Revisiting the Relationship Between Celebrity Worship and Intimate Relationship Expectations in Indian and American Adolescents

Robert T. Hitlan[1], Devi Sekar[2], Terry F. Pettijohn II[3], James Griffith[4], Urska Dobersek[5], & Lynn E. McCutcheon[6]

University of Northern Iowa[1], SRM Institute of Science and Technology, India[2], Coastal Carolina University[3], Shippensburg University[4], University of Southern Indiana[5], North American Journal of Psychology[6]

Abstract: The purposes of the present study were to correct some mistakes in a previous study (Jia, 2025) done in China and to attempt to replicate the Chinese findings in the United States and India. In two related studies (India & the United States), we administered a brief version of the Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS-7), a modified version of the Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS), and the short version of the Self-Reflection and Insight Scale (SRIS) to late adolescents. We hypothesized, and generally found, that the relationship between admiration for one's favorite celebrity was positively related to the belief that adult intimate relationships will always remain very romantic. We found no gender difference in Romantic Beliefs scores in either country. A subsample of participants who selected an other-gender favorite celebrity did not score significantly higher on the CAS-7 than those who selected a favorite celebrity of the same gender as the participant. Lower SRIS scores were associated with higher CAS-7 scores and higher RBS scores in both countries. Discussion focused on cultural similarities and differences.

Keywords: Indian, celebrity, relationship expectations

Adolescence is an important developmental stage marked by an increasing interest in interpersonal and intimate relationships (Jia, 2025). Ideally, the preparation for adulthood that occurs during this time period should focus partly on the reality of adult intimate relationships. However, some teens become dependent on the use of the Internet and other social media (Reyes et al., 2021; Vally et al., 2021; Zsila et al., 2018). These activities often present idealistic and unrealistic portrayals of adult intimate relationships. Entertainment media frequently feature very attractive couples who display considerable romantic affection for one

Author info: Correspondence should be sent to: Dr. Robert T. Hitlan, University of Northern Iowa. *E-mail:* rob.hitlan@uni.edu

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another. The stars of these movies and television programs often attract many fans and become favorite celebrities for their followers (Aruguete et al., 2020; Hitlan et al., 2021). However, continued exposure to celebrities can hinder real-world social interactions (McCutcheon et al., 2016, 2026; Sashikumar, 2026) create a false impression of realistic long-term close relationships, and fail to prepare adolescents for the reality of adult intimate relationships. Consequently, many youthful long-term relationships may not succeed, partly because of unrealistic expectations about the reality of everyday married life.

Compared with older age groups, adolescents and young adults are more likely to express strong interest in celebrities and a favorite celebrity in particular (Collisson et al., 2020; Jia, 2025; Swami et al., 2010; Zsila et al., 2018). College students with a strong attachment to a favorite celebrity also tended to believe in soulmate theory, the unrealistic idea that there is one perfect person—a soulmate—for everyone (McCutcheon et al., 2016). Research has found that high celebrity admiration scores predicted depression, anxiety, and stress (Ahadi et al., 2025; McCutcheon et al., 2026; Zsila et al., 2024). Additionally, Hwang et al. (2026) found that high celebrity admiration scores predicted gullibility and lack of self-insight.

Celebrities are often viewed as credible sources of information about what the adult world is really like (Alblowi et al., 2023). Sometimes parasocial attachments to celebrities serve as imaginary substitutes for real-life intimate relationships (Hartman, 2017; Jia, 2025; Zsila et al., 2018). A few studies show that lonely persons are attracted to celebrities (Aufa et al., 2019; Fitri et al., 2025; Krismana et al., 2023), especially LGBTQ+ persons (McCutcheon et al., 2022). Perhaps some loneliness results from an inability to form friendships with peers during adolescence. All of this evidence suggests that some teenagers hold unrealistic ideas about romantic adult relationships and that the lives of attractive celebrities often superficially appear to be filled with romance.

Only a few studies have analyzed differences in celebrity attitude between persons who choose an other-gender favorite celebrity and those who select a same-gender favorite celebrity. Although the subsample of younger participants was very small, one study found no difference (Collisson et al., 2020). The other two found that participants who chose a favorite celebrity of the other gender scored higher on celebrity attitudes than those who selected a favorite celebrity of the same gender (Greenwood et al., 2018; Zsila et al., 2019). These results suggest that romantic fantasy might underlie the choice of a favorite celebrity for at least some, especially women (Greenwood et al., 2018).

Lack of self-insight is also linked with admiration for one's favorite celebrity (Hwang et al., 2026). Additionally, related research has found that romantic relationship partners were more confident and optimistic and rated their relationships as being higher quality but tended to be less

accurate than observers (parents and roommates) when predicting relationship longevity (MacDonald & Ross, 1999). Media portrayal of celebrity weddings creates an expectation of perfect-looking relationships (Rakshit, n.d.). Those who lack self-awareness often develop a skewed perception of reality, such as the perception that long-term close relationships are always filled with romance. Self-insight has also been found to correlate negatively with a brief measure of depression, anxiety, stress, and neuroticism, and positively with conscientiousness (Silvia, 2021).

Jia (2025) found that a sample of Chinese 'adolescents' who were strongly attracted to their favorite celebrity tended to have unrealistic expectations about adult intimate relationships. Given the high incidence of marital strife in the United States (Hays, 2025), we believe Jia's results are important enough to be replicated. However, there are other reasons why Jia's study should be replicated. Some of Jia's 84 participants were as old as 35, thus not adolescents. Also, some of the items in the measure of expectations that Jia used were worded inappropriately. Three of the items used the word "hope" where "expect" would have been a better choice. Hoping and expecting are not the same. You might hope that your favorite sport team, with a record of no wins and 10 losses, upsets a team that has 10 wins and no losses, but you probably would not expect that to happen. It is not clear how the latter two issues affected Jia's results.

The current research reexamines the relation between celebrity worship and idealized romantic expectations using a more accurate measure of romantic expectations with Indian (Study 1) and American samples (Study 2) of young college students. India and the United States are large important countries that are culturally different from China, thus providing an opportunity to determine if Jia's results generalize well. We also plan to see if those who choose opposite-gender favorite celebrities score differently from those who choose same-gender favorite celebrities. Finally, we hope to determine if lack of self-insight is related to both stronger attraction to one's favorite celebrity and higher expectations about romantic adult intimate relationships. We proposed specific hypotheses:

1) We hypothesized that there would be a positive relation between attraction to a favorite celebrity and idealized expectations about intimate adult relationships in both studies.

2) Given the inconsistent findings on gender differences in romantic expectations in prior research (Adamczyk & Metts, 2014; Simpson et al., 1986; Sprecher & Metts, 1989; Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002), we did not make any prediction about gender differences in the present studies.

3) We predicted that a subsample of participants who select an other-gender favorite celebrity would score higher on celebrity admiration than those who select a favorite celebrity of the same gender as the participant.

4) Finally, we predicted that the lack of self-reflection and self-insight would be related to both stronger attraction to one's favorite celebrity (4a) and higher expectations about romantic adult intimate relationships (4b).

STUDY 1: INDIAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

METHOD

Participants

We used convenience sampling to collect data from 124 college-aged participants. Seven participants were excluded because they were married (n = 2) or were over the age of 20 (n = 5). As such, the final sample comprised 117 participants (n_{men}= 29, n_{women} = 88) aged between 18 and 20 years (M = 18.93, SD = 1.10). Most students were from urban (42.7%) and rural (36.8%) areas, with some from suburban areas (20.5%). In terms of academic level, 78.6% were enrolled in undergraduate programs, while 21.4% were first-year postgraduate students. Preference for celebrity gender was mixed: 61.5% of students reported a preference for male celebrities, and 38.5% for female celebrities. Although female participants constituted the majority of the sample, their celebrity preferences did not necessarily align with their gender.

Measures

Celebrity Attitude. The brief Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS-7) was used to measure participants' beliefs about their favorite celebrity (Zsila et al., 2024). It is a 7-item questionnaire comprising the Entertainment/Social (3 items) and Intense/Pathological (4 items) subscales. High scorers on the former subscale are persons who are attached to a favorite celebrity because that celebrity is a valued source of entertainment. Persons who score high on the latter subscale are intensely and/or pathologically attached to a favorite celebrity. The items are anchored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include: "It is enjoyable just to be with others who like my favorite celebrity" and "I share with my favorite celebrity a special bond that cannot be described in words." A total score is calculated by averaging across scale items, with higher scores indicating greater attachment to one's favorite celebrity. CAS-7 showed good psychometric properties across studies, with reliability estimates ranging from .78 to .88 (Ahadi et al., 2025; Hwang et al., 2026; McCutcheon et al., 2026; Zsila et al., 2024). For the current (Indian) sample, Cronbach's alpha was .87 (CAS E/S = .79, CAS I/P = .78).

Romantic Beliefs. We used 12 items from the Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS; Sprecher & Metts, 1989), slightly altered, to assess future expectations about intimate relationships. For example, "Once I experience true love, I could never experience it again, to the same degree, with another person" became "I expect that once I experience true love, I could never experience it again, to the same degree, with another person," and "If I love someone, I know I can make the relationship work, despite any obstacles" became "If I love someone, I would expect to make the relationship work, despite any obstacles." We also deleted three items designed to measure love at first sight, because their alpha values were low (.53, Adamczyk & Metts, 2014; .57, Sprecher & Metts, 1989). The modified RBS uses a 5-Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A total score is calculated by averaging across scale items where high scores indicate an individual has high expectations that a long-term adult intimate relationship will be romantic. Attesting to the scale's validity, Sprecher and Metts (1989) found that RBS scores correlated positively with existing measures of romantic interest. This research also found that men were more romantic than women. Prior studies have demonstrated good reliability estimates (.80 and .81; Adamczyk & Metts, 2014; Sprecher & Metts, 1989). In the current sample, Cronbach's alpha was .90.

Self-Reflection and Insight. We used the short form of the Self-Reflection and Insight Scale(SRIS; Silvia, 2022), to measure the extent to which persons understand their attitudes and behaviors. It has six items anchored on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include "I'm often confused about the way that I really feel about things" (reverse scored), "My behavior often puzzles me" (reverse scored), and "I usually know why I feel the way I do." A total score is calculated by reversing scores on all but item 6, where high scores suggest good insight about attitudes and behaviors. A slightly longer version of the SRIS has also been found to correlate with a measure of self-awareness (Sutton, 2016). Past studies suggested good internal consistency with Cronbach alphas between .80 to .88 (Banner et al., 2024; Hwang et al., 2026; Silvia, 2022). Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the present sample (India) was .71.

Procedure

After receiving permission from the institution, the researcher distributed the questionnaire using a Google Form. The questionnaire link was shared with department heads, who further circulated it to 130 students via email, and received 124 responses (95.4% response rate). Data were collected online. Student participation was completely voluntary, and no incentives, benefits, or academic credits were provided. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. After

their consent, participants completed a demographic questionnaire and the other scales in random order to minimize the likelihood of systematic order bias. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS (version 26). Exclusion criteria included participants younger than 18 or older than 20 years, as well as those who were married.

RESULTS

Preliminary analysis

The data were approximately normally distributed, as indicated by the observed means and standard deviations of the study variables. The standard deviation values were relatively low and close to 1, indicating that the participants' scores were moderately clustered around the mean without excessive variability. Specifically, the Intense/Pathological subscale of the CAS-7 showed a mean of 3.03 and a standard deviation of 0.94, the Entertainment/Social subscale of the CAS-7 had a mean of 3.62 and a standard deviation of 0.98, the SRIS had a mean of 3.42 with a standard deviation of 0.96, and the RBS had a mean of 3.79 with a standard deviation of 0.75. The relatively balanced distribution of scores around the mean suggests that the data did not exhibit substantial deviation from normality (Mishra et al., 2019).

Main Analyses

To test hypothesis 1, we first examined if there would be a positive correlation between a measure of attraction to a favorite celebrity in a sample of adolescents and a measure of idealized expectations about adult intimate relationships. Table 1 shows that romantic expectations were positively associated with both Intense/Pathological and Entertainment/Social subscales of the CAS-7, supporting our first hypothesis.

Next, we examined gender differences in romantic expectations. Independent-samples *t* tests found no significant gender difference in Romantic Beliefs Scale scores (see Table 2). However, there was a significant gender difference on the Intense/Pathological subscale of the CAS-7, with males scoring higher than females. There was also a significant difference on the Entertainment/Social subscale of the CAS-7, with males scoring higher than females. There was no gender difference on the SRIS (see Table 2).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4

1. CAS-7 (E/S)	3.62	.98	--			
2. CAS-7 (I/P)	3.03	.94	.75**	--		
3. SRIS	3.42	.96	-.18	-.36**	--	
4. RBS	3.79	.75	.33*	.26**	-.19*	--

Note. N = 117. *p < .05, **p < .01. CAS-7 (E/S) = Celebrity Attitude Scale–Entertainment/Social. CAS-7 (I/P) = Celebrity Attitude Scale–Intense/Pathological. SRIS = Self-Reflection and Insight Scale. RBS = Romantic Beliefs Scale.

Table 2 Gender Differences Across Study Variables

Variables	Female (n = 88)		Male (n = 29)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	$t(115)$	p
CAS-7 (E/S)	3.49	1.00	4.01	.80	-2.54	.012
CAS-7 (I/P)	2.83	.90	3.63	.81	-4.23	.008
SRIS	3.47	1.06	3.29	.55	.87	.388
RBS	3.83	.75	3.65	.74	1.15	.254

Note. CAS-7 (E/S) = Celebrity Attitude Scale–Entertainment/Social. CAS-7 (I/P) = Celebrity Attitude Scale–Intense/Pathological. SRIS = Self-Reflection and Insight Scale. RBS = Romantic Beliefs Scale.

Next, we expected that a subsample of those participants who selected an opposite-gender favorite celebrity would score significantly higher on the CAS-7 than those who selected a favorite celebrity of the same gender as the participant. Table 3 presents the comparison between participants who preferred same-gender celebrities and those who preferred other-gender celebrities across four variables. For Intense/Pathological celebrity attitudes, participants in the same-gender group scored significantly higher than those in the other-gender group. On the Entertainment/Social subscale of the CAS-7, the same-gender group had slightly higher mean scores than the other-gender group, although the difference failed to reach a conventional level of significance (p = .05).

Table 3 Mean Differences Across Study Variables on Celebrity Gender Preferences

Variables	Same Gender (n = 40)		Other Gender (n = 77)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	$t(115)$	p
CAS-7 (E/S)	3.85	.89	3.50	1.00	1.85	.067
CAS-7 (I/P)	3.28	.89	2.90	.95	2.11	.037
SRIS	3.36	.88	3.45	1.01	.61	.051
RBS	3.87	.68	3.74	.78	.89	.378

Note. CAS-7 (E/S) = Celebrity Attitude Scale–Entertainment/Social. CAS-7 (I/P) = Celebrity Attitude Scale–Intense/Pathological. SRIS = Self-Reflection and Insight Scale. RBS = Romantic Beliefs Scale.

Finally, we expected that a lack of self-reflection and self-insight would be related to both stronger attraction to one's favorite celebrity (H4a) and higher expectations about romantic adult intimate relationships (H4b). Intense/Pathological celebrity attitudes were significantly negatively correlated with SRIS scores, $r(115) = -.36$, $p < .001$. However, scores on the Entertainment/Social subscale were not significantly related to SRIS scores, $r(115) = -.18$, $p = .052$. SRIS scores showed a small but significant negative correlation with RBS scores, $r(115) = -.19$, $p = .040$, thus supporting hypothesis 4b.

DISCUSSION

This study highlights how celebrity worship operates within India's evolving socio-cultural and media environment. In a collectivistic culture like India, identity and relational expectations are strongly influenced by family, community, and mediated narratives (Appadurai, 1996; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995).

Our first hypothesis, that there would be a positive correlation between attraction to a favorite celebrity and idealized expectations about adult intimate relationships was supported. Greater involvement with celebrity culture was linked to stronger romantic expectations, suggesting that media exposure may reinforce idealized views of relationships. These expectations did not differ by gender, indicating that such ideals are widely shared, likely due to the homogenizing effects of contemporary media.

Our second hypothesis, regarding gender differences in expectations about romantic relationships, showed that men and women were not significantly different. However, men scored higher on both subscales of the CAS-7, which may reflect variations in media access, social freedom, and norms surrounding emotional expression and fandom (Zsila et al.,

2021). These findings highlight that celebrity worship, self-insight, and romantic beliefs are embedded within a broader cultural and psychosocial framework in contemporary Indian society.

Our third hypothesis, that a subsample of participants who selected an other-gender favorite celebrity would score significantly higher on the CAS-7 than those who selected a favorite celebrity of the same gender, was not supported. Specifically, participants who preferred same-gender celebrities scored higher on the Intense/Pathological celebrity attitude subscale of the CAS-7. This suggests that in India same-gender favorite celebrities may function as aspirational identity figures more often than romantic interests, aligning with research linking parasocial relationships to identity formation and perceived similarity, particularly among youth (Ravi & Patki, 2025).

Our fourth hypotheses—lack of self-insight would be related to both stronger attraction to one's favorite celebrity (4a) and higher expectations about romantic adult intimate relationships (4b)—were supported. Specifically, higher Intense/Pathological celebrity scores and higher Entertainment/Social scores were both associated with lower SRIS scores, supporting the view that strong parasocial attachment serves as a compensatory response to unmet psychological or social needs. In the Indian context, where emotional expression may be constrained, such relationships may provide an accessible outlet at the cost of introspection. Lack of self-insight was also associated with stronger expectations regarding romantic relationships, suggesting greater endorsement of idealized relationship expectations, likely influenced by media portrayals (Ravi & Patki, 2025). This is particularly relevant in India, where traditional and modern narratives of romance coexist.

STUDY 2: UNITED STATES COLLEGE STUDENTS

METHOD

Participants

Using a convenience sample, 262 university college-aged students were recruited via Psychology Subject Pool or Sona Systems, a university participant management software system. Due to meeting exclusionary criteria of being married (n = 2), under 18, or over 20 years old (n = 3), four participants were omitted. One participant met both exclusion criteria but represented a single excluded case. Additionally, 19 students failed to indicate their age and were excluded. The final sample included 239 undergraduate university students (n_{men} = 178, n_{women} = 61), who attended universities in the states of Indiana (n = 73, 30.5%), Iowa (n = 51, 21.3%), Pennsylvania (n = 67, 28%), and South Carolina (n = 48, 20.1%). For the final sample, participant ages ranged from 18 to 22 (*Mage* = 18.78, *SD* = .81). Ninety participants (54.2%) indicated their favorite celebrity was

male, and 76 (45.8%) reported a female favorite celebrity (one study location did not inquire about favorite celebrity gender).

Measures

We used the same measures as those described in study one: CAS-7 subscales: Entertainment/Social (3 items, α = .78), Intense/Pathological (4 items, α = .83), the RBS (α = .79), and the SRIS (α = .84).

Procedure

After Institutional Review Board approval at all four universities, surveys were administered via Qualtrics, with measures (CAS-7, RBS, & SRIS) presented in random order to reduce potential systematic order effects. Demographic questions included age, gender, and marital status. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS (version 29). All participants received partial course credit for their participation.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

Preliminary analyses were conducted to examine whether the data met the assumptions underlying correlational analysis and independent-samples *t*-test. Examination of the raw data indicated that all participants had complete scale data for each of the study variables (i.e., Celebrity Attitude subscales, Romantic Beliefs Scale, and Self-Reflection and Insight Scale). Univariate outliers were examined by computing standard scores for each participant on each scale (e.g., *z*-scores). No cases exceeded the recommended standardized values for potential univariate outliers for each of the scales (e.g., $|z| = 3.29$; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis values for each scale, Q-Q plots, and scatterplots. Results indicated that neither skewness nor kurtosis for any of the scales exceeded values often associated with nonnormality (i.e., |skewness|, < 2; |kurtosis|, < 7; West et al., 1995; see also Kim, 2013). All skewness and kurtosis values were < 1, indicating nonnormality was not a concern in the current data. Additionally, visual inspection of Q-Q plots and scatterplots provided additional evidence for normality and approximate linear relations among variables.

To test the homogeneity of variance assumption for the independent samples *t*-test, we relied on Levene's test of equality of variances. Where equal variability could not be assumed, we relied on Welch's correction (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019; Field, 2018).

Main Analyses

Table 4 displays the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for the study variables. Scores on the RBS were significantly related to higher scores on the Entertainment/Social subscale of the CAS-

7, $r(237) = .130$, $p = .044$, but not the Intense/Pathological subscale, $r(237) = .004$, $p = .953$. Additionally, a negative relation emerged between RBS scores and SRIS scores, $r(237) = -.126$, $p = .052$.

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. CAS-7 (E/S)	3.07	.88	--			
2. CAS-7 (I/P)	2.14	.84	.41**	--		
3. SRIS	4.06	1.18	-.21**	-.37**	--	
4. RBS	3.32	.59	.13*	.00	-.13[a]	--

Note. $N = 239$. [a]$p = .052$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. CAS-7 (E/S) = Celebrity Attitude Scale–Entertainment/Social. CAS-7 (I/P) = Celebrity Attitude Scale–Intense/Pathological. SRIS = Self-Reflection and Insight Scale. RBS = Romantic Beliefs Scale.

Table 5 displays the results of independent samples *t*-tests examining gender differences across study variables. Results indicated that women scored significantly higher on the Entertainment/Social subscale of the CAS-7, $t(86.96$, equal variances not assumed$) = 2.71$, $p < .01$, $d = .46$.

Table 6 displays the comparison between participants who preferred same-gender celebrities and those who preferred other-gender celebrities across the four study variables. No significant differences emerged across study variables as a function of same versus different gender celebrity preferences.

Table 5 Gender Differences Across Study Variables

Variables	Female ($n = 178$)		Male ($n = 61$)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*(237)	*p*
CAS-7 (E/S)	3.16	.80	2.78	1.02	2.71	.008
CAS-7 (I/P)	2.16	.85	2.08	.80	-.61	.540

SRIS	4.01	1.24	4.22	1.24	1.21	.229
RBS	3.32	.57	3.32	.64	.08	.933

Note. CAS-7 (E/S) = Celebrity Attitude Scale–Entertainment/Social. CAS-7 (I/P) = Celebrity Attitude Scale–Intense/Pathological. SRIS = Self-Reflection and Insight Scale. RBS = Romantic Beliefs Scale. For CAS7 (E/S) Levene's test of equality of variances indicated equal variances could not be assumed, $F = 5.19$, $p = .024$, t-test $df = 86.96$.

Table 6 Mean Differences Across Study Variables on Celebrity Gender Preferences

Variables	Same Gender (n = 100)		Other Gender (n = 66)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	$t(164)$	p
CAS-7 (E/S)	3.19	.78	2.98	.90	1.56	.120
CAS-7 (I/P)	2.31	.85	2.28	.22	.83	.867
SIS	4.08	1.22	3.82	1.11	1.40	.165
RBS	3.25	.57	3.30	.65	-.47	.642

Note. One location failed to collect information on favorite celebrity gender, resulting in a final sample size of $N = 166$. CAS-7 (E/S) = Celebrity Attitude Scale–Entertainment/Social. CAS-7 (I/P) = Celebrity Attitude Scale–Intense/Pathological. SRIS = Self-Reflection and Insight Scale. RBS = Romantic Beliefs Scale.

DISCUSSION

Our first hypothesis, namely that there would be a positive correlation between a measure of attraction to a favorite celebrity in a sample of adolescents and a measure of idealized expectations about adult intimate relationships, was partially supported in that RBS scores were significantly related to the Entertainment/Social subscale scores of the CAS-7.

Our second hypothesis regarding a gender difference in expectations about romantic relationships was not supported. Men and women reported very similar levels of romantic beliefs. Our third hypothesis was that a subsample of participants who indicated that their favorite celebrity was of the opposite gender would score significantly higher on the CAS-7 compared to those who indicated that their favorite celebrity was of the same gender as the participant. This hypothesis was not supported. Our fourth hypothesis, that lower SRIS scores will be related to both stronger attraction to one's favorite celebrity (H4a) and higher beliefs/expectations

about romantic adult intimate relationships (H4b) were supported, with H4b receiving marginal support (p = .052).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In both studies, we found that the relationship between admiration for one's favorite celebrity (at least in the Entertainment/Social subscale) was positively related to the belief that adult intimate relationships will always remain very romantic. Consistent with the hypothesis and prior research (Jia, 2025), entertainment media frequently feature attractive couples who seem romantically involved. These couples often attract many fans and become favorite celebrities for many youthful followers (Aruguete et al., 2020; Hitlan et al., 2021), but continued exposure to such entertainment fare may create unrealistic impressions of long-term close relationships, thus failing to prepare adolescents for the reality of adult intimate relationships, in which jobs and domestic duties often take precedence over romance (McCutcheon et al., 2016, 2026; Sashikumar, 2026). The divorce rate in the United States is 45%, but only 1% in India (Divorce Rate, 2025). It could be possible that young Americans are exposed to so much divorce that they develop a more realistic view of what marriage is like, so much so that they are only marginally influenced by media exposure to romantic couples. Future research is needed to make certain that young persons have a realistic idea of what romantic attachments are like in the long run.

In India, the relatively strong association between admiration for celebrities and unrealistic beliefs about long-term romantic relationships can be understood within the country's sociocultural context, where marriage is highly valued, divorce remains stigmatized, and open discussions of marital conflict are relatively limited. Although India's divorce rate is low, social constraints limit adolescents' exposure to realistic models of relationship breakdown (Allendorf & Pandian, 2016; Divorce Rate, 2025). In such an environment, young people are more likely to rely on idealized portrayals of romance presented in media industries such as Bollywood and Kollywood, where attractive celebrity couples are depicted in emotionally intense and enduring relationships, reinforcing unrealistic expectations. Unlike in the United States, where higher exposure to divorce and more open discourse around relationship challenges may foster relatively pragmatic views of marriage, Indian adolescents may experience fewer real-life counterexamples to these idealized narratives, making them more susceptible to the influence of celebrity admiration on romantic beliefs (McCutcheon et al., 2016; Sashikumar, 2026). Consequently, continued exposure to such media representations may contribute to the development of overly romanticized expectations about adult intimate relationships among Indian youth, highlighting the need for research that incorporates family communication

patterns, cultural norms, and evolving media consumption habits (Jia, 2025; Uberoi, 2006). Consistent with this, the correlation between the entertainment/social dimension of the celebrity admiration scale and romantic beliefs was larger for the Indian sample ($r = .33$) compared to the U.S. sample ($r = .13$), although this difference did not reach a conventional level of significance, Fisher's $z = 1.86$, $p = .063$ (two-tailed). Similarly, the relation between celebrity admiration (Intense/Pathological) and romantic beliefs was significantly stronger in the Indian sample (r = .26) than in the U.S. sample ($r = .004$), Fisher's $z = 2.30$, $p = .022$ (two-tailed).

Our second hypothesis regarding a gender difference in expectations about romantic relationships was not supported. Men and women reported very similar levels of romantic beliefs in both countries. Prior research on this relation is inconsistent. For example, some reported no significant findings (Jia, 2025), others found no gender difference in expectations about romantic relationships (Adamczyk & Metts, 2014), and some studies found that men scored higher (Sharp & Ganong, 2000; Sprecher & Metts, 1989). Given these equivocal findings, further research is required to examine reasons for these discrepancies.

Our third hypothesis, that a subsample of participants who selected an other-gender favorite celebrity would score significantly higher on the CAS-7 than those who selected a favorite celebrity of the same-gender as the participant, was not supported in the American sample. However, a previous study using the 23-item version of the CAS found that American participants who chose other-gender favorite celebrities did score higher on the CAS than those who preferred same gender favorite celebrities (Greenwood et al., 2018). This may be the result of small differences between CAS and CAS-7, but the issue remains to be resolved going forward. On the other hand, we found limited support for this third hypothesis in India. We note that American participants preferred same-gender favorite celebrities (100 to 66), but Indian participants preferred other-gender favorite celebrities (77 to 40).

The modest support for the hypothesis may be explained by cultural norms that shape how adolescents' express attraction and admiration, where opposite-gender celebrity preference can serve as a socially acceptable outlet for romantic curiosity in a context that often restricts open cross-gender interaction (Netting, 2010; Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). This helps explain why more Indian participants preferred other-gender celebrities and showed slightly higher celebrity attachment, as media industries such as Bollywood and Kollywood frequently portray idealized heterosexual romantic pairings that reinforce aspirational attraction. However, the relatively weak support suggests that these patterns are evolving with increasing urbanization and exposure to diverse relationship models, making the influence of gender-based celebrity preference more

complex and context-dependent in contemporary India (Allendorf & Pandian, 2016; Bejanyan et al., 2014; Uberoi, 2006).

Our fourth hypothesis, that lack of self-insight will be related to both stronger attraction to one's favorite celebrity (H4a) and higher expectations about romantic adult intimate relationships (H4b) were supported in the American sample, with H4b receiving marginal support. In the Indian sample Hypothesis 4a was partially supported, inasmuch as Intense/Pathological celebrity attitude scores were significantly negatively correlated with scores on the SRIS, but the Entertainment/Social subscale of the CAS-7 was not significantly related to SRIS scores. SRIS scores showed a small but significant negative correlation with scores on the RBS, thus supporting Hypothesis 4b.

Our results from hypothesis four are consistent with McCutcheon et al. (2016), who found that college students with a strong attachment to a favorite celebrity also tended to believe in the unrealistic idea that there is one perfect person, or soulmate, for everyone. Furthermore, lack of self-insight has also been linked to scores on a measure of admiration for one's favorite celebrity (CAS-7; Hwang et al., 2026).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Our research has a few limitations, including the use of self-reported data, non-probability sampling, a cross-sectional design, and an unequal number of men and women. First, our data collection relied on self-report data, which is subject to inaccuracies caused by carelessness, failing to understand the scale items, and/or the tendency to present oneself in a socially desirable way. Second, while our study included cross-cultural samples, we used convenience sampling, making the samples nonrepresentative, which in turn limits generalizability of the findings. Third, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow causal and temporal inference among the variables. The role of self-insight, as it relates to unrealistic expectations about romantic relationships, deserves greater attention. Future studies should strive to include equal numbers of men and women. Furthermore, future research should focus on younger adolescents, who might be somewhat more likely to romanticize adult relationships. Finally, researchers, clinicians, and parents should make a strong effort to prepare adolescents for the reality of adult intimate relationships.

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