Social Appearance Anxiety is Strongly Related to Eating Disorder Symptoms regardless of Age in both Clinical Eating Disorder and Nonclinical Cases

Jordan E. Drake  
*University of Louisville*, jedrak02@louisville.edu

Caroline Christian  
*University of Louisville*, caroline.christian@louisville.edu

Cheri Levinson  
*University of Louisville*, cheri.levinson@louisville.edu

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Social Appearance Anxiety is Strongly Related to Eating Disorder Symptoms regardless of Age in both Eating Disorder and Nonclinical Cases

Jordan E. Drake, Caroline Christian, B.S., Cheri Levinson, Ph.D.
University of Louisville, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences

Introduction

- Eating disorders (EDs) commonly develop in adolescence and persist into adulthood (Christian et al., 2019)
- Social appearance anxiety (SAA) is the fear of appearance–based judgement (Claes, 2012)
- Predicts ED symptoms in undergraduates (Levinson et al., 2013)
- SAA is more prevalent in adolescents than adults in community samples (Dakanalis, 2015)
- No research on SAA and ED symptoms across development
- The current study tests if age moderates the relationship between SAA and ED symptoms
- Hypothesis
  - Age will moderate the relationship between SAA and three ED symptoms (drive for thinness (DT), bulimic symptoms, and body dissatisfaction)
  - Younger participants would have a stronger connection between SAA and ED symptoms than older participants

Participants

- N=3,273 participants from a combined dataset of 14 studies
- Mix of adolescent, undergraduate, and clinical samples
- Average age = 21.04 years (SD = 7.03, Range = 14–70)
- 84.1% Female (n = 2,754)
- 69.7% European American

Measures

- Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS; Hart et al., 2008)
- 16-item measure to assess anxiety about being negatively evaluated by others because of one’s appearance, including body shape
- Eating Disorder Inventory–2 (EDI–2) (Garner, et al., 1983)
- 91-item measure with 8 subscales to assess different aspects of ED symptoms
  - 3 subscales used in the current study
    - Drive for Thinness Subscale
    - Bulimic Symptoms Subscale
    - Body Dissatisfaction Subscale

Table 1. Zero Order Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>SAA</th>
<th>DT</th>
<th>Bulimia</th>
<th>BD</th>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAA</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DT</td>
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<td>.60**</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulimia</td>
<td>.10**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BD</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.61**</td>
<td>.73**</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ** = values are significant at p < .001. SAA = Social Appearance Anxiety, DT = Drive for Thinness, BD = Body Dissatisfaction

Data Analytic Plan

- Conducted zero-order correlations
- Conducted cross-sectional linear regression testing the interaction between age and SAAs on ED symptoms
- Conducted moderation analyses to test if age moderated the relationship between ED and symptoms
  - Simple slopes probing analysis
  - Tested these models in three samples:
    - Clinical ED sample (N=952)
    - Nonclinical sample (N=1,693)
    - Full sample (N=3,273)

Results

- All zero order correlations were significant at (p < .001; see Table 1)
- Significant interaction between age and SAA on DT (see Figure 1) in younger participants (b = .25, p < .001) compared to older participants (b = .43, p < .001) in the clinical ED sample
  - Age moderated the relationship between SAA and DT
    - SAA and DT were more strongly related in older participants
  - Age did not moderate the relationship between SAA and DT, body dissatisfaction, or bulimic symptoms in the nonclinical sample or full sample (p > .05)
  - SAA was related to all three domains of ED symptoms regardless of age (b = .25–.62, p < .001)

Figure 1. Interaction of SAA and Age on DT

Drive for Thinness

Discussion

- Conclusions:
  - SAA is strongly related to EDs across developmental stages
  - SAA and DT may be more strongly related in older participants with ED symptoms
  - Potentially related to longer duration of illness
- Implications:
  - Treatments and interventions focused on SAA may be useful across developmental stages and levels of ED severity
- Future Directions:
  - Examine factors that influence the relationship between SAA and DT across age and duration of illness
  - Examine the associations prospectively across development
  - Test the influence of social media and technology on the relationship between SAA and ED symptoms