74.7%
7	I hope all teenagers feel good about pubertal changes	3.98	1.26	53.3%
8	I hope everyone can love their bodies as they are	4.27	1.25	68.7%
9	I hope everyone views their bodies as a unique part of who they are	4.20	1.18	60.7%
10	When confronted with media body ideals, I distract myself with other things I like	3.39	1.37	40.7%
11	When confronted with media body ideals, I distract myself and think about something positive	3.85	1.30	54.0%
12	If I receive negative feedback on my appearance, it is important not to pay too much attention	3.72	1.29	48.7%
13	If I receive negative feedback, I try to forget about this	3.95	1.27	53.3%
14	If I receive negative feedback, I remind myself that the remarks are not important and that I love my body	4.59	0.92	79.3%
15	If I receive negative feedback, I distract myself and think about something positive	3.73	1.50	52.7%

Note. Response scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always. M = mean; SD = sample standard deviation.

Percentages are the proportion of respondents choosing "Always" for that item. Pilot

reliability for the PBIAS in this study setting: Cronbach's  $\alpha = .74$  ( $n = 20$ ).

The descriptive analysis indicates a generally high level of positive body image among adolescents, with an average item score of  $M = 4.16$  from a 1–5 scale. The strongest endorsement is for the statement "I love my body" (Item 2,  $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ), with 90% reporting "Always." Other highly endorsed items include "I respect my body" (Item 5,  $M = 4.73$ ) and affirmations following criticism (Item 14,  $M = 4.59$ ). However, variances exist, especially in areas concerning media-driven body ideals, with the lowest endorsement for Item 10 ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ), indicating some adolescents struggle to cope with idealised

body standards. Notable variability in responses suggests the need for targeted interventions focused on media literacy and coping strategies. The sample, gathered from four public schools in one local government area in Nigeria, emphasises the necessity for further studies to validate the findings and explore the relationship between body image and identity formation. Future analyses could also investigate media literacy impacts and subgroup differences, enhancing understanding of adolescents' body image resilience.

Research Question Two: What is the level of identity formation among senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State?

**Table 2**  
Descriptive statistics for Identity Formation items (FIS),  $N = 150$

Item	Statement (shortened)	M	SD	% Always
1	Learning abilities shape the future	4.73	0.79	88.0
2	Values/beliefs consistent with commitments	4.53	0.95	78.7
3	I am goal-directed	4.45	0.92	79.3
4	My values and beliefs say a lot about me	4.45	0.99	74.0
5	Much of who I am is based on my parents' wishes	3.97	1.20	56.7
6	I am certain that I know myself	4.37	0.96	70.7
7	I do not have a tangible sense of self	2.75	1.12	6.0
8	I set goals and work toward them	4.44	0.95	75.3
9	I make independent decisions despite influence	4.36	0.97	72.0
10	I accept who I am	4.73	0.81	88.0
11	I am undecided about my future	3.34	1.37	38.7
12	I passively accept others' beliefs	3.47	1.28	34.7
13	I comply with normal standards of self-expression	4.09	1.21	54.0
14	I have a consistent sense of self	4.08	1.11	57.3
15	My values/beliefs reflect who I am	4.26	1.05	65.3
16	I have no idea what my future holds	3.05	1.42	34.0
17	My values and goals align with actions	4.27	1.01	64.7
18	I feel peace with myself and my identity	4.41	0.95	73.3
19	I do not have clear life goals	2.89	1.41	29.3
20	My values/beliefs are coherent with who I understand myself to be	4.42	0.98	71.3
21	Self-motivation based on a sense of self is my strength	4.29	1.03	68.7
22	Life is meaningful through parents' values	4.73	0.78	86.7

Note. Scale: 1 = Never, 5 = Always. Overall Mean = 4.09 (Very High level of identity formation).

A descriptive statistic was used to analyse the responses of senior secondary school

adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State, regarding their body image acceptance. The findings indicate that the adolescents reported a very high level of identity formation (overall mean = 4.09).

Strongest areas were self-acceptance ( $M = 4.73$ ) and perceived meaning of life through parents' values ( $M = 4.73$ ), showing both personal confidence and strong parental influence. Other high-scoring areas included goal setting ( $M = 4.45$ ), value alignment ( $M = 4.27$ ), and self-motivation ( $M = 4.29$ ). However, lower scores were recorded on future clarity ( $M = 3.05$ ) and having clear life goals ( $M = 2.89$ ), suggesting some uncertainty about long-term direction among adolescents. The data reflects various aspects of self-perception and values through itemised responses. The findings highlight a mix of strong self-acceptance and significant uncertainty regarding personal goals and identity, with various influences shaping individual perceptions and behaviours.

$H_0$ : There is no significant relationship between positive body image and identity formation among senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State.

**Table 3**

Pearson correlation between positive body image and identity formation ( $N = 150$ )

Variables	1	2	M	SD
1. Positive body image	—	.597**	62.47	8.15
2. Identity formation	.597**	—	90.18	10.42

Note.  $r$  = Pearson's correlation coefficient.  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

$M$  = mean;  $SD$  = standard deviation.

The correlation results show a moderate to strong positive relationship between positive body image and identity formation ( $r = .597$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This indicates that adolescents with higher levels of positive body image also tend to report stronger identity formation. Given that the relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected. Thus, the findings support the conclusion that positive body image is significantly associated with identity formation among senior secondary school adolescents in the study area.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into the relationship between

positive body image and identity formation among senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State. Overall, the results show that the adolescents reported high levels of positive body image as well as very high levels of identity formation. Additionally, a statistically significant moderate-to-strong positive relationship was found between positive body image and identity formation, indicating that adolescents who develop a healthier perception of their bodies are more likely to form a coherent and stable sense of self. The high levels of positive body image reported in this study suggest that many adolescents in the study area demonstrate acceptance, respect, and appreciation for their bodies, despite societal and media pressures. This finding aligns with the work of Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015), who describe positive body image as encompassing body appreciation and resilience against negative appearance-related messages. Although some respondents indicated challenges when confronted with idealised media images, the general trend of self-acceptance reflects the protective role of cultural values, family support, and peer relationships identified in previous African studies (Pradeilles et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the variability in coping with media-driven ideals suggests the need for media literacy interventions to further strengthen adolescents' resistance to unrealistic standards. In terms of identity formation, the adolescents reported very high scores, particularly in the areas of self-acceptance, goal orientation, and alignment of values with personal beliefs. This finding supports Erikson's psychosocial theory, which positions adolescence as a critical period for consolidating identity (Crocetti, 2017). The high scores on parental influence and life meaning derived from parents' values also reflect the cultural context in Nigeria, where family expectations remain central to adolescent development (Arndt et al., 2024). However, the lower scores related to clarity about future goals indicate lingering uncertainty about long-term direction, which is consistent with Mitchell et al. (2021), who note that identity development is an ongoing process influenced by exploration and commitment across domains. The significant positive correlation between positive body image and identity formation found in this study provides

empirical evidence for the interdependence of these constructs. Adolescents who embrace and appreciate their bodies are more likely to report stable self-concepts, value coherence, and goal-directed behaviour. This finding corroborates the work of Bashir and Quratulain (2023), who highlight the protective role of positive body image in preventing identity confusion, as well as Palmeroni et al. (2020), who demonstrate that body dissatisfaction undermines identity development and increases vulnerability to psychosocial risks. The moderate-to-strong correlation observed suggests that interventions to promote positive body image could have far-reaching implications for identity development and overall adolescent well-being. The findings also emphasise the contextual interplay of cultural norms and global influences. While Westernised media ideals present challenges to adolescents' body image, the enduring influence of family, peers, and cultural expectations provides a buffering effect that supports positive identity outcomes. This duality mirrors the tripartite influence model (Hanan et al., 2023), where family, peers, and media collectively shape adolescents' body image and identity formation. For Nigerian adolescents, the balance between traditional communal values and exposure to global ideals creates a unique developmental context that warrants further investigation. The study confirms that positive body image plays a significant role in facilitating identity formation among adolescents. The results suggest that interventions designed to enhance body appreciation, respect, and coping strategies in the face of media pressures may contribute to more stable and positive identity outcomes. Future research could explore gender differences, socio-economic influences, and longitudinal patterns to deepen understanding of this relationship within Nigerian and broader African contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between positive body image and identity formation among senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan South-East Local Government Area, Oyo State. The findings revealed that adolescents in the study area generally reported high levels of positive body image and very high levels of identity

formation. Importantly, the results demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables, indicating that adolescents who appreciate and respect their bodies are more likely to develop a coherent and stable sense of identity. These findings affirm the central role of body image in adolescent development and underscore its importance as a protective factor for identity formation. They also highlight the cultural realities of Nigerian adolescents, who balance traditional family and community expectations with increasing exposure to globalised media ideals. While many adolescents in this study displayed resilience in maintaining positive body perceptions, challenges in coping with media-driven ideals were also evident, pointing to the need for targeted interventions in schools and counselling practice. Based on the outcomes of this study, it is recommended that educators, counsellors, and policymakers prioritise programs that foster body appreciation, self-acceptance, and media literacy among adolescents. Such initiatives can support healthier self-concepts, reduce risks of identity confusion, and promote overall psychological well-being. Furthermore, future research should extend these findings by examining gender-specific patterns, socio-cultural influences, and longitudinal trends to develop culturally grounded interventions that strengthen adolescent development across diverse contexts. In conclusion, positive body image is not only a reflection of how adolescents view themselves physically but also a critical foundation for identity formation. Supporting adolescents in cultivating positive body image will therefore contribute significantly to their personal growth, emotional resilience, and capacity to navigate the complex challenges of adolescence in Nigeria and beyond.

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