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Social Media Appearance Preoccupation Scale (SMAPS)

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Introduction

The Social Media Appearance Preoccupation Scale (SMAPS; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021) is an 18-item measure of social comparison, self-presentation, and general activity related to appearance when engaging in visual online content, especially using social media. The SMAPS has been used with older children, adolescents, and young adults, and it places the focus on patterns or types of use of social media related to concerns about any aspect of appearance, rather than limiting items to a focus on body shape or size.

Development

After reviewing relevant theory (e.g., Festinger, 1954; Frederickson & Roberts, 1997) and research (e.g., Webb et al., 2014, 2017; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2018), the SMAPS was designed with five issues in mind: (1) image sharing activity, (2) investment and self-presentation, (3) social comparison, (4) active versus passive social media use, and (5) negative responses to social media. The issues of image sharing activity and investment of time focused on appearance-based content led to including items that measure time investment (i.e., activity) and self-presentation online. These issues and past research on appearance anxiety also led to the consideration of how appearance-related activity and self-presentation, without attention to preoccupation with how one looks and compares to others, may not fully capture preoccupation. Thus, the SMAPS items were designed to tap excessive concern related to self-presentation and the third issue of social comparison as two components of appearance preoccupation. More specifically, SMAPS items were designed to capture online behaviors related to social comparison, as well as self-presentation, especially given that upward social comparisons, which involve judging one's appearance in relation to others, is a core reason for body image concerns and poor emotional health (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2019; Holland & Tiggemann, 2017). SMAPS items purposely addressed active and passive use of social media, given that active and passive viewing can have different associations with mental health, and items were designed to limit direct reference to negative emotional reactions.

Administration and Timing

The SMAPS can be administered in hard copy (in person) or online. It was designed for men or women (boys or girls) age 10 and older and takes 3–5 minutes to complete.

Factor Structure and Invariance

A final exploratory factor analyses with Australian adolescents in the original development study (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021) supported a 3-factor solution and 18 items that had high and positive loadings on only one of three factors, with low cross-loadings on other factors of $< |.30|$. Factor 1, online self-presentation, was represented by seven items addressing attention to presentation of appearance (authentic or inauthentic) through photo sharing on social media (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$). Factor 2, appearance-related activity, was represented by five items tapping personal and friends' general appearance-related behavior online ($\alpha = .87$). Factor 3, appearance comparison, was represented by six items tapping evaluation of personal appearance compared to others ($\alpha = .93$). The three latent factors of online self-presentation, appearance-related activity and appearance comparison were confirmed in Study 2 with a sample of Australian university students. There has been no indication that the loadings or the covariances between factors differ significantly between young women and men.

Evidence of Reliability and Validity

In the original measurement development study (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021), inter-item correlations of items on each factor were high. However, items designed to measure active versus passive media use tended to load together and the active items sometimes had stronger loadings than the passive items. Further, all items loading high on the appearance social comparison factor include some aspect of reacting to social media, rather than simply engaging in comparison, suggesting these items measure self-judgements or envy that can follow from social comparison.

Supporting validity, SMAPS self-presentation and appearance comparison were associated with a higher level of appearance-related anxiety, disordered eating, engaging in and witnessing social media teasing about appearance, as well as having moderate positive associations with general social anxiety and depressive symptoms. Also, appearance-related activity was positively associated with disordered eating, but activity had only small associations with general emotional adjustment (social anxiety and depression). In addition, multivariate models showed that SMAPS appearance-related activity and appearance comparison had incremental validity when the outcomes were social anxiety,

depression, appearance anxiety, and disordered eating. Online self-presentation had a higher average score than appearance-related activity and appearance comparison. Young women were higher on all three subscales than young men. The SMAPS subscale scores had small associations with age ($r < .13$).

Scale Instructions and Items

The SMAPS instructions and 18 items are presented below:

Instructions: “The following questions ask you about your experiences with **social media**. **Social media** include the websites and applications that you use to create and share content with others or to participate in social networking such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter, Tumblr, or Periscope. **How much do you disagree or agree with each of the following?**”

1. Seeing pictures of others tends to make me feel down on myself. (Appearance comparison 1)
2. When on social media I post, comment on, share or like content about what and when to eat. (Appearance activity 1)
3. When on social media my friends post, comment on, share or like content about what and when to eat. (Appearance activity 2)
4. When on social media I post, comment on, share or like content about getting or staying fit and/or muscular. (Appearance activity 3)
5. When on social media my friends post, comment on, share or like content about getting or staying fit and/or muscular. (Appearance activity 4)
6. I feel inadequate in appearance compared to my friends on social media. (Appearance comparison 2)
7. When on social media my friends post, comment on, share or like content about what they would like their bodies to look like. (Appearance activity 5)
8. How I feel about my body and appearance is influenced by other people's social media pictures. (Appearance comparison 3)
9. I feel like I want to change my diet after viewing other people's pictures online. (Appearance comparison 4)
10. I feel like I want to change my exercise routine or fitness level after viewing other people's pictures online. (Appearance comparison 5)
11. I approve photos of myself before anyone can tag them. (Self-presentation 1)

12. I prefer to only upload photos of myself to social media where I look physically attractive. (Self-presentation 2)
13. I prefer to only upload photos of myself to social media where I look fit and healthy. (Self-presentation 3)
14. When I upload photos of myself I usually use filters or alter/change them to make myself look better. (Self-presentation 4)
15. When others uploaded photos of me to social media, I focus on whether I looked good. (Self-presentation 5)
16. I check to see who is commenting on, liking or viewing photos of me or my body on social media. (Self-presentation 6)
17. When others upload photos of me to social media, I get upset when I don't look my best. (Self-presentation 7)
18. I am often dissatisfied with my weight or looks in my social media pictures. (Appearance comparison 6)

Response Scale

Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Somewhat Disagree = 3, In the Middle = 4, Somewhat Agree = 5, Agree = 6, Strongly Agree = 7.

Scoring

Average the responses to the relevant items to create composite scores for online self-presentation (seven items), appearance-related activity (five items), and appearance comparison (six items). A composite score can also be formed to represent appearance preoccupation by averaging the composite scores for two subscales: online self-presentation and appearance comparison. Appearance-related activity is best maintained as a separate score/variable for analyses, given its small correlations with online self-presentation and appearance comparison and its different associations with other measures.

Cost and Additional Information for Users

There is no cost for using the SMAPS. If you have questions about the SMAPS, contact Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck at m.zimmer-gembeck@griffith.edu.au. When reporting on the SMAPS, please use the Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2021) reference. It is recommended, depending on study aims, that a general measure of online use of social media or all media be included alongside the SMAPS, given evidence that general amount of use (e.g., time online, type of online activities) and SMAPS subscales could interact and better predict outcomes of interest (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021).

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