Body Image and Appearance Anxiety:

The Influence of Offline Experiences and Online Behaviors during Adolescence

Professor

Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck

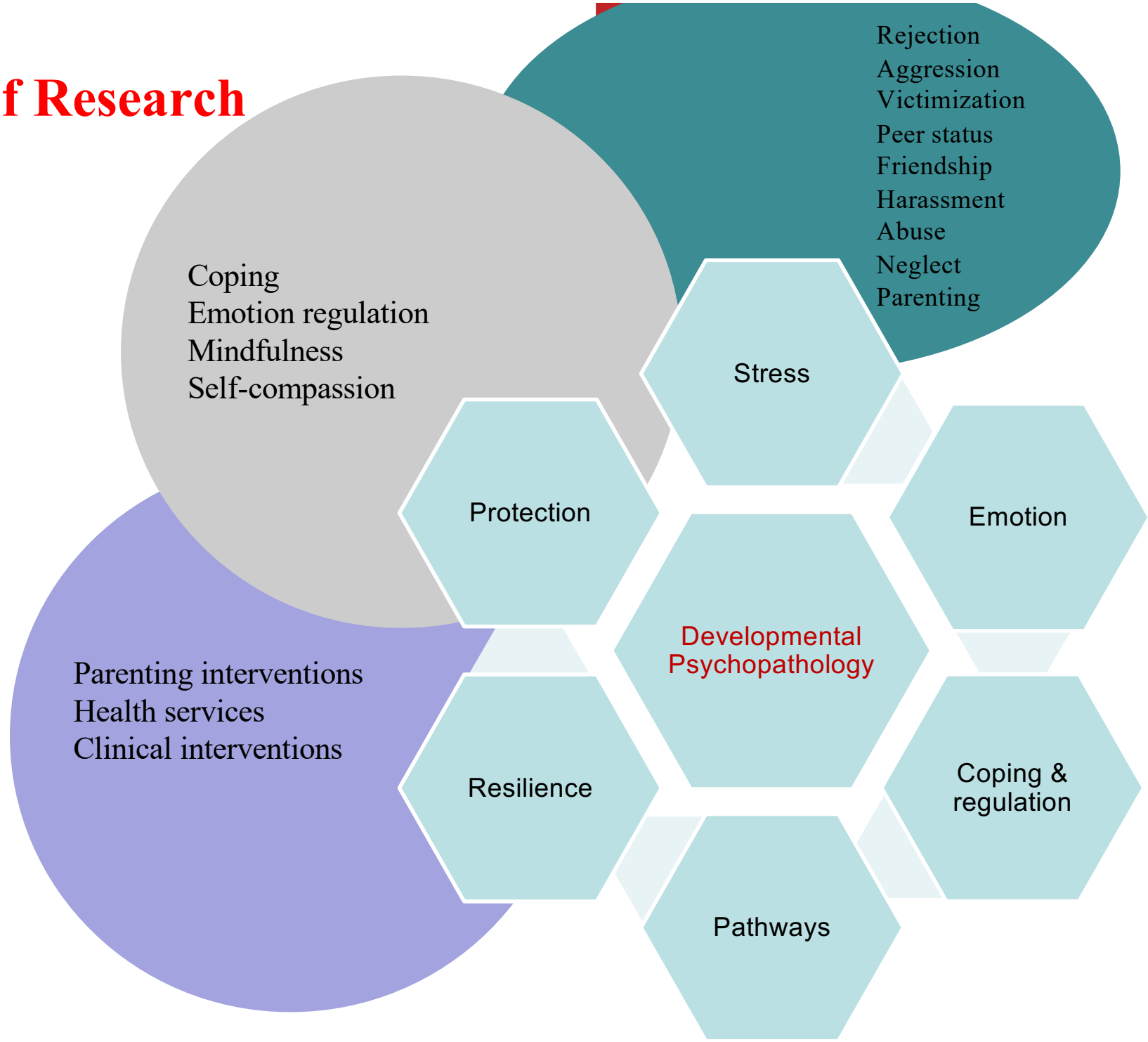
Griffith University
School of Applied Psychology
Gold Coast, Australia





Comments from social media projected on a teens body.

Areas of Research



Adolescents and Appearance

- Conforming to societal standards of beauty is highly valued almost everywhere in the world
  - » Children learn about physical attractiveness and its value very early in life
  - » Especially recognizable to girls, but increasingly relevant for boys
- It's not so surprising that weight and body image concerns and appearance-related distress are common among adolescents and even children
  - » Associated with many mental health problems
  - » Associated with many forms of disordered eating
- In recent large Australian surveys, appearance concerns are often endorsed as a top stressor for youth

Outline

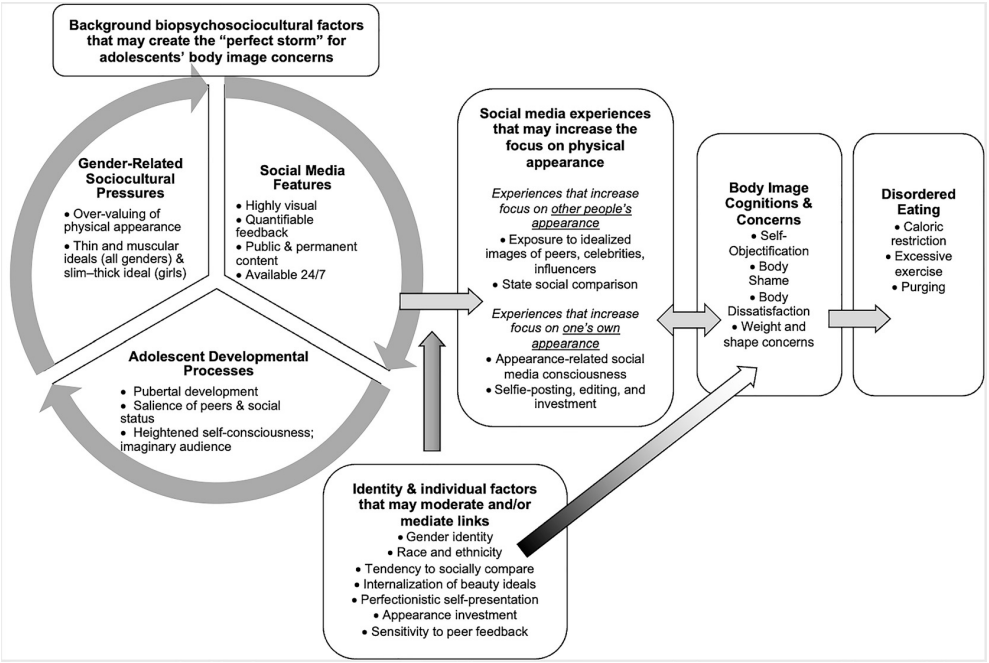
- The development of appearance anxiety
- Appearance-focused rejection sensitivity (RS)
  - » Factors related to Appearance RS
  - » Interrelations between Appearance RS and appearance anxiety
  - » Appearance RS as a link from social experiences to appearance anxiety
- Protective factors: Emotion regulation and mindfulness
- Social media and appearance
- Protective factors: Support for neutrality and coping

The Widespread Impact of Appearance Concerns

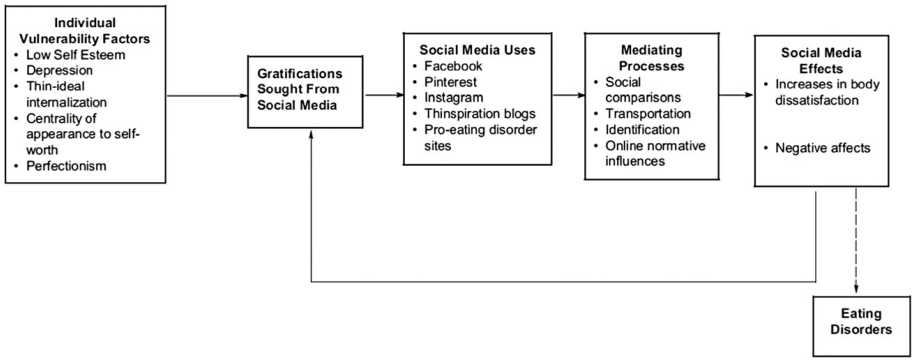
About **9-10%** of Australian adolescents 10-13 years are above the clinical cutoff for appearance anxiety concerns / BDD.

About 75% are girls.

About **20%** of Australian adolescents age 15-16 are above the clinical cutoff for appearance anxiety concerns.



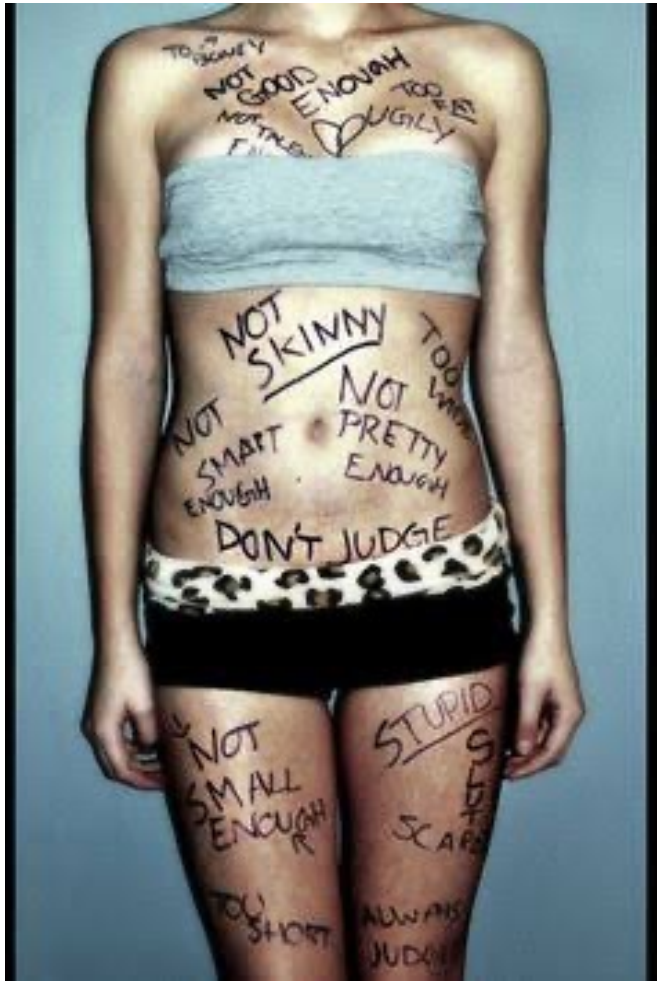
Choukas-Bradley et al., 2025



Perloff, 2014

Appearance Anxiety / BDS Measure

- The 10-item Appearance Anxiety Inventory (AAI; Veale et al., 2014)
- "I worry about my appearance", "I think about how to camouflage or alter my appearance"



Growth in Appearance Anxiety

Development and Psychopathology **30** (2018), 337–350
© Cambridge University Press 2017
doi:10.1017/S0954579417000657

Girls' and boys' trajectories of appearance anxiety from age 10 to 15 years are associated with earlier maturation and appearance-related teasing

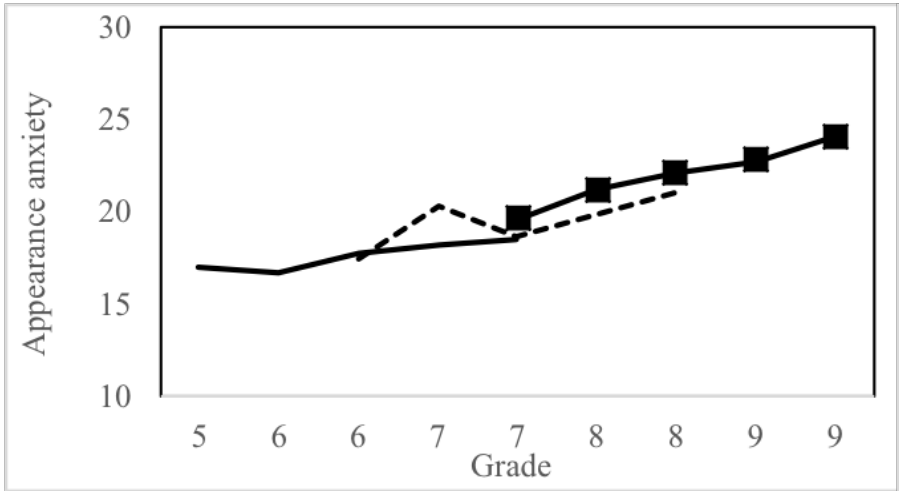
MELANIE J. ZIMMER-GEMBECK, HALEY J. WEBB, LARA J. FARRELL, AND ALLISON M. WATERS
Griffith University and Menzies Health Institute of Queensland

Abstract

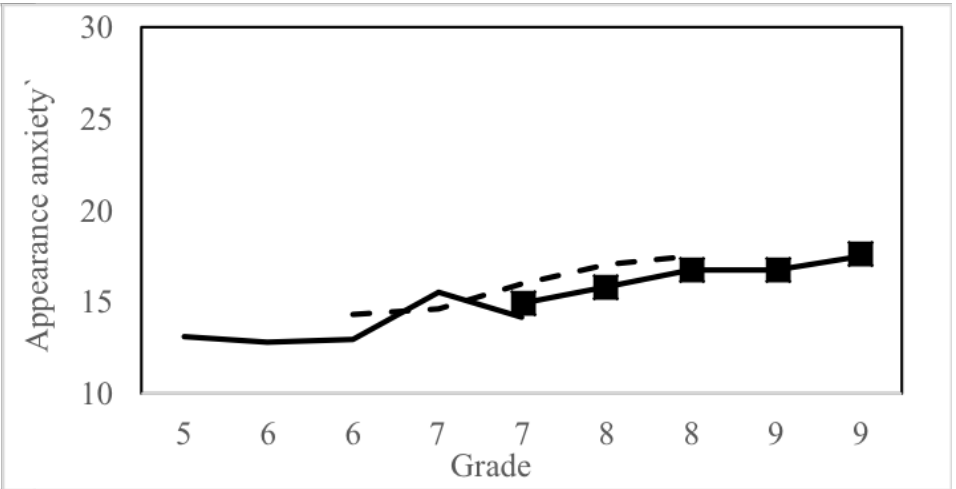
Adolescents' appearance-related concerns can provoke increasing emotional, social, and eating-related problems. The aims of this five-wave (2.5-year), multiple-informant longitudinal study were to (a) examine growth trajectories of appearance anxiety symptoms and appearance esteem, (b) identify whether trajectories differed by gender, and (c) examine several launching factors including parent-reported physical maturation, peer-rated physical appearance, body mass index, and appearance teasing by parents and peers. Participants were 387 adolescents (44% boys) aged 10 to 13 years at the first assessment. Steep growth in appearance anxiety symptoms was found for both girls and boys, but there was no average change in appearance esteem. Girls had more elevated appearance anxiety symptoms and lower appearance esteem than boys, girls' body mass index was associated with symptoms, and earlier physical maturation and teasing about appearance, alone and in combination, were associated with growth in appearance anxiety symptoms for girls and boys. Earlier maturing boys who were highly teased by parents, but even more so when teased by peers, were at utmost risk for elevated appearance anxiety symptoms and increasing symptoms over time. In contrast, all girls exhibited elevated or increasing appearance anxiety symptoms across time, with the exception of girls with the latest maturation who also reported little teasing about their appearance.

Appearance Anxiety Patterns From Grade 5 to 9

Girls



Boys



Higher for girls than boys in Grade 5 (about age 10) for girls.
Still higher for girls than boys in grade 9 (about age 15).

Slight steeper increase for girls

Social-Relational: Peer and Parent Teasing

Puberty



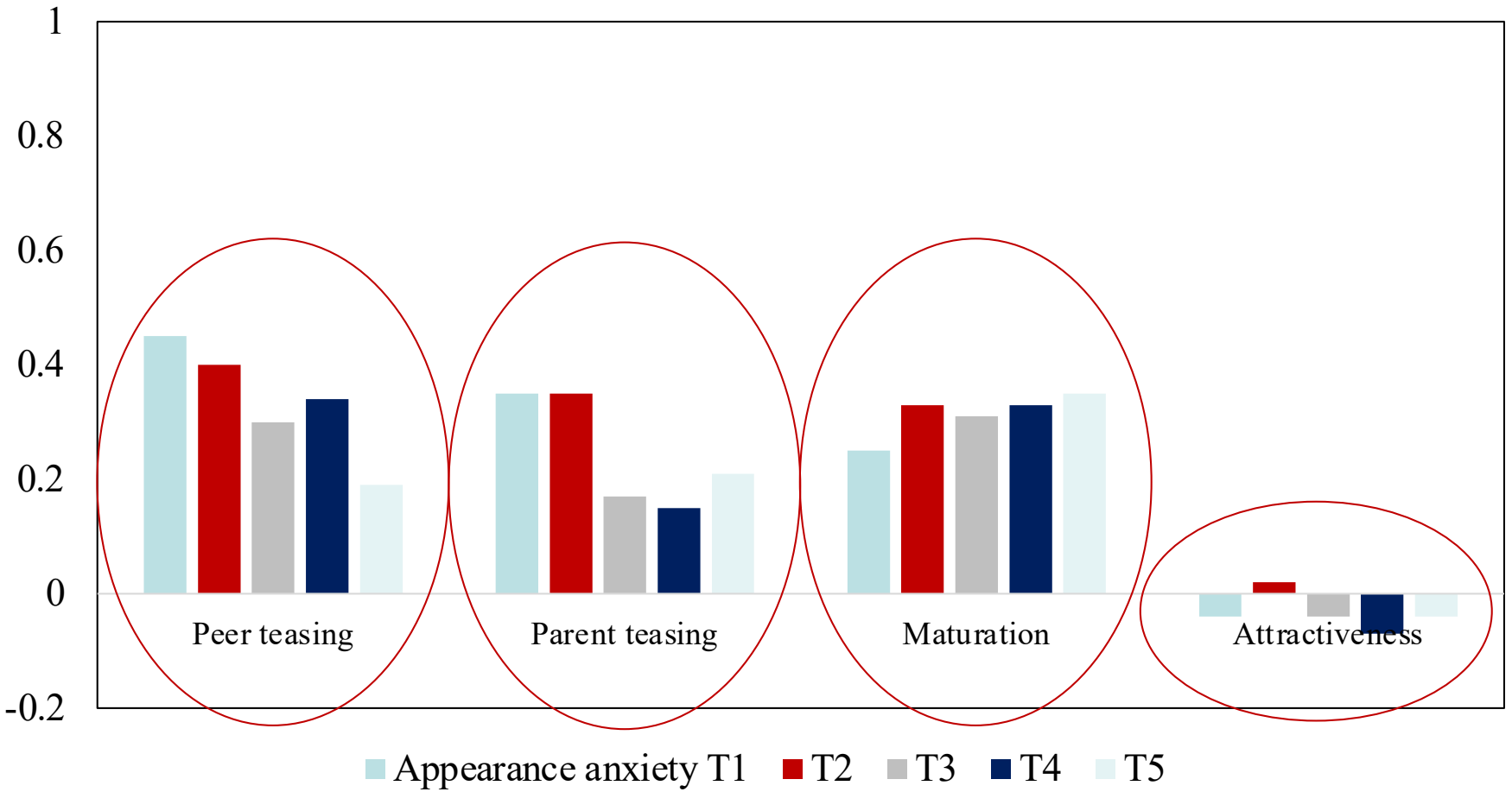




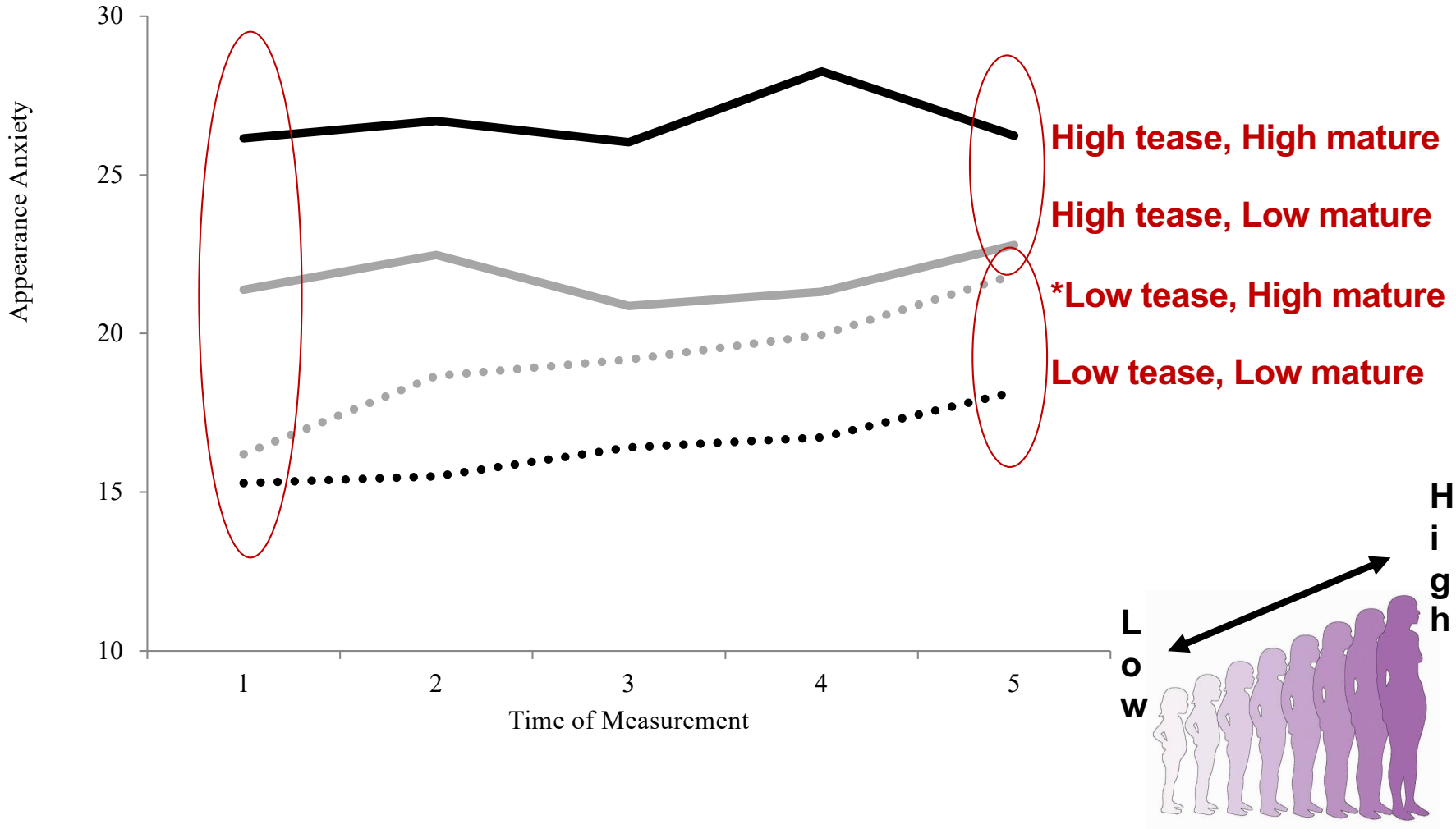




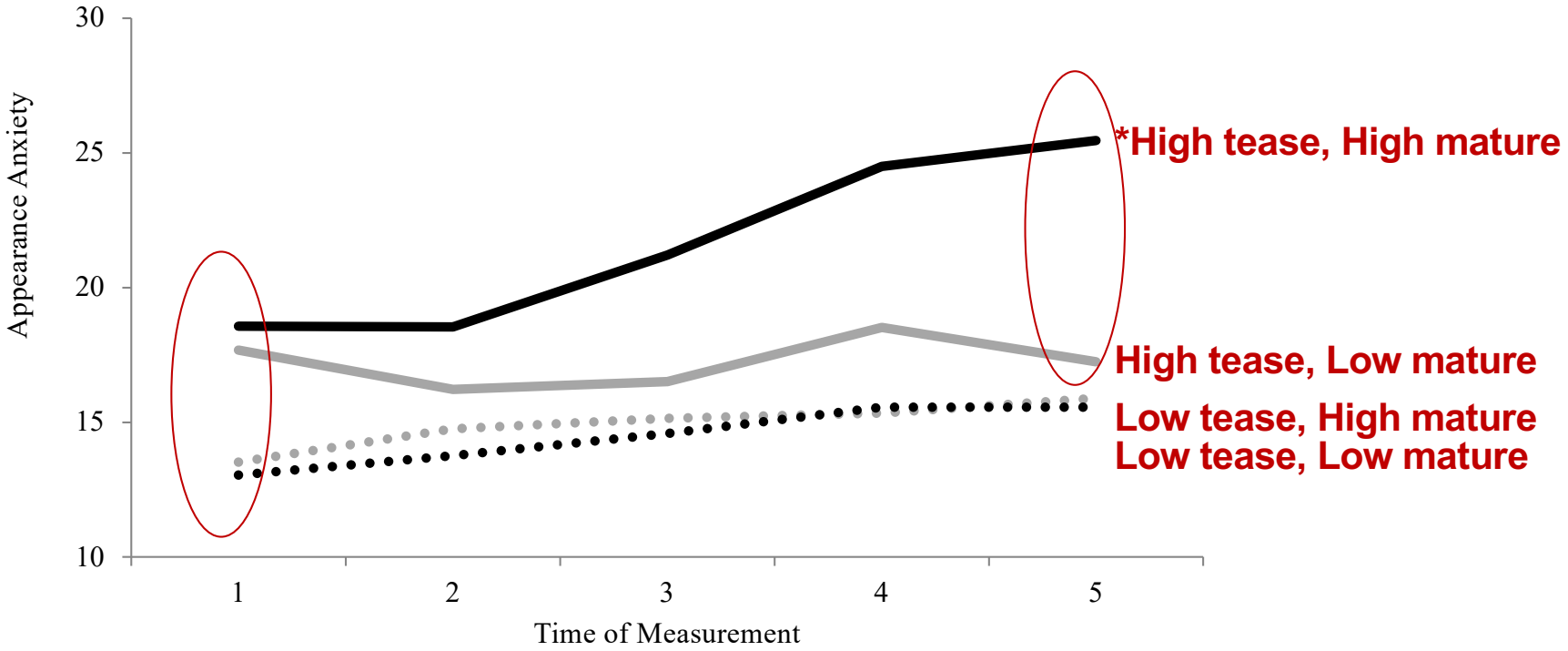
Correlations of Appearance Anxiety with T1 Peer and Parent Teasing, Parent-report Physical Maturation, and Peer-Report of Attractiveness



GIRLS
Peer Teasing About Appearance x Maturation

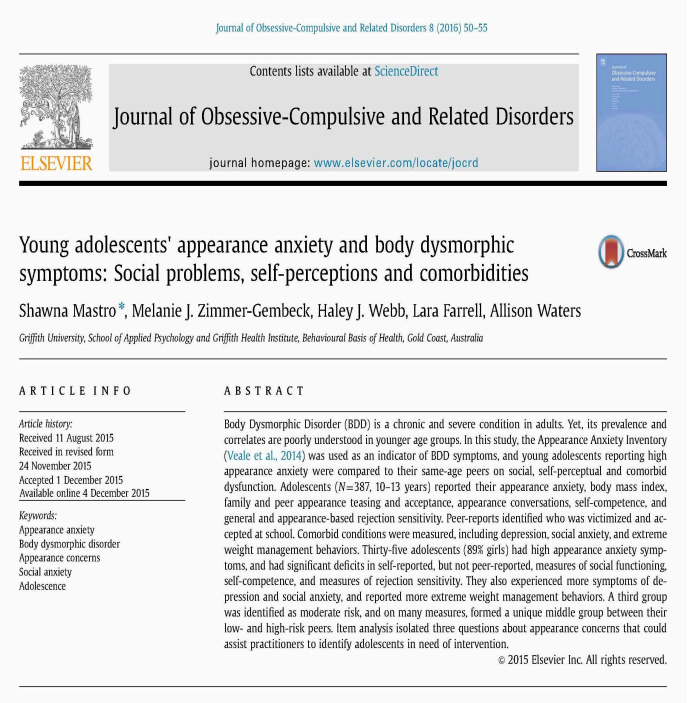


BOYS
Peer Teasing About Appearance x Maturation



Appearance Anxiety Relates to Social Problems, Poorer Self-Perceptions and Mental Health Problems

- Adolescents with Very High Appearance Anxiety at age 10-13…
  - » More teased by same-sex and other-sex peers
  - » More teased by parents and siblings about appearance and weight
  - » Feel less liked by peers
  - » Focus more on appearance with their friends
  - » Feel worse across all self-competence domains: general worth, academic, athletic
  - » Report more binge eating, bulimic symptoms, excessive exercise
  - » More depressive and social anxiety symptoms



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Young adolescents' appearance anxiety and body dysmorphic symptoms: Social problems, self-perceptions and comorbidities

Shawna Mastro*, Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck, Haley J. Webb, Lara Farrell, Allison Waters

Griffith University, School of Applied Psychology and Griffith Health Institute, Behavioural Basis of Health, Gold Coast, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is a chronic and severe condition in adults. Yet, its prevalence and correlates are poorly understood in younger age groups. In this study, the Appearance Anxiety Inventory (Veale et al., 2014) was used as an indicator of BDD symptoms, and young adolescents reporting high appearance anxiety were compared to their same-age peers on social, self-perceptual and comorbid dysfunction. Adolescents (N=387, 10–13 years) reported their appearance anxiety, body mass index, family and peer appearance teasing and acceptance, appearance conversations, self-competence, and general and appearance-based rejection sensitivity. Peer-reports identified who was victimized and accepted at school. Comorbid conditions were measured, including depression, social anxiety, and extreme weight management behaviors. Thirty-five adolescents (89% girls) had high appearance anxiety symptoms, and had significant deficits in self-reported, but not peer-reported, measures of social functioning, self-competence, and measures of rejection sensitivity. They also experienced more symptoms of depression and social anxiety, and reported more extreme weight management behaviors. A third group was identified as moderate risk, and on many measures, formed a unique middle group between their low- and high-risk peers. Item analysis isolated three questions about appearance concerns that could assist practitioners to identify adolescents in need of intervention.

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Peers did not perceive this group as more victimized or disliked than others.

Appearance Anxiety Develops from Social Experiences…

Do Individual Social, Cognitive, and Affective Sensitivities Better Identify Youth at Risk?

Social Sensitivity specific to appearance:

Appearance-focused Rejection Sensitivity







Appearance Rejection Sensitivity



» Sensitivity or socio-cognitive bias that involves anxious concerns about, heightened expectations of, and overreactions to perceived social rejection, and attributions for this rejection to aspects of physical appearance.

Park, 2007; Park et al, 2009; Webb & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2015; Webb et al., 2014

Appearance RS Measure

- 10 brief vignettes
- ”Your friend introduced you to a new friend. You had fun hanging out and you really like the person. However, since that day that new friend hasn’t called or texted you. ”

- Each vignettes is followed by two questions about 1) concern and 2) expectations of rejection due to physical appearance.

ARS and Appearance Anxiety

The Social Concerns of Appearance RS and the Preoccupation of Appearance Anxiety: How do they Interrelate?

What's the pathway?



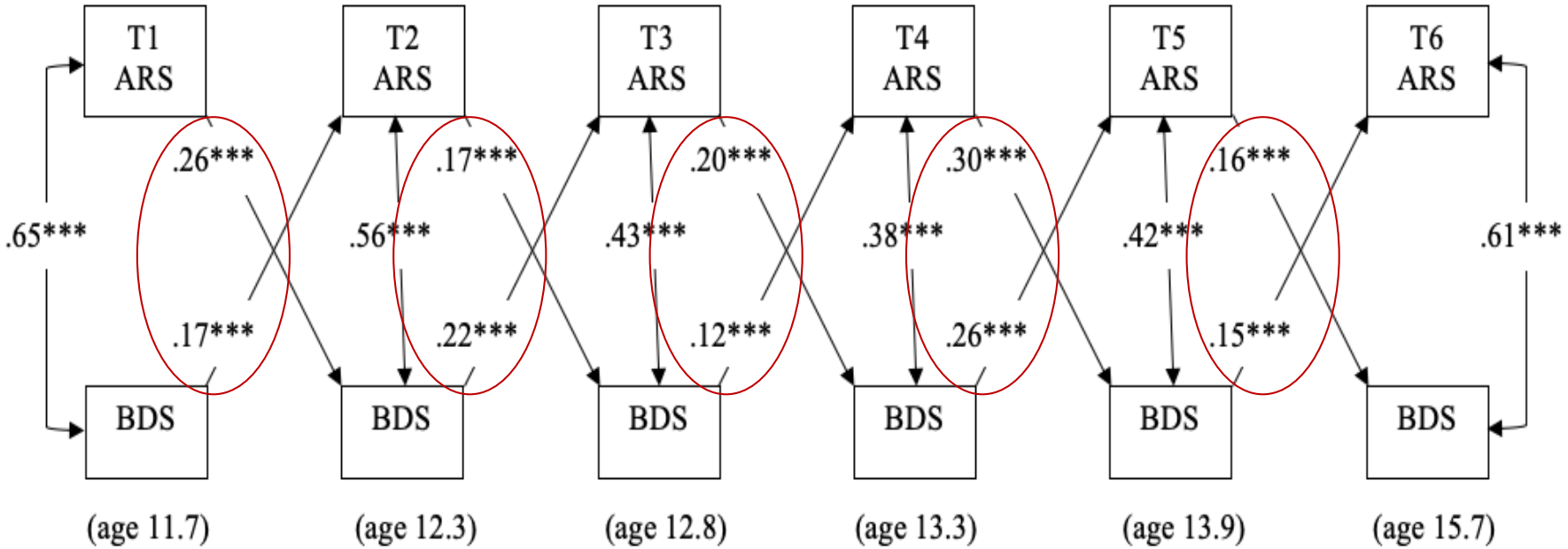


Figure 1. * Cross-lagged panel model of body dysmorphic symptoms (BDS) and appearance rejection sensitivity (ARS) with unconstrained parameters across six waves. Standardized coefficients are shown.
Note. $p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$. Model fit: $\chi^2(48) = 228.19$, $p < .001$, CFI = .93, SRMR = .092, RMSEA = .097 (90% CI .085 - .110), $p < .001$. Stabilities of BDS and ARS were fixed to equality $B = .54$ for BDS and $B = .60$ for ARS.

Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., Rudolph, J., & Pariz, J. (2022). A cascade of rejection and appearance preoccupation: Adolescents' body dysmorphic symptoms and appearance rejection sensitivity over 4 years. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 40*(1), 17-34. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjdp.12377

Predictors of Appearance-RS, Body Dissatisfaction, and Appearance Anxiety

Social Development Vol 24 No. 1 1–19 February 2015
doi: 10.1111/sode.12081

Body Image and Body Change Strategies Within Friendship Dyads and Groups: Implications for Adolescent Appearance-based Rejection Sensitivity

Haley J. Webb and Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck, *Griffith University*

Abstract

Appearance-based rejection sensitivity (appearance-RS) consists of concerns about, and expectations of, rejection because of one's appearance (Park). This study examined dyadic- and group-level friendship characteristics as correlates of early adolescents' appearance-RS. Using subgroups of an initial sample of 380 participants, appearance-RS was examined within best friend relationships ($N = 132$, $M_{age} = 13.84$) and friendship groups ($N = 186$, $M_{age} = 13.83$). Overall, best friends were similar in their appearance-RS, body dissatisfaction, restrictive dieting, appearance-conditional self-worth, appearance values, and self-rated attractiveness. Similarities between individuals and their friendship groups were consistent with the findings for dyads, except for self-rated attractiveness and dieting. Appearance-RS was higher in adolescents

JOURNAL OF
Research on Adolescence

JOURNAL OF RESEARCH ON ADOLESCENCE, 24(4), 564–590

The Role of Friends and Peers in Adolescent Body Dissatisfaction: A Review and Critique of 15 Years of Research

Haley J. Webb and Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck
Griffith University

We review the research conducted in the past 15 years concerned with the role of friends and peers in adolescent body dissatisfaction. A number of friend and peer group characteristics have been associated with heightened body dissatisfaction both concurrently and longitudinally. Most widely studied and more consistently linked to body dissatisfaction are appearance teasing and perceived pressure from friends to be thin. Other interactions between friends and peers that communicate and strengthen appearance ideals and direct attention to appearance also have been associated with body dissatisfaction, including appearance-re
tions of friends' appearance-related attitudes.
gies are proposed that could be implemented

Body Image 23 (2017) 162–170

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Early adolescents' body dysmorphic symptoms as compensatory responses to parental appearance messages and appearance-based rejection sensitivity

Kelly Densham[a], Haley J. Webb[a,*], Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck[a], Drew Nesdale[a], Geraldine Downey[b]

[a] *Griffith University, School of Applied Psychology, Australia*
[b] *Columbia University, Department of Psychology, United States*

Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology 43 (2016) 91–100

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology

A Longitudinal Study of Appearance-based Rejection Sensitivity and the Peer Appearance Culture

Haley J. Webb *, Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck

School of Applied Psychology and Menzies Health Institute, Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia 4222

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Friendship
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ABSTRACT

Drawing from theory that implicates the peer appearance culture in shaping adolescents' appearance concerns, we examined whether friends' reports of the appearance culture were associated with increases in emerging adolescents' appearance-based rejection sensitivity (appearance-RS) over six months. Gender and age differences were also assessed. We used peer nomination to identify dyadic friendships ($n = 178$ adolescents/89 dyads, $M_{age} = 12.0$), and unique friendship networ ($n = 384$, $M_{age} = 12.0$). Appearance-RS increased more over a 6-month period for adolescents who had recip -to-best friends who reported more body change and extreme weight loss behaviors, and when they had a best friend with a higher BMI. This suggests that observable features and behaviors may more relevant cues, however, adolescents showed greater increases in appearance-RS when they belonged to a friendship group that reported higher appearance dissatisfaction, and adolescents showed less increases in appearance-RS when their friends reported more positive appearance self-perceptions.

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JOURNAL OF
Research on Adolescence

JOURNAL OF RESEARCH ON ADOLESCENCE, [illegible], 1–

"Pretty Pressure" From Peers, Parents, and the Media: A Longitudinal Study of Appearance-Based Rejection Sensitivity

Haley J. Webb, Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck, Allison M. Waters, Lara J. Farrell, and Drew Nesdale
Griffith University

Geraldine Downey
Columbia University

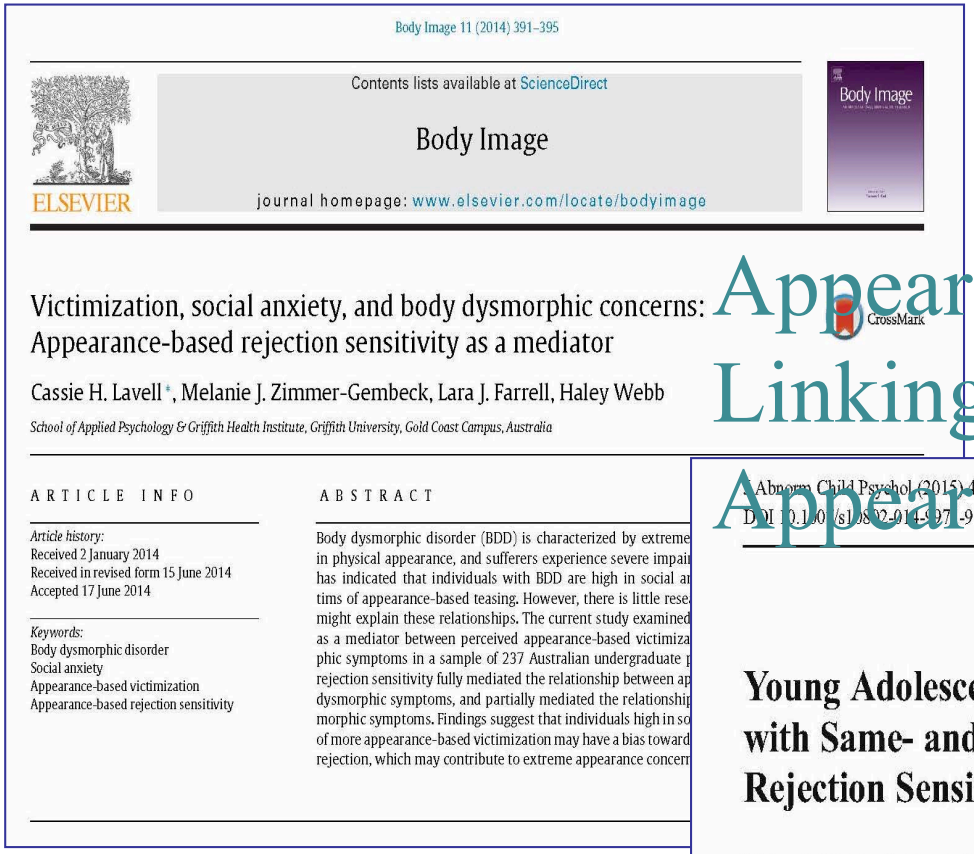
Drawing from the tripartite sociocultural model of body image, the researchers examined whether direct messages and modeling from peers, parents, and media were concurrently and prospectively associated with appearance-based rejection sensitivity (appearance-RS) in young adolescents ($M_{age} = 12.0$ years). Appearance-RS was higher among those who concurrently reported more appearance-related teasing and pressure by peers, more parent teasing, and greater acceptance of media appearance ideals. In prospective analyses, greater increases in appearance-RS over 1 year were found for adolescents who perceived higher levels of parental appearance-related teasing and negative attitudes about their own appearance. Moderation analyses indicated the positive prospective association between parental negative appearance attitudes and appearance-RS was found in younger but not older participants. Gender did not moderate associations.

J Abnorm Child Psychol ([illegible]015) 43:1161–1173
DOI 10.1007/s10802-014-[illegible]71-9

Young Adolescents' Body Dysmorphic Symptoms: Associations with Same- and Cross-Sex Peer Teasing via Appearance-based Rejection Sensitivity

Haley J. Webb · Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck · Shawna Mastro · Lara J. Farrell · Allison M. Waters · Cassie H. Lavell

Appearance RS as a Mediator Linking Social Experience to Appearance Anxiety



Body Image 11 (2014) 391–395

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

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Victimization, social anxiety, and body dysmorphic concerns: Appearance-based rejection sensitivity as a mediator

Cassie H. Lavell *, Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck, Lara J. Farrell, Haley Webb

School of Applied Psychology & Griffith Health Institute, Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, Australia

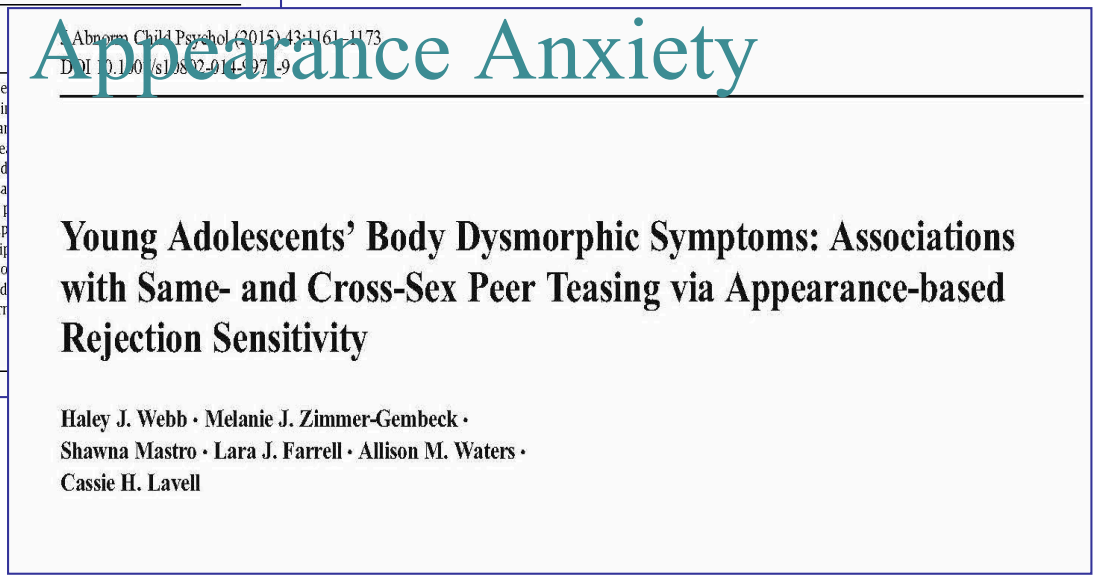
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Keywords:
Body dysmorphic disorder
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Appearance-based victimization
Appearance-based rejection sensitivity

ABSTRACT

Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is characterized by extreme
in physical appearance, and sufferers experience severe impair
has indicated that individuals with BDD are high in social an
tims of appearance-based teasing. However, there is little rese
might explain these relationships. The current study examined
as a mediator between perceived appearance-based victimiza
phic symptoms in a sample of 237 Australian undergraduate p
rejection sensitivity fully mediated the relationship between ap
dysmorphic symptoms, and partially mediated the relationship
morphic symptoms. Findings suggest that individuals high in so
of more appearance-based victimization may have a bias toward
rejection, which may contribute to extreme appearance concern



J Abnorm Child Psychol (2015) 43:1161–1173
DOI 10.1007/s10802-014-9977-9

Young Adolescents' Body Dysmorphic Symptoms: Associations with Same- and Cross-Sex Peer Teasing via Appearance-based Rejection Sensitivity

Haley J. Webb · Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck · Shawna Mastro · Lara J. Farrell · Allison M. Waters · Cassie H. Lavell

Peer appearance culture

Griffith UNIVERSITY

- Peer victimization (general and appearance-focused)
- Appearance Pressure from peers
- Appearance Conversations with friends
- Peer Popularity
- Dyadic Friends' body change strategies
- Friendship group body dissatisfaction
- Parental personal negative attitudes about appearance
- Teasing from Parents

- Increased Appearance Rejection Sensitivity
- Decreased perception of peer acceptance
- Social Anxiety

- Appearance Anxiety
- Body Dissatisfaction
- Social and Other Responses
- Social Withdrawal
- Rumination
- Opposition

Protective Factors



Protective Factors

- It has been a challenge to find factors that can substantially protect against the negative impact of social experiences on appearance RS, appearance anxiety symptoms, and body dissatisfaction
  - » Stress appraisals and coping responses
  - » Support from others
  - » Emotion regulation, mindfulness, & self-compassion
  - » How to avoid maladaptive responses of withdrawal, rumination, helplessness, opposition, retribution

Emotion Regulation and Mindfulness

Could emotion regulation and mindfulness be protective against the negative effects of peer appearance victimization on appearance anxiety?

Emotion regulation and mindfulness could allow for detachment from (or management of) maladaptive emotions and cognitions, such as appearance anxiety.

Current treatment for body dysmorphic symptoms incorporates training in mindfulness skills to facilitate a broader perceptual focus (i.e., on one's overall appearance, rather than on perceived flaws), and non-judgmental language for describing the self.



Body Image 24 (2018) 17–25

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A prospective study of adolescents' body dysmorphic symptoms: Peer victimization and the direct and protective roles of emotion regulation and mindfulness

Cassie H. Lavell, Haley J. Webb*, Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck, Lara J. Farrell

School of Applied Psychology & Menzies Health Institute of Queensland, Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia

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Body dysmorphic disorder
Emotion regulation
Mindfulness
Peer victimization

ABSTRACT

In this study, we examined whether peer appearance-related victimization was associated with adolescents' increasing body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) symptoms over 12 months. Also, given emotion regulation and mindfulness have been associated with less body dissatisfaction, we expected that they would protect against the negative impact of peer victimization on BDD symptoms. Participants were 367 Australian adolescents (M_{age} = 13 years). In multiple regressions, two aspects of emotion regulation, strategies and clarity, and two components of mindfulness, acting with awareness and being non-judgmental, were uniquely associated with fewer BDD symptoms at T2 relative to T1. There was evidence that one mindfulness component, observing, was a risk factor for more BDD symptoms. Further, acting with awareness and observing moderated the prospective relationship between victimization and BDD symptoms; low acting with awareness and high observing were risks for symptoms regardless of victimization, whereas high acting with awareness and low observing appeared protective of BDD symptoms, but only for adolescents who reported lower victimization.

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Emotion Regulation: 5 subscales

- **Awareness** ("I pay attention to how I feel")
- **Clarity** ("I am clear about my feelings")
- **Control** ("I experience my emotions as overwhelming and out of control")
- **Goals** ("When I'm upset, I have difficulty focusing on other things")
- **Acceptance** ("When I'm upset, I become very angry at myself for feeling that way")
- **Strategies** ("When I'm upset, I know that I can find a way to eventually feel better")

Gratz & Roemer, 2004

Mindfulness: 5 subscales

- **Observing** ("I notice the smells and aromas of things")
- **Describing** ("I am good at finding words to describe my feelings")
- **Acting with awareness** ("I find myself doing things without paying attention
- **Non-judging of inner experience** ("I think some of my emotions are bad or inappropriate and I should not feel them")
- **Non-reactivity to inner experience** ("I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them")

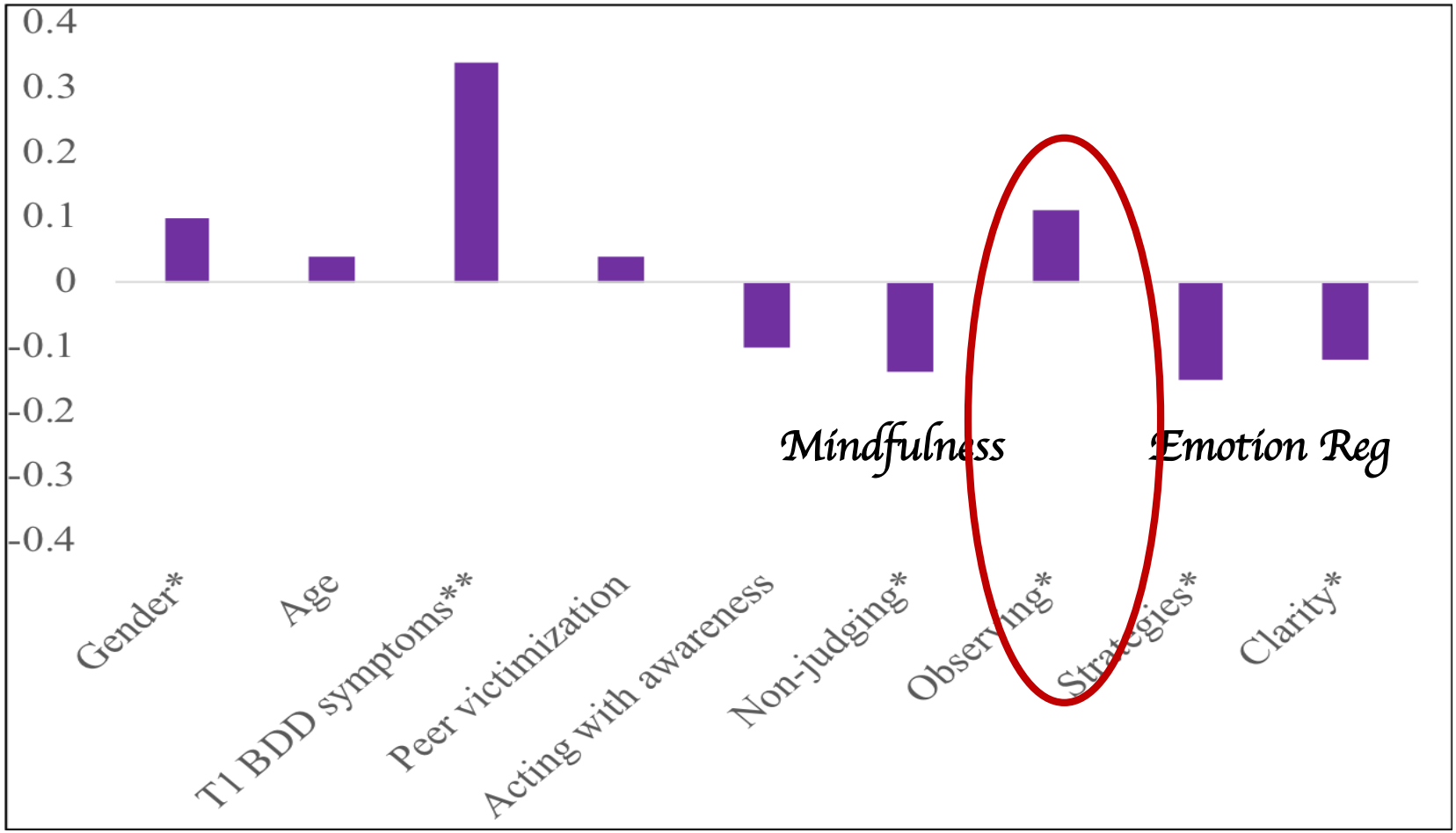
FFMQ

Appearance Anxiety Symptoms at Time 2
T1 = mean age 13; T2 = mean age 14




CAUTION

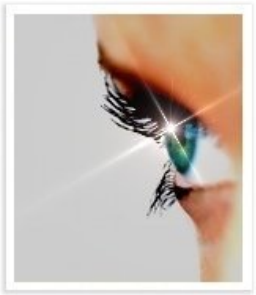
Appearance Anxiety Symptoms w/ Significant IVs



A significant interaction effect also suggested being cautious…

- Peer appearance victimization had a greater impact on appearance anxiety when awareness was **high** rather than low.

Mindful Observing



» Mindful observing and mindful awareness may facilitate increased attention to negative stimuli for adolescents.

Self-consciousness
Social anxiety



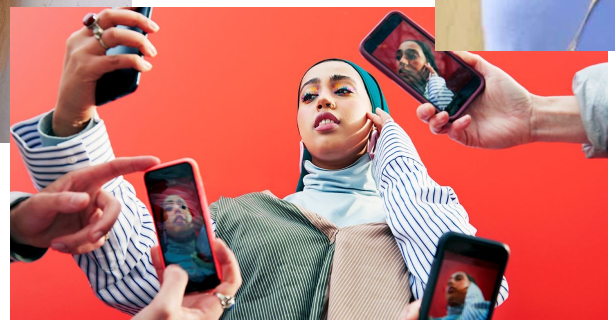
Summary

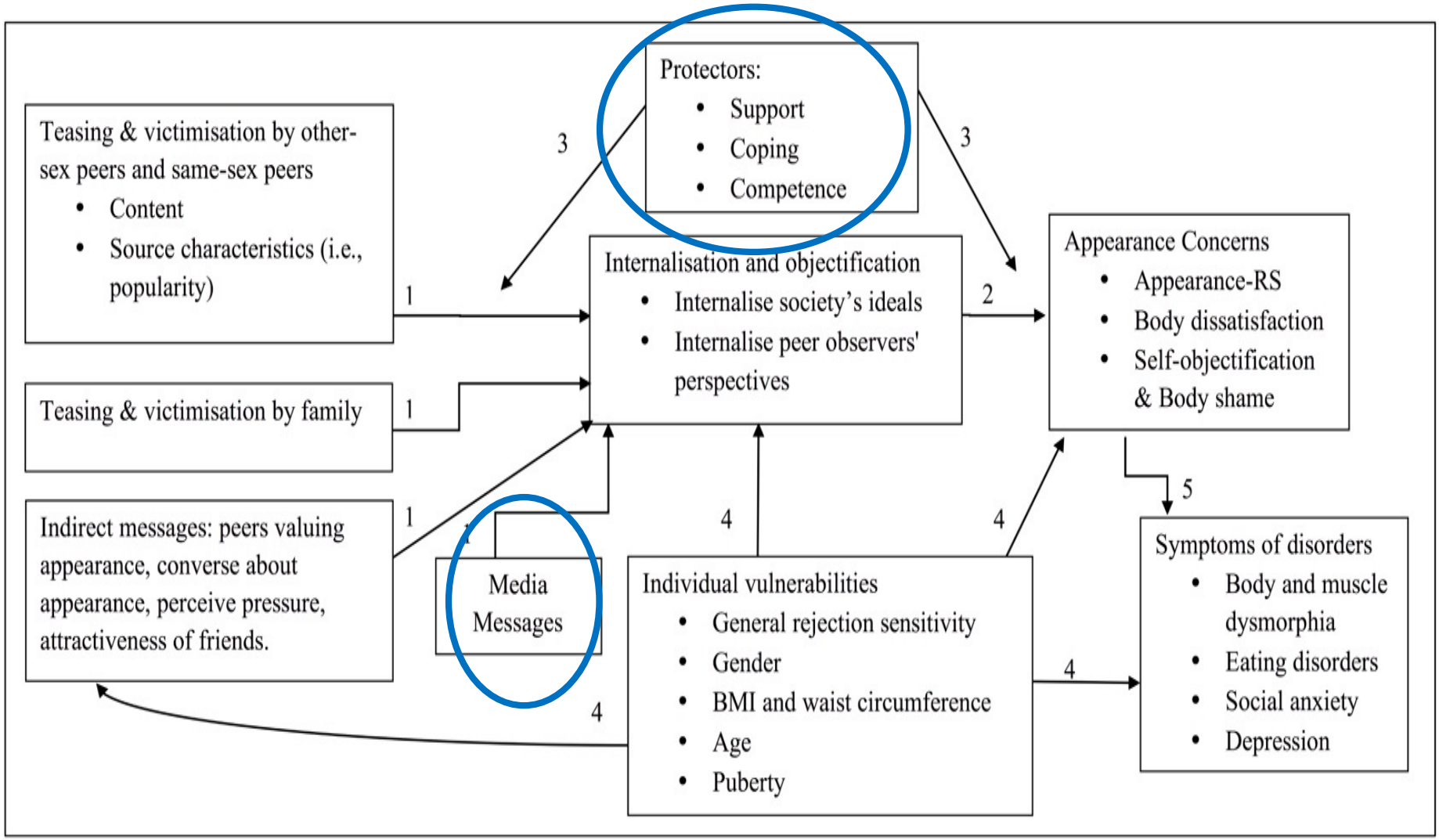
- Biological and social risk factors work in concert with each other to explain patterns of appearance anxiety
- Anxious expectations of rejection by others due to appearance are linked to increasing anxiety about appearance
- In turn, anxiety predicts negative expectations of others and problematic social behavior over time.
- These experiences involve strong emotions and having strategies to regulate emotions is a strength.
- Caution when studying mindfulness.
- It's hard to avoid feelings of appearance dissatisfaction, preoccupation with appearance, especially for girls.
- Differentiating what is problematic versus "normative" or "typical" can be very difficult.

Social Media and Appearance








Protectors:
Support
Coping
Competence
Teasing & victimisation by other-sex peers and same-sex peers
Content
Source characteristics (i.e., popularity)
Teasing & victimisation by family
Indirect messages: peers valuing appearance, converse about appearance, perceive pressure, attractiveness of friends.
Media Messages
Internalisation and objectification
Internalise society's ideals
Internalise peer observers' perspectives
Appearance Concerns
Appearance-RS
Body dissatisfaction
Self-objectification & Body shame
Individual vulnerabilities
General rejection sensitivity
Gender
BMI and waist circumference
Age
Puberty
Symptoms of disorders
Body and muscle dysmorphia
Eating disorders
Social anxiety
Depression
1
1
1
2
3
3
4
4
4
4
5

Social Media and Appearance

- Online Appearance Preoccupation: Definition
  - » Directing attention towards cultivating a preferred visual appearance, engaging in appearance comparisons in online environments, and engaging in high levels of general activities that involve interacting with appearance-based content.

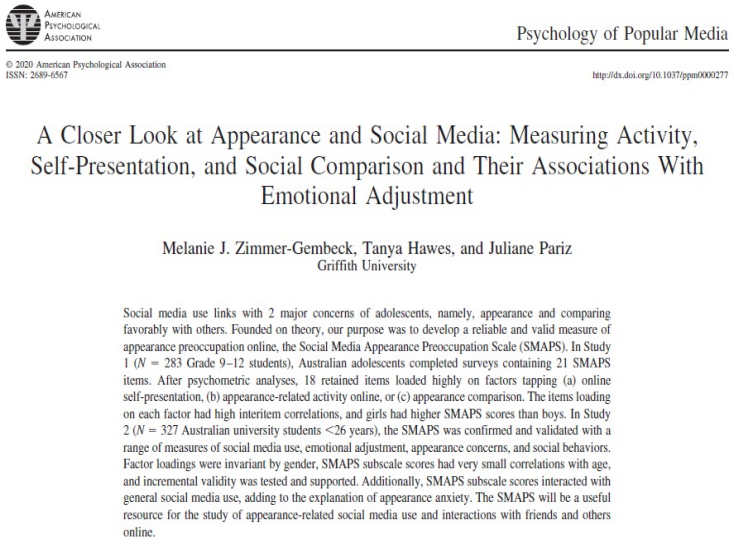
(Choukas-Bradley et al., 2022; Fardouly et al., 2018; Frison & Eggermont, 2016; Hawes et al., 2020; Rogers & Rosseau, 2022; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021)





Measuring Online Appearance Preoccupation

- Social Media Appearance Preoccupation Scale (SMAPS; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021)
  - » Three Subscales
    - Upward social comparisons online
    - Self-presentational behaviors online
    - Appearance-related activity



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A Closer Look at Appearance and Social Media: Measuring Activity, Self-Presentation, and Social Comparison and Their Associations With Emotional Adjustment

Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck, Tanya Hawes, and Juliane Pariz
Griffith University

Social media use links with 2 major concerns of adolescents, namely, appearance and comparing favorably with others. Founded on theory, our purpose was to develop a reliable and valid measure of appearance preoccupation online, the Social Media Appearance Preoccupation Scale (SMAPS). In Study 1 (N = 283 Grade 9–12 students), Australian adolescents completed surveys containing 21 SMAPS items. After psychometric analyses, 18 retained items loaded highly on factors tapping (a) online self-presentation, (b) appearance-related activity online, or (c) appearance comparison. The items loading on each factor had high interitem correlations, and girls had higher SMAPS scores than boys. In Study 2 (N = 327 Australian university students <26 years), the SMAPS was confirmed and validated with a range of measures of social media use, emotional adjustment, appearance concerns, and social behaviors. Factor loadings were invariant by gender, SMAPS subscale scores had very small correlations with age, and incremental validity was tested and supported. Additionally, SMAPS subscale scores interacted with general social media use, adding to the explanation of appearance anxiety. The SMAPS will be a useful resource for the study of appearance-related social media use and interactions with friends and others online.

What are some early adolescent risks for later online appearance preoccupation?

Social Influences



Eating & Body Change



Gender



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Adolescents' online appearance preoccupation: A 5-year longitudinal study of the influence of peers, parents, beliefs, and disordered eating

Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck, PhD [a,*], Tanya Hawes, BPsych(Hons) [b], Riley A. Scott, PhD [b], Tia Campbell, BPsych(Hons) [b], Haley J. Webb, PhD [c]

[a] School of Applied Psychology and Griffith Centre for Mental Health, Griffith University, Australia
[b] School of Applied Psychology, Griffith University, Australia
[c] Little Warriors Psychology Clinic, Queensland, Australia

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Internalization of appearance ideals

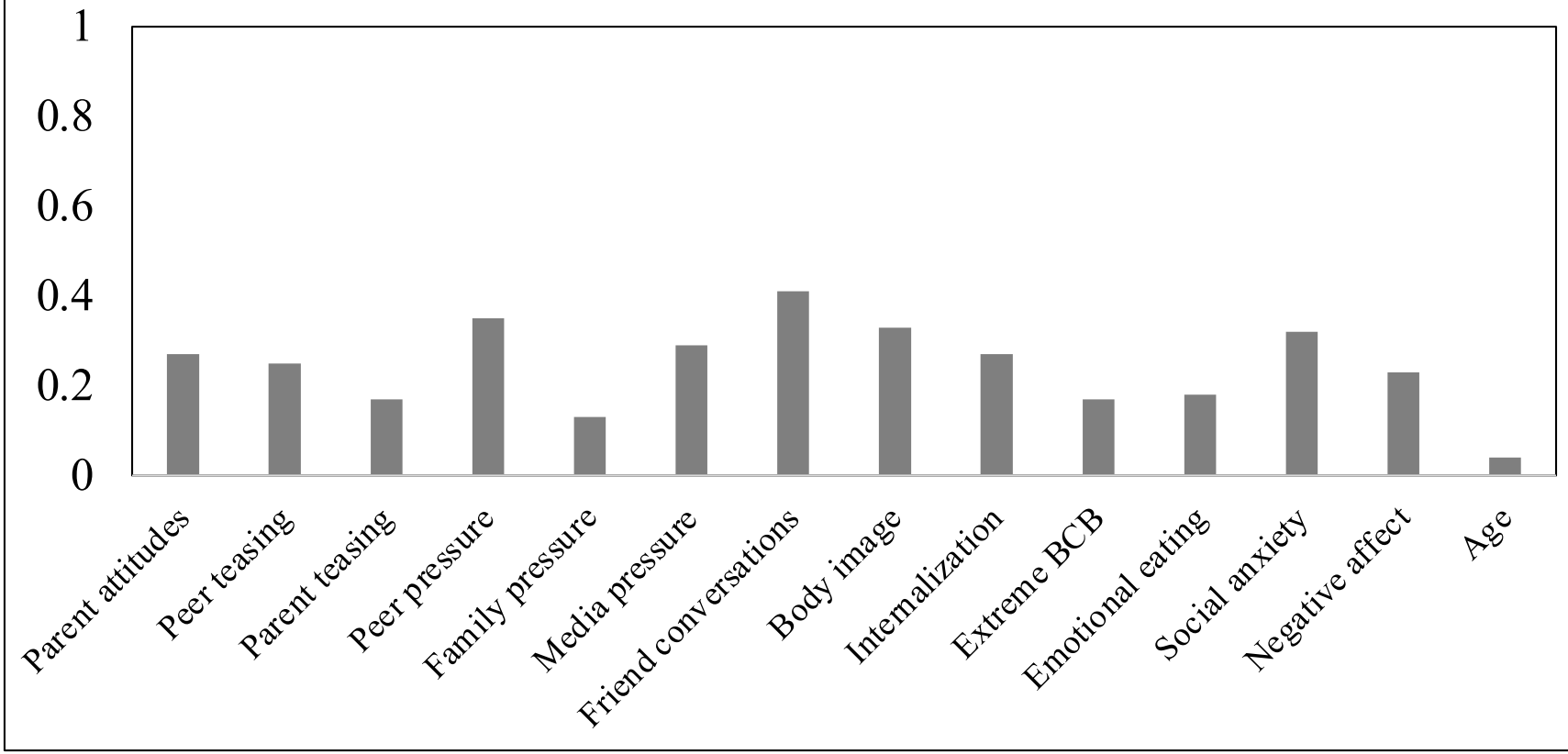
ABSTRACT

Online behaviors, especially those concerning appearance preoccupation, have been related to poorer mental health, but early risk factors for online appearance preoccupation are not well understood. In this study, data were collected in the first years of adolescence (age 10-13 years) to investigate correlates of later online appearance preoccupation (ages 15-18 years). Drawing data from a longitudinal study, 261 Australian adolescents (48% male; M_{age} = 12.0, SD = 0.89) completed surveys to report on social pressures, personal beliefs and attitudes, and body change and eating behaviors at the start of the study (when age 10 to 13). They also reported their online appearance preoccupation (appearance comparison/presentation, and appearance-related activity) five years later at age 15 to 18. Results demonstrated that the most prominent risks for online appearance preoccupation and activity in later adolescence were social in origin. Specifically, appearance-related conversations with friends in early adolescence emerged as the most salient preceding risk factor for boys' and girls' online appearance preoccupation five years later. Also, there were distinct early risks in models estimated separately for boys and girls; these included parents' appearance-related attitudes and behaviors for boys and internalization of appearance ideals and emotional eating for girls.



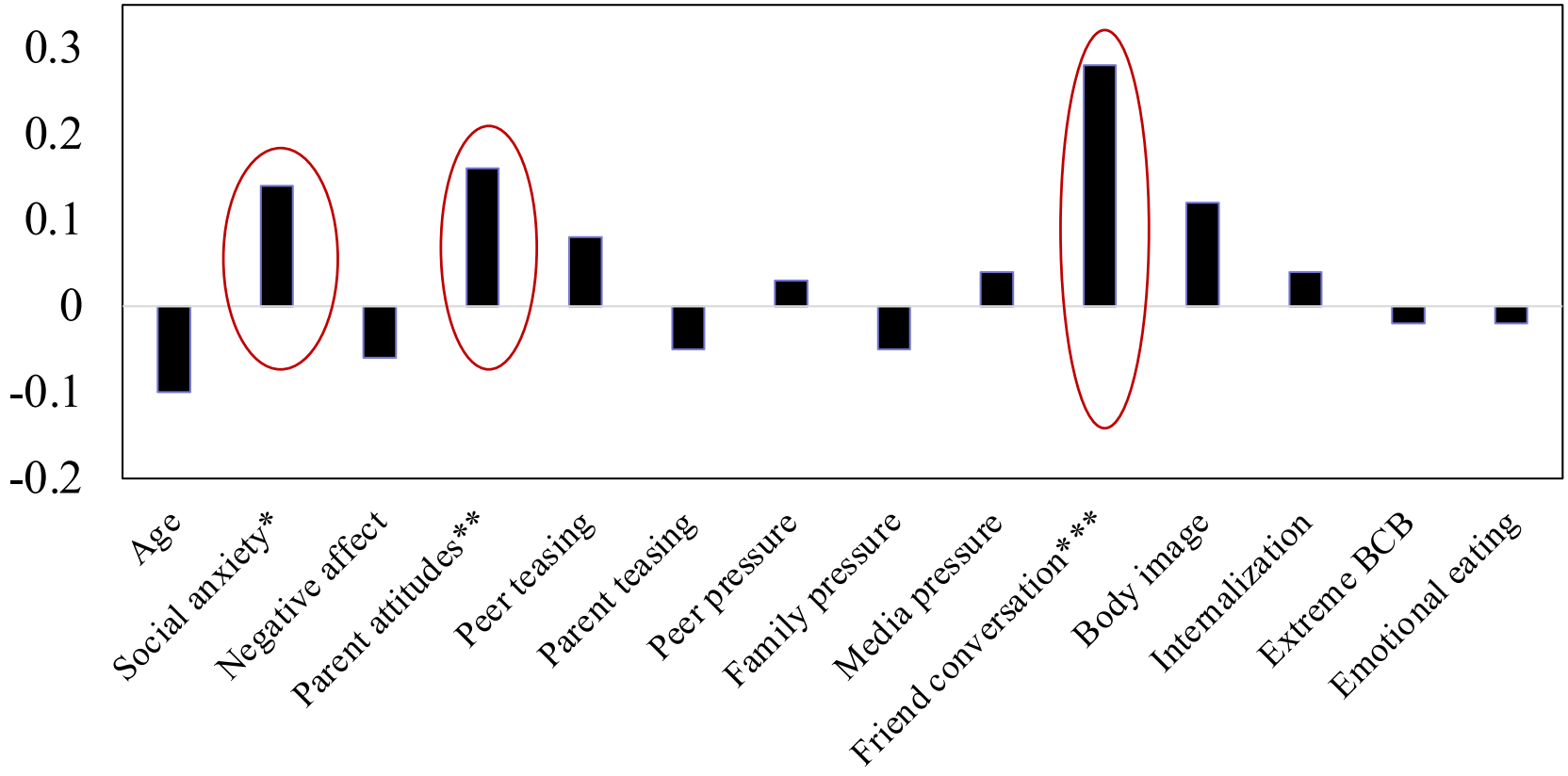
Beliefs & Attitudes

Correlations of Early Risks (age 10-13) with Online Appearance Preoccupation (age 16-19)



***N* = 261**

Results of Regressing Later Adolescents' Online Appearance Preoccupation on All Early Adolescent Risk Factors



Girls: Friend conversations
Boys: Parent Attitudes about weight and shape

Protective Factors and Resources

Coping Responses: self-acceptance and compensatory thinking

Support From Others for appearance neutrality



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Appearance-related teasing, rejection sensitivity, acceptance, and coping as risks and resources associated with online appearance preoccupation over one year

Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck [a,*], Riley A. Scott [b], Tanya Hawes [c]

[a] Griffith University, School of Applied Psychology and Centre for Mental Health, Australia
[b] University of Southern Queensland, School of Psychology and Wellbeing, Australia
[c] Griffith University, School of Applied Psychology, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Online appearance preoccupation is a known correlate of poorer body image, social problems, and mental health symptoms among youth. Yet, this study is the first to investigate individual and social risks and resources expected to explain the level of concurrent, as well as change in, online appearance preoccupation across one year. We focused on two risk factors of appearance teasing online by peers and appearance-based sensitivity to rejection, and two positive resources of appearance neutral support from important others and ways of coping with appearance-related stressors. A total of 752 Australian adolescents and emerging adults (14–21 years; M = 17.8 years, *SD* = 1.8 years; 41% young men; about 95% White or Asian) recruited from secondary schools or university were included. Results of regression analyses suggested that, concurrently, online appearance teasing, appearance rejection sensitivity, and positive coping were uniquely associated with online appearance preoccupation. Further, the positive association of peer appearance teasing with online appearance preoccupation was stronger among young men than young women. Over time and once all risks and resources were considered, positive coping with appearance pressures was associated with a decrease in online appearance preoccupation from T1 to T2. Gender (girl/young woman) and intensity of social media use were notable risks for concurrent online appearance preoccupation and predictors of increases in preoccupation over one year. Findings are discussed in light of theory and provide practical suggestions for future research and interventions among youth.

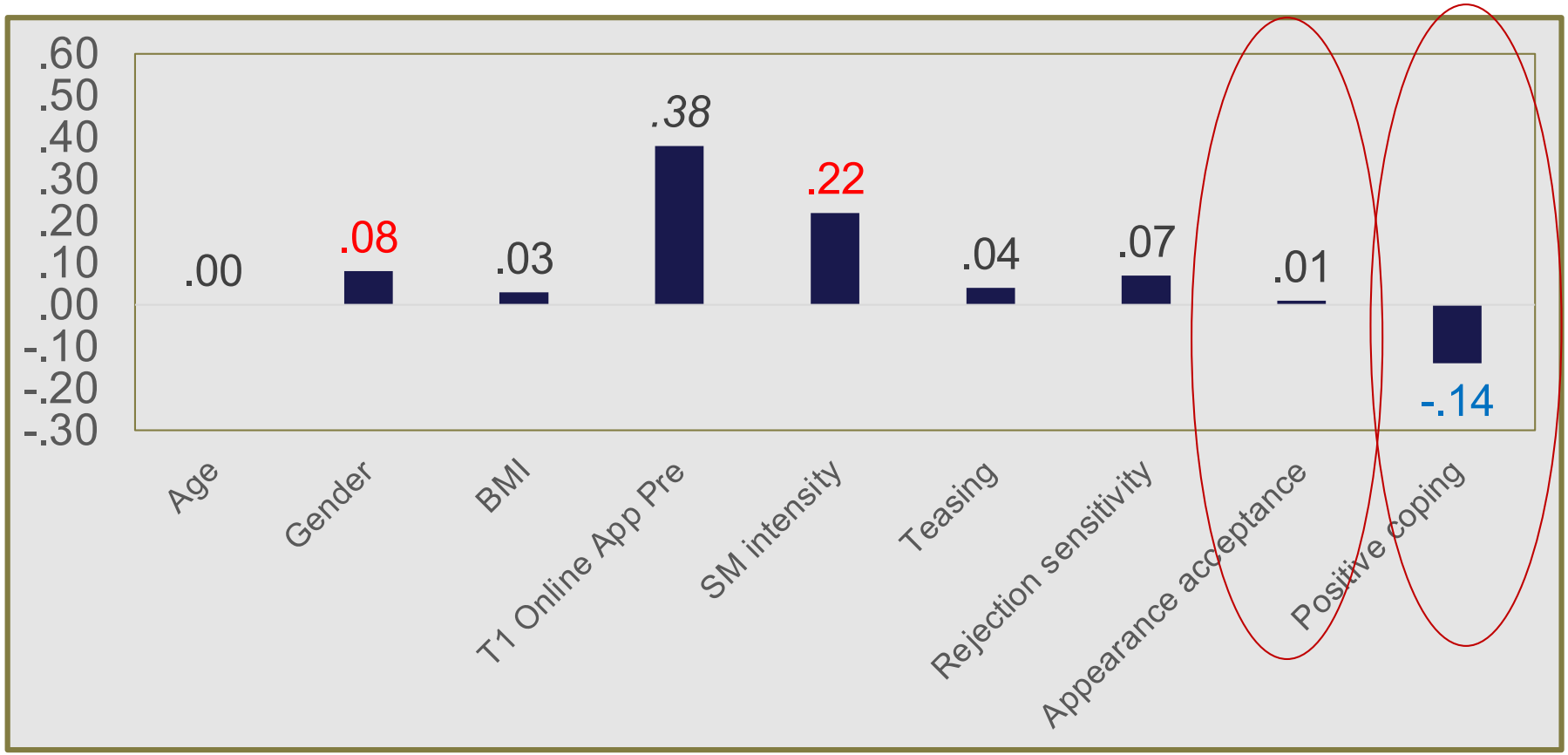
"Say to yourself or think 'I am perfect the way I am'"
"Try to get it your appearance off your mind by doing something else"

"Important people in my life help me to see that there are more important things than how I look"

Controlling for social media use, online peer teasing about appearance, and appearance RS

Online Appearance Preoccupation (N = 752, age 14-21)

Results of Longitudinal Model



- **Protection again early peer appearance teasing?? No**


Body-positive
Body-neutral
I feel good about myself, because I know I'm beautiful
How I feel about myself has nothing to do with my appearance
GOAL MENTAL STATE

What Next?

- What can we do to intervene to reduce body and appearance preoccupation and related negative views of worth and mental health problems ?
  - » Focus on social media literacy and cleansing feeds --- but this will probably not be enough
  - » Focus on understanding how adolescents find ways to manage and use behavioral and cognitive strategies to mitigate against appearance pressures + use coping strategies (body appreciation, self-compassion) --- but this will probably not be enough
  - » Provide programs that develop personal competencies, goals, and interests – shifting values and providing positive experiences of success for all adolescents



What Next?



- Ongoing and New Projects
  - » Body Positivity and Body Neutrality movements: do they reduce body dissatisfaction and appearance concerns?
  - » Media and socioemotional development (emotional regulation skills and social skills)
  - » The impact of use of GLP-1 on body image and self-confidence (e.g., competence in school or work)
  - » Impact of peer and parenting appearance teasing on functioning into emerging/early adulthood
  - » Eating behaviors



Newest Work

- Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., Seekis, V., & Duffy, A. (2026). Keeping up appearances online: Linkages of adolescents' early peer status and relational aggression with online appearance preoccupation four years later. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly: A Peer Relations Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1353/mpq.0.a999240
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- Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2026). Eating for emotion regulation: Associations with threats to psychological needs from adolescents' peer, family, and academic daily stress. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 36(2), e70214. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jora.70214

Newest Work

- Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., & Scott, R. A. (2027). Media and socioemotional development. To appear in X. Chen & L. A. Schmidt (Ed.) *Research Handbook on Socioemotional Development*. Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd

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Collaborators

Dr. Sarah Clear
Kelly Densham
Dr. Narelle Duncan
Dr. Alex Gardner
Tanya Hawes
Leah Henderson
Dr. Jessica Kerin
Dr. Cassie Lavell
Dr. Shawna Mastro Campbell
Dr. Juliane Pariz
Dr. Carly Roberts
Dr. Julia Rudolph
Dr. Riley Scott

Dr. Haley Webb
Professor Lara Farrell
Professor Allison Waters
Professor Geraldine Downey
Dr. Amanda Duffy
Professor Wyndol Furman
Dr. Veya Seekis

+++many volunteer undergraduate research assistants!

Griffith UNIVERSITY

Thank You

- m.zimmer-gembeck@griffith.edu.au
- www.melaniezimmergembeck.com.au
- www.familyinteractionprogram.com.au

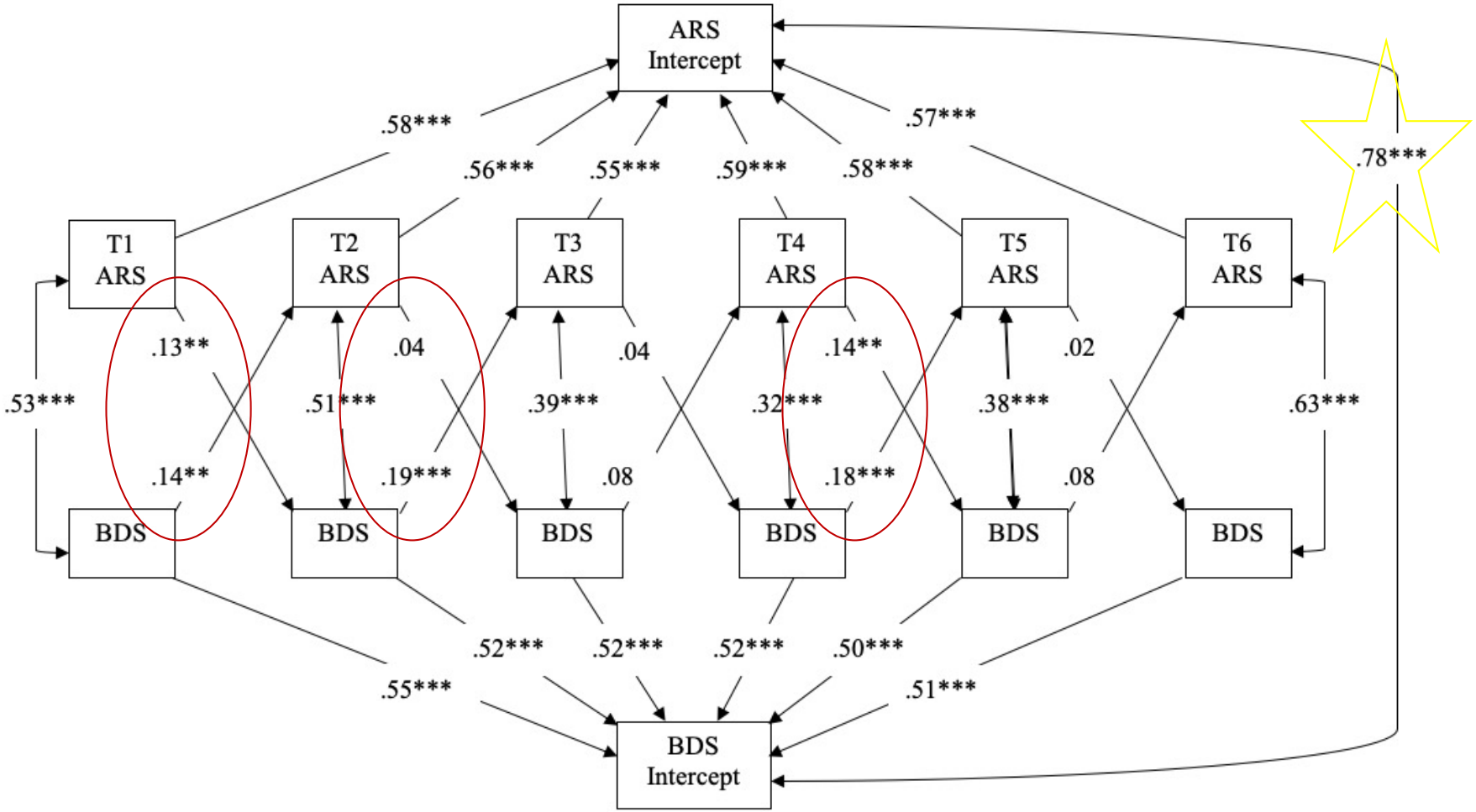


Figure 2. * Cross-lagged panel model with a random intercept for body dysmorphic symptoms (BDS) and appearance rejection sensitivity (ARS) with unconstrained parameters across six waves. Standardized coefficients are shown. Stabilities of BDS and ARS were fixed to equality $B = .27$ for BDS and $B = .19$ for ARS).

Note. $p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$. Model fit: $\chi^2(45) = 115.48$, $p < .001$; CFI= .97, SRMR = .060, RMSEA= .063 (90% CI .049 - .077), $p = .07$. Stabilities of BDS and ARS were fixed to equality $B = .27$ for BDS and $B = .19$ for ARS.

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Table 2

Study 1 and 2 Loadings for the Final 18-Item SMAPS

Items	Study 1 EFA (N = 281)			Study 2 CFA (N = 327)		
	Online self-presentation	Appearance activity	Appearance comparison	Online self-presentation	Appearance activity	Appearance comparison
I prefer to only upload photos of myself to social media where I look physically attractive.	.92			.80		
I prefer to only upload photos of myself to social media where I look fit and healthy.	.87			.72		
When others upload photos of me to social media, I focus on whether I looked good.	.85			.86		
I check to see who is commenting on, liking, or viewing photos of me or my body on social media.	.70			.80		
When others upload photos of me to social media, I get upset when I don't look my best.	.57			.82		
I approve photos of myself before anyone can tag them.	.56			.66		
When I upload photos of myself, I usually use filters or alter/change them to make myself look better.	.51			.71		
When on social media my friends post, comment on, share, or like content about getting or staying fit and/or muscular.		.82			.89	
When on social media my friends post, comment on, share, or like content about what and when to eat.		.75			.60	
When on social media I post, comment on, share, or like content about what and when to eat.		.71			.48	
When on social media I post, comment on, share, or like content about getting or staying fit and/or muscular.		.68			.72	
When on social media my friends post, comment on, share, or like content about what they would like their bodies to look like.		.57			.80	
I am often dissatisfied with my weight or looks in my social media pictures.			−.91			.84
I feel inadequate in appearance compared to my friends on social media.			−.86			.85
I feel like I want to change my diet after viewing other people's pictures online.			−.78			.87
How I feel about my body and appearance is influenced by other people's social media pictures.			−.75			.88
Seeing pictures of others tends to make me feel down on myself.			−.70			.79
I feel like I want to change my exercise routine or fitness level after viewing other people's pictures online.			−.63			.79
Eigenvalue	9.18	1.93	1.43	—	—	—
Variance accounted for	50.97%	10.72%	7.94%	—	—	—
Cronbach's α	.91	.87	.93	.91	.85	.94

Note. SMAPS = Social Media Appearance Preoccupation Scale; EFA = exploratory factor analysis; CFA = confirmation factor analysis. Values less than |.30| are not shown. Fit for Study 2, CFA: $\chi^2(128) = 318.35$, $p < .001$, comparative fit index = .96, root mean square error of approximation = .067 (90% confidence interval [.058, .077], $p = .001$). Standardized loadings are reported.