AN ANALYTICAL EXAMINATION OF THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN APPEARANCE ANXIETY AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AMONG EARLY ADULTS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SELF-COMPASSION

A

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submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of M.A. Psychology (Clinical and Counselling) of MIER College of Education, is an authentic record of my own research work carried out under the supervision of Dr. Priya Choudhary.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full Form
AA	Appearance Anxiety
AAI	Appearance Anxiety Inventory
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
BDD	Body Dysmorphic Disorder
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
PROCES	Hayes PROCESS Macro
SCS	Self-Compassion Scale
SD	Standard Deviation
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
WHO	World Health Organization

ABSTRACT

The present study examined the interrelationship between appearance anxiety, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion among young adults, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of self-compassion. The study was grounded in the understanding that rapid social change, increased exposure to digital media, and rising societal expectations regarding physical appearance have significantly heightened appearance-related concerns, particularly among young adults in early adulthood.

The study was conducted on a sample of 200 young adults aged 18 to 25 years, selected through random sampling from colleges and universities. A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design was employed. Data were collected using three standardized psychological instruments: the Appearance Anxiety Inventory (AAI) by Veale et al. (2014), the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) by Schutte et al. (1998), and the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) by Neff (2003). Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson's product-moment correlation, linear regression, and mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4) in SPSS.

The findings revealed that appearance anxiety did not significantly predict emotional intelligence ($\beta = .040$, $p = .573$), indicating the absence of a direct relationship between these constructs in the present sample. However, a significant negative relationship was found between self-compassion and appearance anxiety ($\beta = -.249$, $p < .001$), confirming that higher levels of self-compassion are associated with lower appearance-related anxiety. The correlation analysis further showed that neither self-compassion nor appearance anxiety was significantly associated with emotional intelligence. The mediation analysis indicated that self-compassion did not significantly mediate the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence, as both the direct and indirect effects were non-significant (95% CI [−0.18, 0.15]).

The study concludes that while appearance anxiety is an important psychological concern among young adults, self-compassion emerged as a key protective psychological resource that significantly reduces appearance-related distress. These findings carry meaningful implications for the design of self-compassion-based interventions and wellness programmes in educational and clinical settings. Future research may explore longitudinal designs, alternative mediating variables, and diverse cultural samples to deepen understanding of these psychological constructs.

Keywords: *Appearance Anxiety, Emotional Intelligence, Self-Compassion, Young Adults, Psychological Well-Being, Mediation Analysis*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, psychological well-being has become an essential concern, particularly among young adults who are navigating complex personal, social and academic challenges. Rapid social change, increased exposure to digital media and rising societal expectations regarding appearance, success and emotional competence have significantly influenced individual's self-perception and mental health (Twenge et al., 2018). Young adults today are constantly exposed to idealized standards of beauty, emotional regulation and self-worth, which may contribute to heightened psychological vulnerability (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016).

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is marked by critical developmental tasks such as identity formation, emotional regulation and social integration (Arnett, 2000). During this phase, individuals become increasingly self-aware and sensitive to how they are perceived by others. Concerns related to physical appearance, emotional adequacy and self-acceptance often intensify, making this period psychologically significant. When individuals struggle to manage these concerns effectively, it may lead to emotional distress, anxiety and reduced psychological well-being (Gross & John, 2003).

Recent psychological research highlights that internal psychological resources play a crucial role in determining how individuals respond to external pressures. Factors such as emotional intelligence and self-compassion act as protective mechanisms that enable individuals to cope adaptively with stressors related to self-image and emotional challenges (Neff, 2023; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Conversely, excessive preoccupation with appearance and fear of negative evaluation may undermine self-confidence and emotional stability (Veale et al., 2014).

The present study is grounded in the understanding that psychological well-being is not determined by a single factor, but by the interaction of multiple cognitive, emotional and self-related processes. In this context, appearance-related anxiety, emotional intelligence and self-compassion emerge as important psychological constructs that may jointly influence mental health outcomes among young adults (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Mayer et al., 2016).

From a psychological perspective, human functioning is shaped by the dynamic interaction between cognition, emotion and self-evaluation. Cognitive processes influence how individuals interpret their appearance and social feedback; emotional processes determine how they regulate distress arising from these interpretations and self-related attitudes influence how kindly or critically individuals treat themselves during moments of perceived inadequacy.

1.2 Appearance Anxiety

In recent years, concerns related to physical appearance have emerged as a significant psychological issue, particularly among young adults. The increasing influence of social media, peer comparison, and culturally constructed beauty standards has intensified individuals' focus on how they look and how they are perceived by others. (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). As highlighted in the synopsis, appearance related concerns are no longer limited to superficial dissatisfaction but are closely linked to emotional distress, anxiety, and reduced self-worth. (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2021)

Appearance anxiety refers to persistent worry, fear, or uneasiness about one's physical appearance and the possibility of being negatively evaluated by others based on looks. (Veale et al., 2014). This anxiety often develops during late adolescence and early adulthood, a period marked by heightened self-awareness and identity formation. (Arnett, 2000) Individuals may become excessively preoccupied with perceived physical flaws, even when such flaws are minimal or not noticeable to others. (Hart et al., 2008)

The present study considers appearance anxiety as a central psychological variable that can influence emotional functioning and self-related attitudes. Understanding its nature, theoretical foundations, and behavioural manifestations is essential to examine how internal psychological resources such as emotional intelligence and self-compassion can buffer its negative effects. (Gao et al., 2023; Seekis & Kennedy, 2023)

1.2.1 Key Characteristics of Appearance Anxiety

Individuals experiencing appearance anxiety commonly display the following characteristics (Veale et al., 2014; Hart et al., 2008):

1. **Excessive Pre-occupation with Looks**

   Constant thinking about physical appearance and perceived flaws. (Veale et al., 2014).

2. **Fear of Negative Evaluation**

   Strong concern about how others judge their appearance. (Hart et al., 2008).

3. **Avoidance Behaviours**

   Avoiding social interactions, public speaking, or photographs. (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002).

4. **Reassurance Seeking**

   Frequently seeking validation from others regarding appearance. (Veale et al., 2014).

5. **Emotional Distress**

   Feelings of anxiety, shame, embarrassment, or low self-esteem. (Grogan, 2021).

1.2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Appearance Anxiety

1.2.2.1 Cognitive Theory Perspective

According to Aaron Beck's Cognitive Theory (1967), appearance anxiety arises from distorted thought patterns and negative self-schemas related to physical appearance. Individuals with appearance anxiety often interpret their physical features negatively and overestimate perceived flaws, leading to increased self-consciousness and emotional distress. (Beck, 1967). Clark and Wells (1995) further elaborated that such maladaptive cognitive patterns involve selective attention

to perceived imperfections, catastrophizing minor features, and holding rigid beliefs such as "My worth depends on how I look," which collectively sustain and intensify appearance-related anxiety.

1.2.2.2 Social Comparison Theory

Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory suggests that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their appearance with others, especially peers and media figures. Upward social comparisons — comparing oneself with those perceived as more attractive — consistently generate body dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety (Festinger, 1954). Tian et al. (2025) demonstrated that upward social comparison on social media significantly predicted appearance anxiety ($\beta = 0.546$, $p < .001$) among young adults, with self-objectification partially mediating this relationship. Choukas-Bradley et al. (2021) further found that appearance-focused social media engagement was significantly associated with increased appearance anxiety and depression, confirming that social media uniquely intensifies comparison-based appearance concerns.

1.2.2.3 Sociocultural Model of Appearance Anxiety

The sociocultural model of appearance anxiety posits that cultural norms, media representations, and societal standards of beauty play a central role in shaping individuals' perceptions of their own physical appearance and generating appearance-related distress. According to this framework, individuals are continuously exposed to idealized images of beauty through various sociocultural channels — including mass media, social media platforms, peer groups, and family — which promote narrow and often unattainable standards of physical attractiveness (Thompson et al., 1999). When individuals internalize these standards, they begin to evaluate their own bodies against these idealized benchmarks, which frequently results in perceived discrepancy between their actual appearance and the cultural ideal, thereby triggering appearance anxiety, body dissatisfaction, and psychological distress (Cafri et al., 2005).

Tiggemann and Slater (2014) demonstrated that greater engagement with appearance-focused social media content was significantly associated with body dissatisfaction and internalization of appearance ideals among young adults, highlighting the role of digital sociocultural environments in intensifying appearance-related concerns. Similarly, Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) reviewed consistent evidence showing that exposure to idealized images on social media platforms such as

Instagram and Facebook leads to upward appearance comparisons, greater body dissatisfaction, and heightened appearance anxiety, particularly in young women. Perloff (2014) further argued that social media uniquely amplifies appearance anxiety by combining constant exposure to idealized images with appearance-based social feedback such as likes and comments, creating a sociocultural environment that promotes chronic self-monitoring and appearance evaluation.

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) extended the sociocultural perspective through Objectification Theory, proposing that societal objectification of bodies leads individuals to internalize an observer's perspective toward their own physical appearance — a process termed self-objectification. This chronic self-surveillance, driven by sociocultural pressures, results in heightened body surveillance, appearance anxiety, shame, and disruption of emotional functioning. The sociocultural model is particularly relevant to the present study's focus on young adults, as this developmental period is characterized by heightened sensitivity to social evaluation, peer comparison, and cultural beauty standards, all of which interact to amplify appearance anxiety in this population (Grogan, 2021)

1.2.3 Cognitive-Behavioural Model of Appearance Anxiety

The cognitive-behavioural model explains appearance anxiety as a self-perpetuating cycle involving maladaptive thoughts, negative emotions, and avoidance behaviours (Veale et al., 2014). According to this model, negative appearance beliefs trigger distorted self-evaluation, which generates anxiety and emotional distress; individuals then engage in avoidance or safety behaviours that provide short-term relief but maintain and strengthen anxiety in the long term (Clark & Wells, 1995; Veale et al., 2014).

Figure 1.1. Cognitive-Behavioural Model of Appearance Anxiety

Negative Appearance Beliefs

↓

Distorted Self-Evaluation

↓

Anxiety & Emotional Distress

↓

Avoidance / Safety Behaviours

↓

Short-Term Relief

↓

Long-Term Maintenance of Anxiety

1.2.4 Appearance Anxiety in Young Adults

Young adulthood is a particularly vulnerable period for the development of appearance anxiety due to: Identity exploration, Increased peer interaction, Romantic and social evaluation, Heightened media exposure. During this stage, individuals are more sensitive to feedback and more likely to associate appearance with self-worth. Academic pressure and social expectations further intensify these concerns (Grogan, 2021). In the present research, appearance anxiety is conceptualized as a key psychological stressor that may negatively impact emotional functioning and self-related attitudes. The study proposes that while appearance anxiety can increase emotional distress, internal resources such as emotional intelligence and self-compassion may play a crucial role in reducing its harmful effects. (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2021).

1.3 Emotional Intelligence

In recent decades, emotional functioning has been recognized as a crucial component of psychological well-being and adaptive behaviour. Salovey and Mayer (1990) were among the first to formally conceptualize emotional intelligence as a distinct psychological ability, defining it as the capacity to monitor one's own and others' feelings, discriminate among them, and use this information to guide thinking and action. Since this foundational work, emotional intelligence has gained considerable empirical and theoretical attention as a key determinant of how individuals navigate psychological challenges and interpersonal demands (Mayer et al., 2016).

Emotional intelligence has gained considerable importance in understanding individual differences in emotional regulation and mental health. In the context of young adulthood, emotional intelligence plays a vital role in managing heightened emotional experiences related to academic pressure, social relationships, self-evaluation, and identity development. Moeller et al. (2020) demonstrated that individuals with higher emotional intelligence reported significantly lower

levels of anxiety and depression, with this protective effect mediated by a stronger sense of social belonging among a large sample of 2,094 undergraduate students. Similarly, Trigueros et al. (2020) found that higher emotional intelligence significantly predicted greater psychological resilience, which in turn reduced both test anxiety ($\beta = -.38$) and academic stress ($\beta = -.41$) among university students, indicating that emotionally intelligent individuals are better equipped to regulate negative emotional states under pressure. The present study considers emotional intelligence as a key psychological resource that may influence how individuals experience and manage appearance-related anxiety. Saklofske et al. (2003) established that higher trait emotional intelligence was significantly associated with more adaptive, problem-focused coping and significantly lower trait anxiety, even after controlling for personality variables, supporting the view that emotional intelligence functions as a meaningful buffer against psychological distress.

1.3.1 Components of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is commonly understood as comprising the following components (Goleman, 1995; Mayer et al., 2016):

1. **Self-Awareness**

   Ability to identify and understand one's own emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

2. **Self-Regulation**

   Capacity to manage emotional reactions effectively (Gross & John, 2003).

3. **Motivation**

   Ability to use emotions to remain goal-oriented and resilient (Goleman, 1995).

4. **Empathy**

   Capacity to recognize and understand others' emotions (Mayer et al., 2016).

5. **Social Skills**

   Ability to manage relationships and social interactions effectively.

These components collectively contribute to emotional competence and psychological well-being.

1.3.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Emotional Intelligence

1.3.2.1Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence

The ability model, proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and later refined by Mayer et al. (2016), conceptualizes emotional intelligence as a form of intelligence involving emotional information processing. According to this model, emotional intelligence includes four hierarchically organized branches: accurate perception of emotions in oneself and others, use of emotions to facilitate thinking and problem-solving, understanding of complex emotional meanings and transitions, and effective regulation of emotions to promote emotional growth (Mayer et al., 2016). This model emphasizes that EI represents a genuine cognitive ability that can be objectively measured using performance-based tasks, distinguishing it from personality traits and motivational tendencies (Mayer et al., 2016).

1.3.2.2 Trait Model of Emotional Intelligence

The trait model views emotional intelligence as a constellation of emotional self-perceptions and dispositions embedded within the broader structure of personality. Unlike the ability model, which conceptualizes EI as a set of measurable cognitive skills, the trait model proposes that emotional intelligence reflects an individual's typical patterns of emotional experience and behaviour — that is, how emotionally confident, adaptive, and self-aware a person generally perceives themselves to be (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). According to Petrides and Furnham (2001), trait EI encompasses a wide range of emotional self-perceptions including empathy, emotional regulation, adaptability, self-motivation, and social competence, all of which are assessed through self-report measures rather than performance-based tasks.

Figure 1.2 Role of Emotional Intelligence in Managing Appearance Anxiety

Appearance-Related Concern

↓

Emotional Reaction (Anxiety)

↓

Emotional Intelligence Skills

(Self-Awareness & Regulation)

↓

Adaptive Emotional Response

↓

Reduced Psychological Distress

1.4 Self-Compassion

In contemporary psychology, increasing emphasis has been placed on the way individuals relate to themselves during experiences of failure, inadequacy, or distress. As indicated in the synopsis, self-evaluation processes play a crucial role in psychological well-being, particularly among young adults who frequently encounter academic pressure, social comparison, and concerns related to appearance and self-worth. (Neff, 2003)

Self-compassion has emerged as an important psychological construct that reflects a healthy and adaptive way of responding to personal difficulties. Instead of engaging in harsh self-criticism or avoidance, self-compassion encourages individuals to treat themselves with kindness, understanding, and acceptance (Neff, 2003) . In the context of appearance anxiety, self-compassion may serve as a powerful protective factor by reducing self-judgment and emotional distress associated with perceived physical flaws (Mills et al., 2022; Wollast et al., 2020).

The present study conceptualizes self-compassion as an internal emotional resource that may influence how young adults experience appearance-related concerns and regulate emotional responses. Understanding the nature and components of self-compassion is essential for examining its role alongside emotional intelligence in promoting psychological resilience.

Self-compassion refers to a positive and caring attitude toward oneself during times of difficulty or perceived inadequacy. Self-compassion is defined as the ability to respond to one's own suffering with kindness, understanding, and a sense of shared humanity, rather than with self-criticism or avoidance. Self-compassion does not imply self-pity or self-indulgence; rather, it involves emotional balance, self-acceptance, and mindful awareness of personal experiences.

1.4.1 Conceptual Understanding of Self-Compassion

Conceptually, self-compassion represents a shift from self-judgment to self-support. It involves recognizing that imperfection and suffering are universal aspects of the human experience (Neff, 2003). Kabat-Zinn (2003). Self-compassion promotes emotional stability by reducing internal conflict and self-directed hostility.

1.4.1.1 Self-Kindness vs. Self-Judgment

Self-kindness involves being caring and understanding toward oneself rather than engaging in harsh self-criticism.

1.4.1.2 Common Humanity vs. Isolation

This component emphasizes recognizing that personal struggles are part of the shared human experience.

1.4.1.3 Mindfulness vs. Over-Identification

Mindfulness involves balanced awareness of emotions without exaggeration or suppression.

1.4.2Theoretical Perspective on Self-Compassion

The construct of self-compassion has been extensively conceptualized by **Kristin Neff**, who proposed that self-compassion plays a vital role in emotional regulation and psychological wellbeing. According to this perspective: Self-compassion reduces self-criticism, It promotes emotional resilience, It encourages adaptive coping. This theoretical framework emphasizes that caring for oneself during distress leads to healthier emotional outcomes than self-judgment(Neff, 2003; Neff & Germer, 2013).

1.5 Significance of the Study

The present study is significant as it contributes to the understanding of appearance anxiety among young adults by examining its relationship with emotional intelligence and self-compassion. Appearance anxiety has become increasingly prevalent in contemporary society due to heightened exposure to social media, societal beauty standards, and appearance-based comparisons. Such

concerns can negatively affect psychological well-being, self-esteem, social functioning, and overall quality of life. Therefore, identifying factors that may protect individuals from experiencing appearance-related distress is of considerable importance.

This study explores emotional intelligence and self-compassion as potential protective factors that may help young adults manage negative emotions and develop a healthier perception of their appearance. By investigating these variables simultaneously, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological processes associated with appearance anxiety. The findings may assist mental health professionals, counselors, educators, and researchers in designing effective intervention and prevention programs aimed at enhancing emotional regulation, self-acceptance, and psychological resilience.

Furthermore, the study enriches the existing literature by addressing a relatively underexplored area of research and provides empirical evidence that may guide future studies. The findings may also contribute to the development of mental health strategies that promote positive self-image and overall psychological well-being among young adults.

1.6 Statement of the problem

"An Analytical Examination of the Interrelationship between Appearance Anxiety and Emotional Intelligence among Early Adults"

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence among young adults.

2. To investigate the effect of appearance anxiety on self-compassion among young adults.

3. To assess the relationship between appearance anxiety, self-compassion, and emotional intelligence among young adults.

4. To explore whether self-compassion mediates the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults.

Hypotheses of the Study

H1: There will be a significant effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence among young adults.

H2: There will be a significant effect of appearance anxiety on self-compassion among young adults.

H3: There will be a significant positive relationship between appearance anxiety, self-compassion, and emotional intelligence among young adults.

H4: Self-compassion will mediate the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults.

1.7 Delimitation of the study

- The study was delimited to young adults within the age range of 18–25 years.
- It was conducted in urban and semi-urban settings across Jammu and Kashmir, limiting generalization beyond the selected region.
- The study focused only on appearance anxiety, self-compassion, and emotional intelligence as the three study variables.
- Self-compassion was examined specifically as a mediating variable between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence.
- A cross-sectional design was used; hence, causal conclusions cannot be drawn.
- Standardized self-report measures were used, which may be subject to response bias.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

In contemporary society, increasing emphasis on physical appearance has significantly influenced the emotional intelligence of young adults. Exposure to unrealistic beauty standards through social media, peer comparison, and cultural expectations has contributed to heightened appearance anxiety, particularly during early adulthood. Appearance anxiety, characterized by persistent concern and distress related to one's physical looks, has been associated with a range of negative emotional outcomes, including low self-esteem, emotional dysregulation, and psychological distress. Emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in how individuals perceive, understand and manage such emotional challenges, thereby influencing their overall psychological adjustment. In recent years, self-compassion has emerged as an important protective factor that promotes emotional resilience by encouraging self-kindness, mindfulness, and acceptance during times of perceived inadequacy. The present study seeks to examine the interrelationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of self-compassion. Relevant empirical studies conducted in both Western and Indian contexts are reviewed below to provide a theoretical and research-based foundation for the study.

2.2 Review of Related Study

Tian et al. (2025) investigated how upward social comparison on social media contributes to appearance anxiety among 397 young adults (mean age = 21.6 years). Drawing on the Stress Vulnerability Model, Objectification Theory, and Self-Compassion Theory, they constructed a moderated mediation model. Results showed that upward social comparison significantly predicted appearance anxiety ($\beta = 0.546$, $p < 0.001$), with self-objectification partially mediating this relationship (accounting for 21% of the total effect). Importantly, self-compassion moderated the relationship between upward social comparison and self-objectification, such that higher self-compassion weakened the negative impact of social comparisons. These findings highlight that

social media environments intensify appearance anxiety through self-objectification and that self-compassion serves as a meaningful protective factor for young adults.

Gao et al. (2023) conducted a large-scale cross-sectional study involving 96,218 students from 63 universities to examine the relationship between appearance anxiety and social anxiety and to test whether self-compassion mediates this relationship. The Appearance Anxiety Scale, The Social Anxiety Scale, and the Self-Compassion Scale were administered. Structural equation modelling confirmed that appearance anxiety was significantly and positively associated with social anxiety ($\beta = 0.334$, $p < 0.001$), and that self-compassion significantly mediated this relationship ($\beta = 0.128$, $p < 0.001$). The study conclude that individuals who treat themselves with greater kindness and understanding during appearance-related distress experience less social anxiety, underscoring the critical role of self-compassion as a buffer between appearance concerns and social fear in young adults.

Castellanos Silva and Steins (2023) conducted an experimental study with 224 young adults examining the effects of different types of social media image content on body dissatisfaction, and the moderating roles of emotion regulation and self-compassion. Participants were exposed to either idealized beauty content, body-diverse content or neutral content. Results showed that exposure to idealized content significantly increased body dissatisfaction and appearance-related negative affect. Crucially, individuals with higher emotion regulation skills and greater self-compassion showed significantly weaker responses to idealized images, suggesting that both emotional skills and self-compassion together buffer appearance-related distress. This study directly supports the present study's rationale by demonstrating that emotional regulation capacity and self-compassion jointly influence vulnerability to appearance anxiety.

Seekis and Kennedy (2023) examined the impact of body-positive and self-compassion TikTok videos on appearance shame, anxiety, self-compassion, mood, and social comparison processes in 195 young women. Participants were randomly assigned to view either self-compassion videos, body-positive videos, or neutral control videos. Results showed that participants who viewed self-compassion content reported significantly lower appearance shame and anxiety and significantly higher self-compassion after viewing, compared to controls. Body-positive content also reduced shame and comparison but to a lesser degree than self-compassion content. These experimental findings confirm that self-compassion directly and meaningfully reduces appearance anxiety in

young women, providing causal evidence for the role of self-compassion in managing appearance-related distress.

Egan et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review examining the evidence for self-compassion as an active ingredient in the prevention and treatment of anxiety and depression in young people. Following PRISMA guidelines, they reviewed randomised controlled trials and found consistent evidence that self-compassion interventions significantly reduce anxiety and depression symptoms in youth, with effect sizes comparable to established therapies. The review highlighted that self-compassion works by reducing harsh self-criticism and increasing acceptance of negative experiences, making it particularly effective for anxiety related to self-evaluation. These findings are highly relevant to the present study, as appearance anxiety is fundamentally rooted in negative self-evaluation, suggesting self-compassion may be a key mediator in reducing its psychological impact.

Hai and Yang (2022) examined how social network site appearance comparison predicts anxiety among 478 Chinese female college students, investigating the chain mediating roles of body area satisfaction, overweight preoccupation, and self-esteem. Using structural equation modelling, they found that social network site appearance comparison negatively predicted body area satisfaction and self-esteem and positively predicted overweight preoccupation, which together significantly mediated the relationship with anxiety. Higher frequency of appearance comparison on social platforms was associated with significantly elevated anxiety through its damaging effects on body satisfaction and self-worth. These findings illustrate the psychological pathway from digital appearance comparisons to anxiety, supporting the present study's examination of appearance anxiety and its emotional correlates.

Mills et al. (2022) examined how sociocultural pressures around idealized body norms relate to body image concerns and tested whether self-compassion and body positivity moderate these relationships. Using a correlational design with young adult women, they found that internalization of beauty ideals was significantly associated with body shame and appearance anxiety. However, these harmful effects were significantly attenuated in individuals with higher self-compassion and greater positive body image, suggesting these factors jointly buffer the impact of sociocultural pressures. The study demonstrated that self-compassion helps individuals disengage from harsh

comparisons with idealized standards, reducing the emotional impact of appearance-related pressures — a mechanism directly relevant to the present study's focus.

Caner et al. (2022) investigated the relationship between social media addiction and social appearance anxiety among 626 adolescents. Using the Social Media Addiction Scale and the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale, and controlling for gender and age, structural equation modelling demonstrated that social media addiction significantly predicted social appearance anxiety (β = .42, $p < .001$). The study found that compulsive engagement with social media driven by comparison with others idealized self-presentations directly increases fear of being negatively evaluated on the basis of one's appearance. These findings highlight that in the digital age, social media use is a significant proximal cause of appearance anxiety in young populations, underscoring the importance of studying protective factors such as self-compassion in this context.

Swami et al. (2022) examined appearance orientation and dating anxiety in 431 emerging adults, investigating the roles of appearance-based rejection sensitivity, social physique anxiety, and selfcompassion. Results indicated that appearance orientation positively predicted appearance-based rejection sensitivity and social physique anxiety, which in turn predicted dating anxiety. Crucially, self-compassion significantly and negatively moderated these pathways, such that individuals with higher self-compassion showed weaker associations between appearance concerns and anxiety outcomes. The study demonstrated that self-compassion functions as a psychological buffer against the anxiety-provoking effects of appearance-focused orientation in emerging adulthood, directly relevant to the present study's examination of self-compassion as a mediator between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence.

Choukas-Bradley et al. (2021) developed and validated the Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness (ASMC) Scale to measure the extent to which adolescents and young adults think about their appearance while using social media, including concerns about how they look in photos posted online. In a series of studies involving young adult samples, the ASMC demonstrated strong psychometric properties including internal reliability and convergent validity with measures of body dissatisfaction, social appearance anxiety, and self-objectification. Higher ASMC scores were significantly associated with increased appearance anxiety and depression, indicating that appearance-focused social media engagement is a meaningful psychological risk factor. The study

provides evidence that the digital environment uniquely heightens appearance self-consciousness and related distress among young people.

Grogan (2021) provided a comprehensive scholarly review of body image research, synthesizing findings on body dissatisfaction across different genders, ages, and cultural contexts. The review documented consistent evidence that body dissatisfaction is associated with heightened appearance anxiety, depression, and disordered eating in young adults, particularly during the developmental transition of early adulthood when identity formation is central. Grogan also noted that sociocultural pressures intensified by social media create environments that systematically promote appearance anxiety by encouraging constant self-evaluation against idealized standards. This work contextualizes the present study within established literature demonstrating that appearance anxiety is a significant psychological issue during young adulthood that warrants investigation of protective factors.

Woodfin et al. (2021) conducted a pre-registered randomised controlled trial examining the effects of a brief self-compassion intervention on perfectionism, anxiety, depression, and body image in 89 university students. Students were randomly assigned to either a self-compassion intervention group consisting of four seminars and a half-day retreat incorporating practices from Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) and Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or a waitlist control group. Repeated measures ANOVA revealed that the intervention group showed significant postintervention reductions in anxiety and depression and improvements in body image compared to controls. These findings demonstrate that self-compassion-based programmes are effective in reducing appearance-related distress and anxiety among young adults, directly supporting the clinical relevance of the present study's variables.

Moeller, Seehuus, and Peisch (2020) examined emotional intelligence as a protective factor against depression, anxiety, and stress among 2,094 undergraduate students. Using the Trait Meta Mood Scale to assess three components of EI emotional attention, clarity, and repair and Hayes' PROCESS macro for mediation analyses, they found that all three EI components significantly reduced psychological distress through the mediating mechanism of a sense of belonging. Students with greater emotional clarity and repair capacities reported lower anxiety and depression, and this effect was partially explained by higher feelings of social inclusion. The study demonstrated that emotional intelligence supports mental health by strengthening interpersonal connectedness,

which is particularly relevant for understanding how EI might buffer appearance-related psychological distress.

Trigueros et al. (2020) examined the influence of emotional intelligence on academic stress and test anxiety in a sample of 1,347 Spanish university students (733 males, 614 females, aged 19–27). A structural equation model demonstrated that higher emotional intelligence significantly and positively predicted psychological resilience, which in turn significantly and negatively predicted both test anxiety ($\beta = -.38$, $p < .001$) and academic stress ($\beta = -.41$, $p < .001$). The findings suggest that emotionally intelligent students are better equipped to regulate negative emotional states under pressure, reducing vulnerability to anxiety. These results are relevant to the present study as they demonstrate that EI functions as a protective resource against anxiety, which may extend to appearance-related anxious distress.

Turk and Waller (2020) conducted a meta-analysis synthesizing evidence on the relationship between self-compassion and eating and body image pathology across 62 studies. Results demonstrated significant negative associations between self-compassion and body image disturbance ($r = -.47$) and between self-compassion and eating disorder symptoms across clinical and non-clinical samples. Self-compassion was particularly strongly associated with reduced body shame and reduced over-evaluation of shape and weight. The findings confirmed that self-compassion is one of the most robust protective factors against appearance-related pathology identified in the literature, supporting its inclusion in clinical interventions for body image concerns. This meta-analytic evidence strongly supports the present study's focus on self-compassion as a central mediating variable.

Wollast et al. (2020) investigated how self-compassion moderates the relationship between body surveillance and body shame in a mixed-gender sample of 476 young adults. Using moderated regression analyses, they found that body surveillance significantly predicted body shame for individuals with low self-compassion, but this association was significantly weakened for those with high self-compassion. The buffering effect of self-compassion was equally significant for men and women. These findings demonstrate that self-compassion disrupts the harmful psychological pathway from body monitoring to shame, which is a core process underlying appearance anxiety. By reducing shame responses to appearance monitoring, self-compassion may

help individuals maintain emotional balance despite appearance-related concerns, supporting its role as a mediator in the present study.

Inwood and Ferrari (2018) conducted a systematic review examining the mechanisms through which self-compassion influences emotion regulation and mental health. Reviewing 27 empirical studies, they found consistent evidence that self-compassion improves mental health by enhancing adaptive emotion regulation strategies, including cognitive reappraisal and acceptance, and by reducing maladaptive strategies such as rumination and suppression. The review proposed that self-compassion functions as an emotion regulation resource that allows individuals to acknowledge and accept negative emotional experiences without becoming overwhelmed. These findings are directly relevant to the present study as they suggest that self-compassion may mediate the relationship between appearance anxiety which involves maladaptive emotion processing and emotional intelligence, which encompasses adaptive emotional regulation.

Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (2016) elaborated the ability model of emotional intelligence, defining it as a set of four interrelated cognitive abilities: perceiving emotions accurately in oneself and others, using emotions to facilitate thinking, understanding complex emotional information, and effectively managing one's own and others' emotions. The authors distinguished EI from personality traits and emphasized that it can be measured using performance-based tasks. They reviewed extensive evidence demonstrating that higher EI predicts better social functioning, lower psychological distress, and more adaptive decision-making. This theoretical framework is foundational to the present study's understanding of emotional intelligence as a cognitive capacity that may interact with appearance-related concerns and self-compassion in young adults.

Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) systematically reviewed the empirical literature on how social media use shapes body image concerns among young adults. Their review synthesized findings from experimental and correlational studies examining platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr. Consistent evidence indicated that exposure to idealized images on social media leads to upward appearance comparisons, greater body dissatisfaction, and higher appearance anxiety. The authors highlighted that the visual nature of social media where photos are central to interaction and self-presentation creates unique conditions for appearance-related distress. They also noted that appearance comparisons mediated the relationship between social media exposure

and body dissatisfaction, suggesting a cognitive pathway through which digital environments exacerbate appearance anxiety.

Tiggemann and Slater (2014) conducted a comprehensive survey study analysing how adolescent girls' engagement with appearance-focused internet and Facebook content relates to body image concerns. The study involved adolescent female participants who reported their daily time spent on social media, frequency of photo posting, and degree of concern about body shape and weight. Results demonstrated that greater engagement with image-based social media content was significantly associated with body dissatisfaction and internalization of appearance ideals, and that these effects persisted into early adulthood in follow-up analyses. The authors concluded that image-based social platforms create repeated opportunities for appearance comparison, reinforcing sociocultural standards and heightening appearance anxiety. This study established a foundation for understanding social media as a trigger for appearance anxiety in young people.

Veale et al. (2014) developed and validated the Appearance Anxiety Inventory (AAI), a process-oriented self-report measure designed to assess the cognitive and behavioural aspects of appearance-related distress, particularly for individuals with Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). Two studies were conducted: the first with a clinical group diagnosed with BDD (n = 139) and the second with a non-clinical community sample showing high appearance concerns (n = 108). The AAI demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$), strong convergent validity with the Yale-Brown Obsessive-Compulsive Scale modified for BDD ($r = .55$), and good sensitivity to change following cognitive-behavioural therapy. The inventory captures threat monitoring, camouflaging, and avoidance behaviours, providing a reliable tool for assessing appearance anxiety in both clinical and non-clinical settings. The present study uses the AAI as the primary instrument for measuring appearance anxiety.

Perloff (2014) offered a theoretical analysis of the mechanisms through which social media intensifies body image concerns among young women. Integrating sociocultural theory and cognitive-behavioural perspectives, Perloff argued that platforms such as Facebook and Instagram expose users to idealized images while simultaneously inviting appearance-based feedback through likes and comments. This environment promotes self-objectification and encourages constant appearance evaluation. Perloff further outlined cognitive pathways including social comparison and internalization of beauty ideals that link social media use to increased appearance

anxiety and body dissatisfaction. The paper provided a comprehensive conceptual model that has been widely cited in subsequent empirical research on appearance concerns in digital contexts.

Tiggemann and McCourt (2013) examined body appreciation as a protective factor against media exposure and appearance dissatisfaction in 351 adult women. Using an experimental design in which participants viewed either appearance-idealizing or neutral magazine images, the researchers found that women with higher body appreciation showed significantly smaller increases in appearance anxiety and body dissatisfaction after exposure to idealized images compared to women with lower body appreciation. The study demonstrated that positive psychological resources including self-acceptance and body appreciation buffer the harmful effects of appearance-focused media. These findings suggest a parallel role for self-compassion, which similarly promotes self-acceptance, in moderating appearance anxiety responses, supporting the rationale of the present study.

Neff and Germer (2013) evaluated the efficacy of an eight-week Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) programme in a randomised controlled trial involving 51 adults randomly assigned to either the MSC programme or a waitlist control. Participants in the MSC group showed significant increases in self-compassion, mindfulness, compassion for others, and life satisfaction, along with significant reductions in depression, anxiety, and stress compared to the control group. Gains were maintained at one-year follow-up. The study established the MSC programme as an effective intervention for enhancing self-compassion and reducing psychological distress, providing a strong evidence base for self-compassion training in clinical and non-clinical settings. These findings support the present study's emphasis on self-compassion as a key protective psychological resource.

MacBeth and Gumley (2012) conducted a meta-analysis examining the relationship between self-compassion and psychopathology across 14 studies. Results demonstrated consistent large negative correlations between self-compassion and symptoms of anxiety ($r = -.54$), depression ($r = -.52$), and stress ($r = -.57$). The meta-analysis confirmed that self-compassion is a robust inverse predictor of psychological distress across diverse populations and measurement approaches. The authors concluded that self-compassion represents a clinically significant protective factor and recommended its integration into therapeutic interventions targeting emotional disorders. These

findings provide strong quantitative support for the present study's hypothesis that self-compassion plays a meaningful role in reducing appearance-related anxiety.

Hart et al. (2008) developed and validated the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS) to measure the fear of being negatively evaluated on the basis of one's overall physical appearance. Across multiple studies involving undergraduate samples, the SAAS demonstrated strong internal reliability, good test-retest reliability, and meaningful convergent validity with measures of social anxiety, body dissatisfaction, and appearance-related shame. Scores on the SAAS were significantly and positively correlated with clinical levels of social anxiety and significantly and negatively correlated with self-esteem and psychological well-being. The scale has since been widely used in research examining appearance anxiety as a distinct construct related to but separable from general social anxiety, providing a conceptual framework relevant to the present study's examination of appearance anxiety.

Leary et al. (2007) conducted five experimental studies examining how self-compassion influences emotional responses to distressing events, particularly those involving personal failures, inadequacies, and social evaluations. Results consistently showed that self-compassionate individuals acknowledged the reality of their negative experiences while simultaneously maintaining emotional equanimity neither denying their mistakes nor becoming overwhelmed by self-criticism. Self-compassion was found to reduce negative affect, self-consciousness, and rumination following failure or rejection, without inflating positive self-views. The study demonstrated experimentally that self-compassion enables healthy, balanced emotional processing of distressing self-relevant events, which is directly relevant to understanding how self-compassion may help young adults cope with appearance-related concerns without experiencing escalating anxiety.

Gross and John (2003) investigated individual differences in two emotion regulation strategies cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression and their differential consequences for emotional experience, well-being, and social functioning in adult samples. Using self-report questionnaires and laboratory methods, they found that people who habitually used cognitive reappraisal experienced more positive emotions, fewer negative emotions, and better psychological well-being, whereas habitual suppressors reported the opposite pattern. These findings demonstrated that adaptive emotion regulation strategies underpin emotional health, and that difficulties in

regulating emotions are closely linked to anxiety and distress. This study provides a theoretical basis for understanding how emotional intelligence as a skill in managing emotional states may reduce appearance anxiety.

Kabat-Zinn (2003) provided a foundational theoretical and clinical review of mindfulness, defining it as the awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment. Kabat-Zinn documented extensive evidence that mindfulness-based practices reduce psychological distress by promoting non-reactive awareness of thoughts and emotions, reducing rumination, and enhancing emotional regulation. Since mindfulness is one of the three core components of Neff's (2003) self-compassion model, alongside self-kindness and common humanity, this foundational work provides essential conceptual grounding for understanding the psychological mechanisms through which self-compassion reduces appearance anxiety and supports emotional well-being in the present study.

Neff (2003) introduced the construct of self-compassion and developed the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), a 26-item self-report instrument measuring six interrelated components: self-kindness, self-judgment (reverse scored), common humanity, isolation (reverse scored), mindfulness, and overidentification (reverse scored). In a series of studies with college students, the SCS demonstrated strong internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$) and significant associations with positive mental health outcomes, including less depression, less anxiety, and greater life satisfaction. Self-compassion was found to be conceptually distinct from self-esteem, suggesting it captures a unique dimension of healthy self-regard. Neff's foundational work established self-compassion as a key psychological resource, and the SCS is used as the primary measure in the present study.

Saklofske et; al (2003) investigated the relationship between trait emotional intelligence, coping styles, and anxiety in a sample of 270 Canadian university students. Using the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test and validated measures of coping and anxiety, they found that higher trait EI was significantly associated with more problem-focused and less avoidance-oriented coping, and significantly and negatively associated with both state and trait anxiety. Even after controlling for personality dimensions, EI explained unique variance in anxiety.

Research gap

Existing literature has extensively examined appearance anxiety, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion as independent psychological constructs. Studies have explored appearance anxiety in relation to social media exposure, body dissatisfaction, and social comparison (Tian et al., 2025; Caner et al., 2022), while separate lines of research have investigated emotional intelligence as a buffer against anxiety and psychological distress (Moeller et al., 2020; Trigueros et al., 2020). Similarly, self-compassion has been identified as a robust protective factor against anxiety, shame, and negative self-evaluation (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Neff, 2023).

However, a critical gap exists in the literature: no study has simultaneously examined all three constructs — appearance anxiety, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion — within a single mediation framework. Most existing studies are based on Western samples, leaving the Indian young adult population largely underrepresented. Furthermore, while self-compassion has been studied as a moderator between social comparison and appearance anxiety, its specific mediating role between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence remains unexplored.

The present study addresses this gap by examining whether self-compassion mediates the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults aged 18–25 years in the Jammu and Kashmir region, contributing both theoretical and contextually relevant applied insights.

CHAPTER-III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Research methodology refers to the systematic framework through which a study is planned, conducted and analyzed in order to address specific research questions. It encompasses the overall design of the study, the selection of participants, the tools used for data collection and the statistical techniques employed to interpret findings. A well-defined methodology ensures that the research is conducted in a scientific, objective and replicable manner.

The present study aims to examine the interrelationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults, with self-compassion serving as a mediating variable. To achieve a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design was adopted. This chapter provides a detailed account of the research design, variables, sample, data collection procedure, tools employed, and the statistical techniques used in the present study.

3.2 Design of the Study

A research design serves as the blueprint of the study, outlining how data will be collected, which variables will be examined, and what statistical techniques will be employed. Selecting an appropriate research design is essential to ensure accuracy, objectivity, and scientific validity. The present study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design.

3.2.1 Variables of the Study

- **Independent Variable**: Appearance Anxiety
- **Dependent Variable:** Emotional Intelligence
- **Mediating Variable**: Self-Compassion

3.2.2 Population and Sample

A population refers to the entire group of individuals who share common characteristics relevant to the research study. The target population for the present study comprises young adults aged between 18 and 25 years enrolled in colleges and universities. This age group was specifically chosen because early adulthood is a crucial developmental period marked by heightened concerns related to physical appearance, emotional regulation, and self-evaluation.

3.2.3 Sample of the Study

The final sample consisted of 200 young adults (N = 200), comprising 154 females (77%) and 46 males (23%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 years, with 42 participants (21%) belonging to the 18–21 age group and 158 participants (79%) falling within the 22–25 age group. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure uniformity and relevance of the sample:

Inclusion Criteria:

- Young adults aged between 18 and 25 years
- College students
- Individuals willing to participate voluntarily

Exclusion Criteria:

- Individuals below 18 years or above 25 years of age
- Individuals diagnosed with severe psychiatric conditions
- Participants with incomplete questionnaire responses

3.2.4 Data Collection

Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality of responses was assured. The questionnaires were administered either individually or in small groups in college settings.

Clear instructions were provided before the administration of each tool, and participants were encouraged to respond honestly and sincerely. The total time required to complete the set of questionnaires was approximately 20 to 25 minutes. Completed questionnaires were checked for missing or incomplete responses, and only those with full responses were retained for final analysis.

3.3 Tools Employed and its Description

Standardized psychological tools were used to collect data for the present study. These tools possess established reliability and validity and are widely used in psychological research. The following three instruments were employed:

3.3.1 Tools and their Description

(i) Appearance Anxiety Inventory (AAI) — Veale et al. (2014): The Appearance Anxiety Inventory is a standardized psychological scale designed to measure anxiety related to physical appearance. It assesses cognitive and behavioural aspects of appearance-related distress, including self-focused attention, avoidance behaviours, and negative self-evaluation. The scale has demonstrated good psychometric properties including satisfactory reliability and validity across various populations.

(ii) Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) — Schutte et al. (1998): The SSEIT is a widely used self-report measure of emotional intelligence. It assesses four major dimensions of emotional intelligence: perception of emotions, managing own emotions, managing others' emotions, and utilization of emotions. The scale has been reported to have high internal consistency and satisfactory construct validity.

(iii) Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) — Neff (2003): The Self-Compassion Scale is a well established measure of self-compassion. It evaluates three core components: self-kindness (versus self-judgment), common humanity (versus isolation), and mindfulness (versus overidentification). The scale has been widely used in psychological research and has demonstrated strong reliability and validity.

3.4 Statistical Technique Used

The data collected for the present study were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Appropriate statistical techniques were selected based on the nature of the research design and the objectives of the study. The following statistical methods were employed:

- Descriptive Statistics: Mean and Standard Deviation were the central tendency and variability of the study variables appearance anxiety, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion.
- Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation: This technique was used to examine the direction and strength of the relationships among the three study variables.
- Linear Regression Analysis: Regression analysis was conducted to assess the extent to which appearance anxiety predicts emotional intelligence and self-compassion individually.
- Mediation Analysis: Mediation analysis was performed using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4) to examine whether self-compassion mediates the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the statistical analyses undertaken to examine the relationship between appearance anxiety, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion among young adults. The data collected for the present study were systematically analysed using appropriate statistical techniques with the help of SPSS in order to address the objectives of the research. The chapter begins with an overview of the demographic characteristics of the sample to provide context for the analysis. Further, inferential statistical analyses were conducted to explore the relationships among the variables. Pearson's product-moment correlation was employed to assess the direction and strength of associations between appearance anxiety, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion. In addition, regression analyses were performed to determine the extent to which appearance anxiety predicts emotional intelligence and self-compassion.

Moreover, mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether self-compassion mediates the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence. The findings are presented in a structured and systematic manner through tables and graphical representations, along with their interpretations.

Table 4.1 *Demographics of the participants*

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Female	154	77.0
Male	46	23.0

The sample consisted of 200 young working adults. In terms of gender distribution, the majority of participants were female which were 154 that's a total of 77% of total data, while males constituted a smaller proportion of the sample which was only 46, which is total of 23% of data. This indicates a higher representation of female participants in the study as shown in fig (**fig 4.1**).

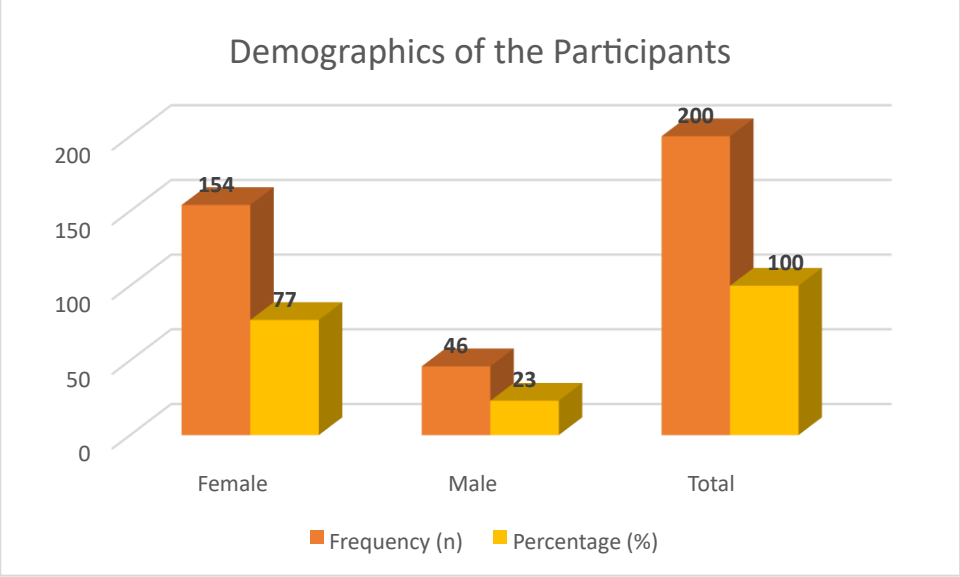


Figure 4.1: *Demographics of the participants*

Table 4.2 *Frequency distribution of ages of Participants*

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-21	42	21.0
22-25	158	79.0
Total	200	100.0

Table 4.2 presents the age-wise distribution of the participants in the study. The total sample consisted of 200 young working adults. Among them, 42 participants (21.0%) belonged to the age group of 18–21 years, whereas a larger proportion, 158 participants (79.0%), fell within the age group of 22–25 years.This indicates that the majority of the respondents were 22–25 age range. The graphical representation of age distribution is presented in **Figure 4.2.**

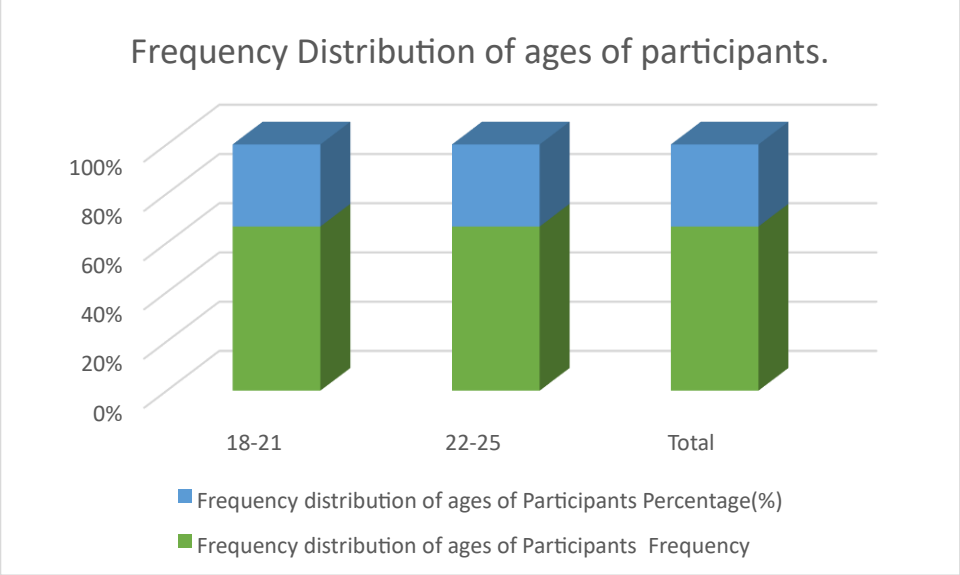


Figure 4.2: *Frequency of ages of participants*.

HA1. To examine the effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence among young adults

Table 4.3A *Model Summary showing effect of Appearance Anxiety on* emotional intelligence

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.040[a]	.002	-.003	16.80

a. *Predictors: Appearance Anxiety; b. Dependent Variable: Emotional Intelligence*

Table 4.3A presents the model summary for the regression analysis examining the effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence. The value of *R* was .040, indicating a very weak relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence. The R^2 value of .002 revealed that appearance anxiety explained 0.2% of the variance in emotional intelligence. The adjusted R^2 value was -.003, indicating minimal explanatory power of the model after adjustment. The standard error of the estimate was 16.80. Overall, the model accounted for a negligible proportion of variance in emotional intelligence.

Table 4.3B *Linear regression showing effect of Appearance Anxiety on* emotional intelligence

Predictor	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p**
Constant	109.30	10.41	—	10.49	< .001
Appearance Anxiety	1.68	2.97	.04	0.57	.573

a. Dependent Variable**:** *Emotional Intelligence*

Table 4.3B presents the results of the linear regression analysis examining the effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence. The regression coefficient for appearance anxiety was $B = 1.68$ ($SE = 2.97$), indicating that a one-unit increase in appearance anxiety was associated with a 1.68-unit increase in emotional intelligence scores. The standardized regression coefficient was $\beta = .04$, suggesting a very weak positive relationship between the two variables. The obtained *t*-value was 0.57 with a corresponding *p*-value of .573. The results indicate that appearance anxiety was not a significant predictor of emotional intelligence in the present sample.

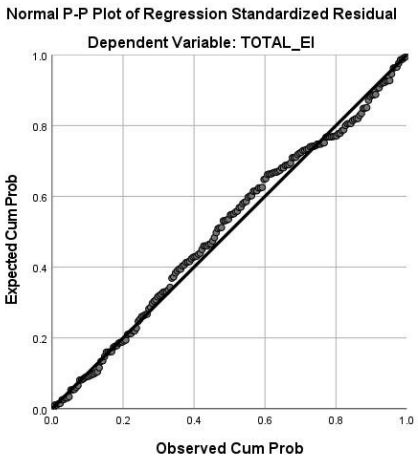


Figure 4.3: *The Normal P-P Plot of Regression*

Objective 2. *To investigate the effect of appearance anxiety on self-compassion among young adults.*

Table 4.4A *Model summary showing effect of Appearance Anxiety on self-compassion among young adults*

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change
.249[a]	.062	.057	6.54	.062	13.085

Predictor: *Appearance Anxiety; Dependent Variable: self compassion*

Table 4.4A presents the model summary for the regression analysis examining the effect of appearance anxiety on self-compassion among young adults. The value of *R* was .249, indicating a weak positive relationship between appearance anxiety and self-compassion. The coefficient of determination (R^2 = .062) showed that appearance anxiety accounted for 6.2% of the variance in self-compassion. The adjusted R^2 value of .057 suggested that the model explained approximately 5.7% of the variance after adjustment for sample size. The standard error of the estimate was 6.54. Furthermore, the R^2 change value was .062, and the *F* change value was 13.085, indicating the contribution of appearance anxiety to the prediction of self-compassion. Overall, the model explained a small proportion of variance in self-compassion among young adults.

Table 4.4B *Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Appearance Anxiety on Self-Compassion*

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	34.89	4.05	—	8.60	< .001
Self-Compassion	-4.18	1.15	-0.25	-3.61	< .001

a. Dependent Variable: *Appearance Anxiety*

Table 4.4B presents the results of the linear regression analysis examining the effect of self-compassion on appearance anxiety among young adults. The regression coefficient for self-compassion was *B* = -4.18 (*SE* = 1.15), indicating that a one-unit increase in self-compassion was associated with a 4.18-unit decrease in appearance anxiety scores. The standardized regression coefficient was β = -.25, suggesting a weak negative relationship between self-compassion and appearance anxiety. The obtained *t*-value was -3.61, which was statistically significant ($p < .001$). These findings indicate that self-compassion significantly and negatively predicted appearance

anxiety among young adults, suggesting that higher levels of self-compassion are associated with lower levels of appearance anxiety.

Objective 3. To assess the relationship between appearance anxiety, self-compassion and emotional intelligence among young adults

Table 4.5 *Mean and SD of self-compassion, Appearance Anxiety and Emotional Intelligence*

Variable	Mean	S.D	N
Self-Compassion	3.48	0.40	200
Appearance Anxiety	20.33	6.74	200
Emotional Intelligence	115.15	16.78	200

The descriptive statistics for the study variables are presented in Table 4.5. The mean score for self-compassion is 3.48 (*SD* = 0.40), indicating a moderate level of self-compassion among the participants. Appearance anxiety had a mean score of 20.33 (*SD* = 6.74), suggesting a moderate level of concern related to appearance. Additionally, the mean score for emotional intelligence is 115.15 (*SD* = 16.78), reflecting a relatively high level of emotional intelligence among young working adults.

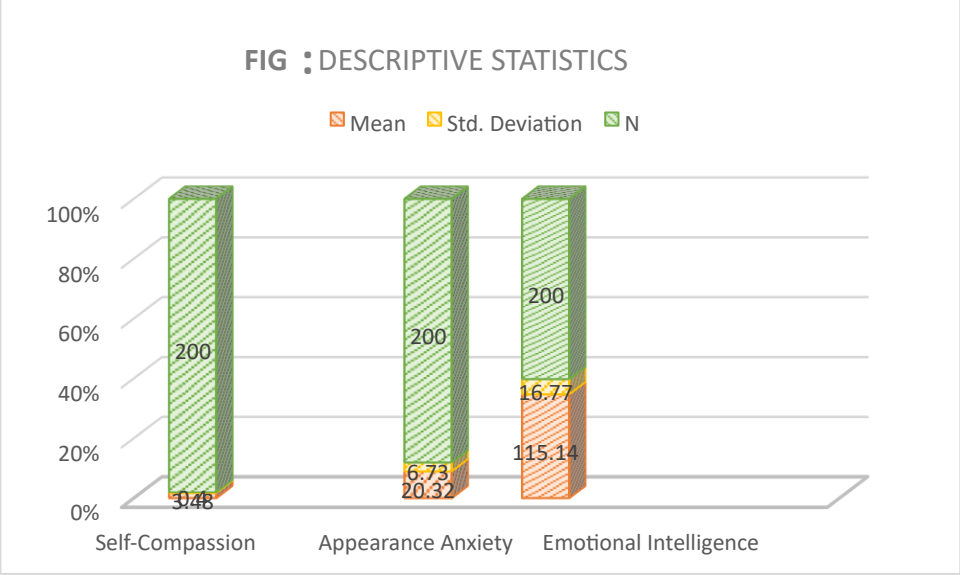


Figure 4.4*: Mean and SD of Self-compassion, Appearance Anxiety, and Emotional Intelligence*

Table 4.6 Relationship Among Self-Compassion, Appearance Anxiety, and Emotional Intelligence (N = 200)

Variable	**1**	**2**	**3**
1. Self-Compassion	—	−.25**	.04
2. Appearance Anxiety	−.25**	—	.05
3. Emotional Intelligence	.04	.05	—

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

Pearson's correlation analysis is conducted to examine the relationships among self-compassion, appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young working adults. The results revealed a **significant negative correlation** between self-compassion and appearance anxiety ($r = -.249$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of self-compassion are associated with lower levels of appearance anxiety. However, self-compassion was **not significantly correlated** with emotional intelligence ($r = .040$, $p = .573$), suggesting no meaningful relationship between these variables. Similarly, appearance anxiety was **not significantly related** to emotional intelligence ($r = .051$, $p = .470$). Overall, the findings suggest that while self-compassion plays a significant role in reducing appearance anxiety, it does not have a significant association with emotional intelligence. Additionally, emotional intelligence does not appear to be significantly related to appearance anxiety in the present study

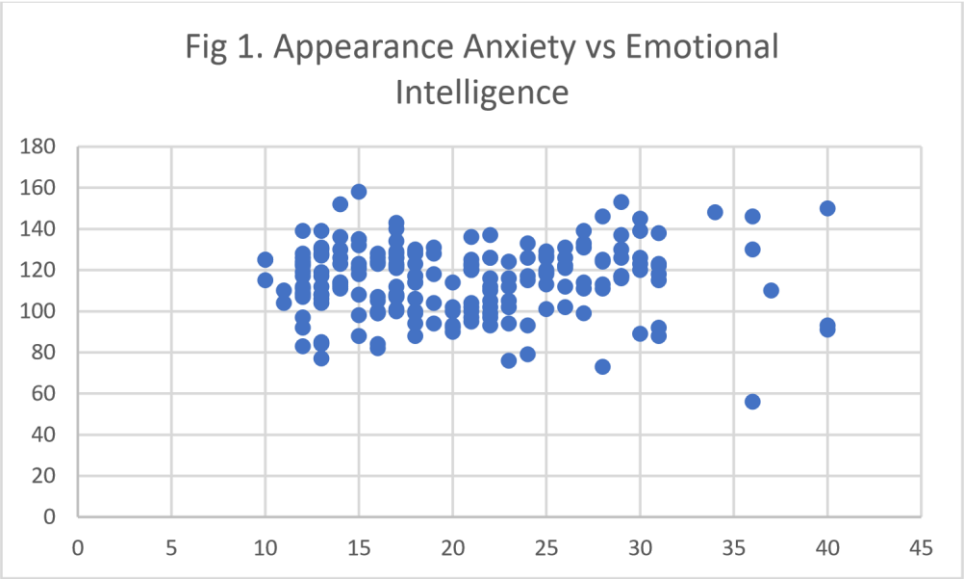


Fig 4.5A: *Scatter plot diagram showing relationship between Appearance Anxiety and Emotional Intelligence.*

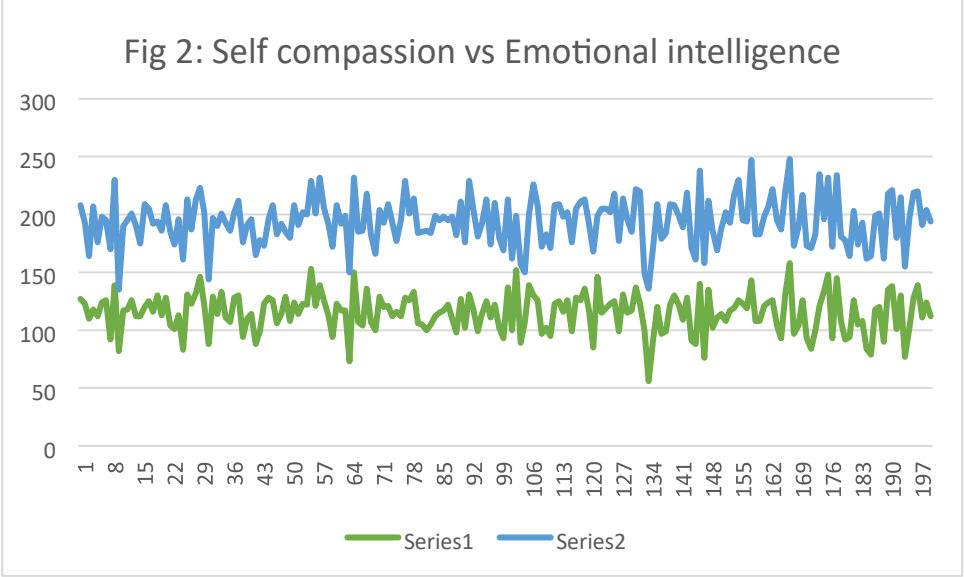


Fig 4.5B: *Scatter plot diagram showing relationship between self- compassion and emotional intelligence.*

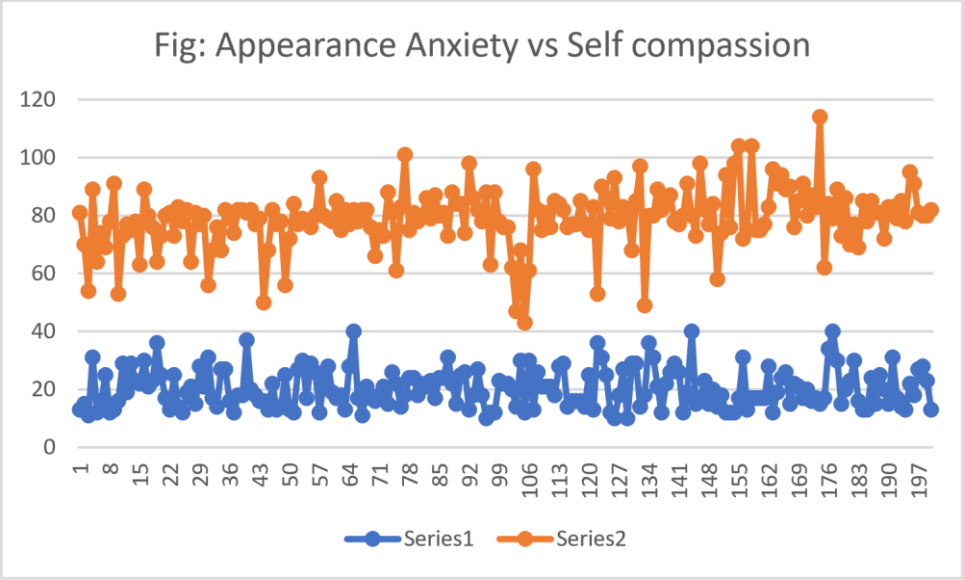


Fig 4.5C: *Scatter plot diagram showing relationship between Appearance Anxiety and Self compassion.*

Objective 4. To study whether self-compassion mediates the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults

Table 4.7A *Mediation Model (Appearance Anxiety, Self-Compassion and Emotional Intelligence)*

Outcome Variable	**Predictor**	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p**	**R^2**
Self-Compassion (M)	Appearance Anxiety (X)	−0.01	**0.00**	−.25	−3.62	< .001	.06
Emotional Intelligence (Y)	Appearance Anxiety (X)	0.16	0.18	.01	0.89	.374	.01
	Self-Compassion (M)	2.36	3.07	.05	0.77	.443	

Table 4.7B *Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Appearance Anxiety on Emotional Intelligence through Self-Compassion*

Effect Type	Effect (B)	SE	t	p	95% CI
Direct Effect (c′)	0.16	0.18	0.89	.374	[−0.20, 0.52]
Indirect Effect (ab)	−0.04	0.08	—	—	[−0.18, 0.15]
Total Effect (c)	0.13*	0.18	0.72	>.05	—

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

The present study aimed to examine whether self-compassion mediates the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults. The findings indicated that appearance anxiety was not significantly related to emotional intelligence (B = 0.16, SE = 0.18, p = .374), suggesting the absence of a significant direct effect. This implies that variations in appearance anxiety do not directly influence levels of emotional intelligence in the present sample.

Further analysis revealed that appearance anxiety had a significant negative association with self-compassion (B = -0.01, SE = 0.00, p < .001), indicating that individuals experiencing higher levels of appearance anxiety tend to report lower self-compassion. This finding highlights the detrimental impact of appearance-related concerns on individuals' ability to be kind and understanding toward themselves. However, self-compassion was not found to be significantly associated with emotional intelligence (B = 2.36, SE = 3.07, p = .443), suggesting that higher levels of self-compassion do not necessarily translate into better emotional intelligence in this sample. Moreover, the indirect effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence through self-compassion was not significant (B = -0.04, SE = 0.08, 95% CI [-0.18, 0.15]), as the confidence interval included zero. This indicates that self-compassion does not function as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence. In other words, although appearance anxiety significantly predicts self-compassion, the lack of a significant relationship between self-compassion and emotional intelligence prevents the formation of a meaningful indirect pathway.

Additionally, the total effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence was also found to be non-significant (B = 0.13, SE = 0.18, p = .470), further confirming the absence of an overall relationship between these variables. Taken together, these findings suggest that while appearance anxiety is associated with lower self-compassion, it does not significantly influence emotional intelligence either directly or indirectly through self-compassion**.**

CHAPTER-V

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

The present study was undertaken to explore the relationship between appearance anxiety, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion among young adults. In recent years, concerns related to physical appearance have increased significantly, especially among young individuals, due to factors such as social media exposure, societal expectations, and constant comparison with others. Appearance anxiety has therefore emerged as an important area of psychological inquiry, as it can negatively affect an individual's self-esteem, confidence, and overall psychological well-being.

Emotional intelligence is considered an important psychological construct that helps individuals understand, manage, and regulate their emotions effectively. It is often associated with better adjustment, interpersonal relationships, and mental health. Similarly, self-compassion, which refers to being kind and understanding toward oneself during times of difficulty, has gained attention as a protective factor against various psychological problems, including anxiety and self-criticism.

The present study attempted to examine how these three variables are interrelated. Specifically, it aimed to understand whether individuals with higher self-compassion experience lower appearance anxiety, and whether emotional intelligence has any role in this relationship. Additionally, the study explored the potential mediating role of self-compassion between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence. The study was conducted using a quantitative research design on a sample of 200 young adults aged 18 to 25 years.

This chapter presents the objectives and hypotheses of the study, followed by a detailed discussion of the major findings in relation to each research objective. It further includes the conclusion, educational implications, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research based on the results obtained.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence among young adults.
2. To investigate the effect of appearance anxiety on self-compassion among young adults.
3. To assess the relationship between appearance anxiety, self-compassion, and emotional intelligence among young adults.
4. To explore whether self-compassion mediates the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults.

Hypotheses of the Study

H1: There will be a significant effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence among young adults. — **Rejected**

H2: There will be a significant effect of appearance anxiety on self-compassion among young adults. — **Accepted**

H3: There will be a significant positive relationship between appearance anxiety, self-compassion, and emotional intelligence among young adults. — **Partially Accepted**

H4: Self-compassion will mediate the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults. — **Rejected**

5.2 Major Findings of the Study

The major findings of the present study are organized according to each research objective and presented below:

5.2.1 Research Objective 1 *To examine the effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence among young adults.*

The findings revealed that appearance anxiety did not significantly predict emotional intelligence ($\beta = .040$, $p = .573$). This indicates that although there was a slight positive trend, it was not statistically meaningful. One possible explanation for this is that emotional intelligence is a broader construct involving multiple abilities such as emotional awareness, regulation, and

interpersonal understanding, which may not be directly influenced by appearance-related concerns. While appearance anxiety is largely driven by external social comparisons and self-focused evaluations related to physical appearance, emotional intelligence encompasses both self and others, which may explain the lack of a significant relationship in the present sample.

Therefore, Hypothesis 1 (H1), which predicted a significant effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence, was rejected.

5.2.2 Research Objective 2 *To investigate the effect of appearance anxiety on self-compassion among young adults.*

The results revealed a significant negative relationship between appearance anxiety and self-compassion ($\beta = -.249$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that individuals with higher levels of self-compassion tend to experience lower levels of appearance anxiety. This is consistent with the theoretical understanding that self-compassion serves as a protective psychological resource. Individuals who treat themselves with kindness and understanding are less likely to engage in harsh self-criticism or negative self-evaluation related to physical appearance, thereby experiencing reduced anxiety and emotional distress associated with appearance concerns.

Therefore, Hypothesis 2 (H2), which predicted a significant effect of appearance anxiety on self-compassion, was accepted.

5.2.3 Research Objective 3 *To assess the relationship between appearance anxiety, self-compassion, and emotional intelligence among young adults.*

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed that self-compassion was significantly negatively correlated with appearance anxiety ($r = -.249$, $p < .01$), suggesting that higher self-compassion is associated with lower appearance-related anxiety. However, self-compassion was not significantly correlated with emotional intelligence ($r = .040$, $p > .05$), and appearance anxiety was also not significantly correlated with emotional intelligence ($r = .051$, $p > .05$).

These findings suggest that while self-compassion plays an important role in reducing appearance-related concerns, emotional intelligence does not appear to have a direct association with either self-compassion or appearance anxiety in the present sample. One possible reason for the absence of a relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence could be that appearance anxiety is more strongly influenced by external factors such as social comparison, media exposure,

and societal beauty standards, whereas emotional intelligence primarily deals with internal emotional processing and regulation.

Therefore, Hypothesis 3 (H3), which predicted a significant positive relationship among all three variables, was only partially supported, given that only the relationship between self-compassion and appearance anxiety was significant.

5.2.4 Research Objective 4 To explore whether self-compassion mediates the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults.

The mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4) examined whether self-compassion mediates the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence. The results indicated that the direct effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence was not significant ($p = .3739$), and the indirect effect through self-compassion was also not significant, as the 95% bootstrap confidence interval included zero (−0.18 to 0.15). Since a key condition for mediation — a significant relationship between the mediator and the outcome variable — was not satisfied, the mediation effect was not supported.

Therefore, Hypothesis 4 (H4), which predicted that self-compassion would mediate the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence, was rejected.

5.3 Conclusion and Discussion

The present study was conducted to examine the interrelationship between appearance anxiety, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion among young adults. Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

There is no significant relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults. The findings revealed that appearance anxiety did not significantly correlate with emotional intelligence, indicating that concerns related to physical appearance do not directly influence emotional intelligence in the present sample. (H1 — Rejected)

There is a significant negative relationship between self-compassion and appearance anxiety among young adults. The results showed that higher levels of self-compassion are associated with lower levels of appearance anxiety, confirming that self-compassion acts as a meaningful protective factor against appearance-related distress. (H2 — Accepted)

There is no significant relationship between self-compassion and emotional intelligence among young adults. The findings indicated that self-compassion does not significantly correlate with emotional intelligence, suggesting that these constructs operate independently in the present study. (H3 — Partially Accepted)

There is no significant mediating effect of self-compassion between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults. The mediation analysis revealed that self-compassion did not significantly mediate this relationship, as the required pathways were not statistically significant. (H4 — Rejected)

Overall, the study concludes that while appearance anxiety is an important psychological concern among young adults, its relationship with emotional intelligence is not significant in the current sample. However, self-compassion emerged as a key psychological resource that significantly reduces appearance anxiety. These findings highlight the importance of fostering self-compassion as a means to enhance psychological well-being and reduce appearance-related distress among young adults.

5.4 Implications of the study

The findings of the present study carry meaningful educational and practical implications for mental health professionals, educators, and institutions working with young adults.

•Given the significant negative relationship between self-compassion and appearance anxiety, educational institutions should incorporate self-compassion-based programs in their student wellness curricula. Techniques such as mindfulness, self-acceptance, and compassion-focused exercises can help students develop healthier self-perceptions and reduce appearance-related distress.

- Counsellors and psychologists working with young adults should focus on self-compassion as a therapeutic target. Developing self-compassion may serve as an effective coping strategy for individuals experiencing appearance anxiety, particularly in an era of heightened social media influence.
- Schools, colleges, and universities can design awareness campaigns that promote body positivity and self-acceptance. These programs can educate students about the harmful effects of

unrealistic beauty standards propagated through social media and encourage a kinder relationship with one's own body and self-image.

- The study is relevant for school counsellors, psychologists, teachers, and parents who play an important role in shaping the emotional and psychological health of young individuals. Training programs for educators can include modules on recognizing and addressing appearance-related concerns in students.
- The findings can also inform the development of group-based workshops focused on emotional well-being, where young adults are guided to replace self-critical thoughts with self-compassionate attitudes, thereby reducing the psychological burden of appearance anxiety

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings and limitations of the present study, the following suggestions are offered for future research:

1. **Longitudinal Studies:** The present study adopted a cross-sectional design. Future research may employ longitudinal designs to examine how appearance anxiety, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion evolve over time, thereby allowing for a better understanding of the directionality of these relationships.

2. **Exploration of Alternative Mediators:** Since self-compassion did not mediate the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence, future studies may explore other potential mediating variables such as self-esteem, body image satisfaction, mindfulness, or social comparison tendencies.

3. **Examination of Moderating Variables:** Future research may investigate moderating factors such as gender, social media usage, personality traits, or cultural influences to better understand under what conditions appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence are related.

4. **Balanced and Diverse Sample:** The present study had a higher proportion of female participants (77%). Future research should aim for a more balanced gender distribution and include participants from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds to enhance the generalizability of findings.

5. **Intervention-Based Research:** Given the significant negative relationship between self-compassion and appearance anxiety, future studies may design and evaluate structured intervention programs focused on enhancing self-compassion to reduce appearance-related distress among young adults.

6. **Role of Social Media Exposure:** Future research may specifically examine the impact of social media usage, online comparison, and digital appearance standards on appearance anxiety, and explore whether self-compassion can effectively buffer these effects.

7. **Inclusion of Clinical Populations:** Future studies may include both clinical and non-clinical populations to examine whether the relationships among the variables differ in individuals with elevated levels of psychological distress or diagnosed conditions such as Body Dysmorphic Disorder.

8. **Qualitative Research Approaches:** In addition to quantitative methods, qualitative studies may be conducted to gain deeper insights into individuals' subjective experiences of appearance anxiety and the personal role that self-compassion plays in coping.

9. **Cross-Cultural Studies:** Cultural standards of beauty and emotional expression may influence the variables under study. Future research may compare findings across different cultural contexts to understand how cultural factors moderate these relationships.

10. **Use of Multiple Measurement Tools:** Future research may incorporate multiple assessment instruments or mixed-method approaches to improve measurement accuracy and capture the multidimensional nature of psychological constructs such as emotional intelligence and self-compassion.

SUMMARY

TOPIC: AN ANALYTICAL EXAMINATION OF THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN APPEARANCE ANXIETY AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AMONG YOUNG ADULTS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SELF-COMPASSION

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Semester IV

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, increasing emphasis on physical appearance has significantly influenced the psychological well-being of young adults. The rapid proliferation of social media, peer comparison, and culturally constructed beauty ideals has intensified appearance-related concerns, particularly among individuals navigating the critical developmental period of early adulthood. These sociocultural pressures contribute to heightened levels of appearance anxiety—a persistent fear or concern about one's physical appearance accompanied by apprehension regarding negative evaluation, rejection, or judgment by others based on perceived physical inadequacies.

Young adulthood is characterized by heightened self-consciousness and increased sensitivity to social feedback. During this phase, individuals actively construct their identities and are particularly vulnerable to internalizing negative self-evaluations related to appearance. When appearance-related concerns become excessive and chronic, they may impair daily functioning, reduce quality of life, and contribute to broader psychological distress.

Alongside appearance anxiety, internal psychological resources play a crucial role in determining how individuals respond to external appearance-related pressures. Emotional intelligence—the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively—enables individuals to navigate emotional challenges with flexibility and adaptive coping. Self-

compassion, which involves treating oneself with kindness, understanding, and mindful awareness during times of difficulty or perceived inadequacy, serves as a protective psychological resource against self-criticism and anxiety.

Despite growing research interest in these constructs individually, limited investigation has examined the interrelationship among appearance anxiety, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion within a single theoretical framework. The central question of this study is: Does self-compassion mediate the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults?

APPEARANCE ANXIETY

Appearance anxiety refers to a persistent fear or concern about one's physical appearance, accompanied by apprehension regarding negative evaluation, rejection, or judgment by others due to perceived physical inadequacies (Veale et al., 2014). This construct encompasses excessive self-monitoring of physical features, fear of negative social evaluation, emotional distress related to body image, and avoidance of social situations. Appearance anxiety is conceptualized as rooted in cognitive processes involving self-perception, social comparison, fear of judgment, and internalization of idealized beauty standards.

Theoretical perspectives on appearance anxiety include cognitive theory, which attributes the condition to distorted thought patterns and negative self-schemas (Beck, 1976); social comparison theory, which emphasizes appearance-based comparisons with peers and media figures (Festinger, 1954); and the sociocultural model, which highlights the role of media, cultural norms, and internalized beauty ideals in intensifying appearance-related concerns (Stice & Shaw, 1994). Young adulthood represents a particularly vulnerable developmental period for appearance anxiety due to identity exploration, heightened peer interaction, and increased exposure to appearance-focused media.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to perceive emotions accurately, understand emotional meanings, regulate emotional responses, and utilize emotions to guide adaptive thinking and behavior (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It comprises several interconnected competencies including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Individuals with

higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to cope with stressors, manage appearance-related concerns with cognitive flexibility, and maintain psychological balance.

Multiple theoretical models conceptualize emotional intelligence. The ability model (Mayer et al., 2016) defines it as a cognitive capacity involving the processing of emotional information. The trait model views emotional intelligence as a constellation of emotional self-perceptions embedded within personality. The mixed model integrates emotional abilities with personality traits and social competencies. In the context of the present study, emotional intelligence is conceptualized as a dependent variable that may be influenced by appearance anxiety and potentially moderated through the development of self-compassion.

SELF-COMPASSION

Self-compassion is defined as the ability to respond to one's own suffering, failures, or inadequacies with kindness, understanding, and a sense of shared humanity, rather than with self-criticism or avoidance (Neff, 2003). It comprises three interrelated components: self-kindness versus self-judgment, common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification. Self-compassion promotes emotional resilience, reduces vulnerability to anxiety, and encourages adaptive coping without dependence on external validation.

Neff's (2003) theoretical framework emphasizes that self-compassion reduces self-criticism and promotes healthier emotional outcomes during distressing experiences. Research consistently demonstrates that self-compassion is negatively associated with anxiety, depression, and appearance-related distress, and positively associated with psychological well-being and emotional resilience. In the present study, self-compassion is examined as a mediating variable that may explain the pathway through which appearance anxiety influences emotional intelligence.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study is significant because it addresses a critical gap in the psychological literature concerning the interrelationship among appearance anxiety, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion in young adults. Although each of these constructs has been studied independently, limited research has examined how they interact together within a mediation framework. Understanding these relationships is essential for developing preventive and therapeutic interventions aimed at promoting psychological well-being among young adults.

The significance of the present study is further underscored by its relevance to the Indian socio-cultural context, where heightened social media exposure, peer comparison, and cultural beauty ideals are increasingly prevalent among college-going young adults. By investigating these relationships empirically, the study contributes to culturally grounded psychological knowledge and offers practical implications for counselors, educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers concerned with the psychological well-being of young adults.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present study is entitled as "An Analytical Examination of the Interrelationship between Appearance Anxiety and Emotional Intelligence among Young Adults: The Mediating Role of Self-Compassion."

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Appearance Anxiety: In the present study, appearance anxiety refers to a persistent fear or concern about one's physical appearance, accompanied by apprehension regarding negative evaluation, rejection, or judgment by others due to perceived physical inadequacies. It was operationally defined as the level of appearance-related anxiety expressed by the participants, as measured through the Appearance Anxiety Inventory (AAI; Veale et al., 2014). Higher scores indicated greater levels of appearance anxiety.

Self-Compassion: In the present study, self-compassion refers to the ability to respond to one's own failures, inadequacies, or suffering with kindness, a sense of common humanity, and mindful awareness, rather than with self-criticism or avoidance. It was operationally defined as the extent to which participants reported self-compassionate attitudes and behaviors, as assessed through the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003). Higher scores indicated greater levels of self-compassion.

Emotional Intelligence: In the present study, emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively in oneself and in interactions with others. It was operationally defined as the level of emotional intelligence reported by the participants on the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT; Schutte et al., 1998). Higher scores indicated greater emotional intelligence.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives were formulated for the present study.

- To examine the effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence among young adults.
- To investigate the effect of appearance anxiety on self-compassion among young adults.
- To assess the relationship between appearance anxiety, self-compassion, and emotional intelligence among young adults.
- To explore whether self-compassion mediates the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

1. There will be a significant relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults.
2. There will be a significant relationship between appearance anxiety and self-compassion among young adults.
3. There will be a significant relationship between appearance anxiety, self-compassion, and emotional intelligence among young adults.
4. Self-compassion will significantly mediate the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence among young adults.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the present study consisted of young adults between the age group of 18 to 25 years enrolled in colleges and universities. This age group was specifically selected because young adulthood represents a period of heightened self-awareness, identity formation, and sensitivity to appearance-related social feedback.

SAMPLE FOR THE STUDY

Random sampling technique was employed for selecting the sample. The final sample consisted of 200 young adults (N = 200), comprising 154 females (77%) and 46 males (23%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 years, with 42 participants (21%) belonging to the 18–21 age group and 158 participants (79%) falling within the 22–25 age group. Data were collected from

colleges and universities in Jammu and Kashmir. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

TOOLS USED

Appearance Anxiety Inventory (AAI): Developed by Veale et al. (2014), the AAI is a process-oriented self-report measure designed to assess cognitive and behavioral aspects of appearance-related distress. The instrument comprises 24 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = Not at all to 4 = Extremely). It evaluates key behavioral processes including self-focused attention, avoidance, checking, and camouflaging behaviors associated with appearance anxiety. Higher scores indicate greater levels of appearance anxiety.

Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT): Developed by Schutte et al. (1998), the SSEIT is a widely used self-report measure of emotional intelligence grounded in Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model. The test comprises 33 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) and assesses four dimensions: perception of emotions, managing one's own emotions, managing others' emotions, and utilization of emotions. Higher scores reflect greater emotional intelligence.

Self-Compassion Scale (SCS): Developed by Neff (2003), the SCS is a well-established self-report measure evaluating three core components of self-compassion: self-kindness versus self-judgment, common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification. The scale comprises 26 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Almost Never to 5 = Almost Always). Higher scores indicate greater self-compassion. The scale demonstrates excellent internal consistency and construct validity across diverse populations.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

- **Effect of Appearance Anxiety on Emotional Intelligence:** The regression analysis revealed that appearance anxiety did not significantly predict emotional intelligence ($\beta = .04$, $p = .573$). The model explained only 0.2% of the variance in emotional intelligence ($R^2 = .002$). These findings indicate that appearance anxiety does not have a direct, meaningful relationship with emotional intelligence in the present sample. Accordingly, Hypothesis 1 (H1) was rejected.
- **Effect of Appearance Anxiety on Self-Compassion:** The regression analysis revealed that appearance anxiety significantly and negatively predicted self-compassion ($\beta = -.25$, $p <$

.001), explaining 6.2% of the variance (R^2 = .062). The unstandardized coefficient (B = −4.183) indicates that an increase in appearance anxiety is associated with a corresponding decrease in self-compassion. Higher appearance anxiety was associated with significantly lower self-compassion. Accordingly, Hypothesis 2 (H2) was accepted.

- **Relationship Among Appearance Anxiety, Self-Compassion, and Emotional Intelligence:** Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between appearance anxiety and self-compassion ($r = -.249$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher appearance anxiety is associated with lower self-compassion. However, no significant relationships were found between self-compassion and emotional intelligence ($r = .04$, $p > .05$) or between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence ($r = .05$, $p > .05$). Accordingly, Hypothesis 3 (H3) was only partially supported.
- **Mediation Analysis — Self-Compassion as Mediator:** The mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4) examined whether self-compassion mediates the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence. The findings indicated that while appearance anxiety significantly predicted self-compassion (B = −0.01, $p < .001$), self-compassion did not significantly predict emotional intelligence. The indirect effect of appearance anxiety on emotional intelligence through self-compassion was non-significant, with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval that included zero. These results indicate that self-compassion does not mediate the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence. Accordingly, Hypothesis 4 (H4) was rejected.

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

- The present study was delimited to young adults between 18 to 25 years of age.
- The study was conducted in urban and semi-urban settings across Jammu and Kashmir, limiting generalization beyond the selected region.
- The study examined only three variables — appearance anxiety, self-compassion, and emotional intelligence — with self-compassion treated as the mediating variable.
- The study was confined to a specific cultural and geographic context; participants from other regions, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds were not included.

- The study relied solely on three standardized self-report measures (AAI, SCS, SSEIT) and did not examine other related factors such as social media usage, personality traits, or social support.
- A cross-sectional research design was adopted with data collected at a single point in time; therefore, causal relationships and changes over time were not examined.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study has brought out how appearance anxiety influences self-compassion, and how these constructs relate to emotional intelligence. These results suggest the following directions for further research:

- The present study adopted a cross-sectional design. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine how appearance anxiety, emotional intelligence, and self-compassion evolve over time, thereby allowing a better understanding of the directionality of these relationships.
- Since self-compassion did not mediate the relationship between appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence, future studies may explore other potential mediating variables such as self-esteem, body image satisfaction, mindfulness, emotion regulation, or social comparison tendencies.
- Future research may investigate moderating factors such as gender, social media usage, personality traits, or cultural influences to better understand under what conditions appearance anxiety and emotional intelligence are related.
- The present study had a higher proportion of female participants (77%). Future research should aim for a more balanced gender distribution and include participants from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds to enhance the generalizability of findings.
- Given the significant negative relationship between self-compassion and appearance anxiety, future studies may design and evaluate structured intervention programs focused on enhancing self-compassion to reduce appearance-related distress among young adults.
- Future research may specifically examine the impact of social media usage, online comparison, and digital appearance standards on appearance anxiety, and explore whether self-compassion can effectively buffer these effects.

- Future studies may include both clinical and non-clinical populations to examine whether the relationships among the variables differ in individuals with elevated levels of psychological distress or diagnosed conditions such as Body Dysmorphic Disorder.
- In addition to quantitative methods, qualitative studies may be conducted to gain deeper insights into individuals' subjective experiences of appearance anxiety and the personal role that self-compassion plays in coping.
- Cultural standards of beauty and emotional expression may influence the variables under study. Future research may compare findings across different cultural contexts to understand how cultural factors moderate these relationships.

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APPENDICES

Demographic Information

Name (optional): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact: For any questions, please contact the researcher at [researcher's institutional email].

Appendix B Demographic Information Sheet

Please provide the following information. All information is confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

1. Age: _____ years
2. Gender: □ Male □ Female □ Non-binary / Third gender □ Prefer not to say
3. Educational Qualification: □ Undergraduate □ Postgraduate □ Other: _____
4. Institution / University: _____
5. Place of Residence: □ Urban □ Semi-urban □ Rural
6. Marital Status: □ Single □ Married □ Other
7. Do you use social media? □ Yes □ No
8. If yes, average daily usage: □ < 1 hour □ 1–2 hours □ 2–3 hours □ > 3 hours

Appendix C Appearance Anxiety Inventory (AAI) (Veale et al., 2014)

Instructions: Please read each statement carefully and indicate how much each statement applied to you over the past week, including today. Rate each item on the following scale:

0 = Not at all 1 = A little bit 2 = Moderately 3 = Quite a bit 4 = Extremely

1. I avoid looking at myself in mirrors or reflective surfaces.
2. I check my appearance repeatedly in mirrors or other surfaces.
3. I compare my appearance with that of others.
4. I try to hide or camouflage parts of my body that I dislike.
5. I seek reassurance from others about my appearance.
6. I think about my appearance for long periods of time.
7. I feel that my appearance is abnormal or defective.
8. I change my clothing to hide parts of my body I dislike.
9. I have difficulty concentrating on activities because of thoughts about my appearance.
10. I avoid social situations because of concerns about my appearance.
11. I believe that others notice my appearance defects.
12. I pick or touch parts of my body that I dislike.
13. I feel distressed about my appearance.
14. I groom myself excessively to improve my appearance.
15. I seek cosmetic procedures to alter my appearance.
16. I feel that my appearance negatively affects my daily functioning.
17. I take multiple photographs of myself and delete ones I dislike.

18. I feel that I would be happier if I looked different.

19. I avoid having my picture taken because of concerns about my appearance.

20. I feel embarrassed or ashamed about my appearance.

21. I am preoccupied with one or more perceived defects in my appearance.

22. I feel that my appearance concerns cause significant impairment in my life.

23. I am unable to control thoughts about my appearance.

24. I feel less confident because of my appearance.

Appendix D Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) (Schutte et al., 1998)

Instructions: Read each statement and then indicate the extent to which each statement applies to you by choosing the appropriate option.

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree

1. I know when to speak about my personal problems to others.
2. When I am faced with obstacles, I remember times I faced similar obstacles and overcame them.
3. I expect that I will do well on most things I try.
4. Other people find it easy to confide in me.
5. I find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people.
6. Some of the major events of my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and what is not.
7. When my mood changes, I see new possibilities.
8. Emotions are one of the things that make my life worth living.
9. I am aware of my emotions as I experience them.
10. I expect good things to happen.
11. I like to share my emotions with others.
12. When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last.
13. I arrange events others enjoy.
14. I seek out activities that make me happy.
15. I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others.

16. I present myself in a way that makes a good impression on others.

17. When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me.

18. By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing.

19. I know why my emotions change.

20. When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas.

21. I have control over my emotions.

22. I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them.

23. I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on.

24. I compliment others when they have done something well.

25. I am aware of the non-verbal messages other people send.

26. When another person tells me about an important event in his or her life, I almost feel as though I experienced this event myself.

27. When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas.

28. When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail.

29. I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them.

30. I help other people feel better when they are down.

31. I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles.

32. I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice.

33. It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do.

Appendix E Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) (Neff, 2003)

Instructions: Please read each statement carefully and indicate how often you behave in the stated manner, using the following scale:

1 = Almost never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Almost always

1. I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.
2. When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong.
3. When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through.
4. When I think about my inadequacies, it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world.
5. I try to be loving and patient with those aspects of my personality I don't like.
6. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.
7. When I'm down and out, I remind myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.
8. When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure.
9. When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am.
10. When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance.
11. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.
12. I'm intolerant and impatient with those aspects of my personality I don't like.
13. When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.
14. When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation.

15. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.

16. When I see aspects of myself that I don't like, I get down on myself.

17. When I fail at something important to me I try to keep things in perspective.

18. When I'm really struggling, I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier time of it.

19. I'm kind to myself when I'm experiencing suffering.

20. When something upsets me I get carried away with my feelings.

21. I can be a bit cold-hearted towards myself when I'm experiencing suffering.

22. When I'm feeling down I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness.

23. I'm tolerant of my own flaws and inadequacies.

24. When something painful happens I tend to blow the incident out of proportion.

25. I can't accept and love the difficult parts of my personality.

26. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to keep a balanced perspective on the situation.

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