

A Moderated Mediation Model of Online Peer Validation, Contingent Self-Worth, Social Comparison, and Adolescent Anxiety

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The manuscript states that “social comparison may represent an important condition that intensifies its psychological consequences.” However, the rationale for positioning social comparison specifically as a moderator of the contingent self-worth-to-anxiety path, rather than the online peer validation-to-contingent self-worth path, requires substantially stronger justification. The authors should explain why comparison orientation is expected to amplify the emotional consequences of contingent self-worth after it has formed, and should contrast this specification with plausible first-stage moderation or direct moderation models.

In the final paragraph of the Introduction, the sentence “the present conceptual model addresses these gaps by distinguishing four theoretically related but non-equivalent constructs” is useful but should be expanded into explicit hypotheses. The manuscript would be considerably stronger if it stated separate hypotheses for the direct association between online peer validation and contingent self-worth, the association between contingent self-worth and anxiety, the mediation effect, the moderation effect, and the moderated mediation index. This would make the statistical testing strategy clearly traceable to the theoretical propositions.

In the description of the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure, the authors state that “the measure was framed with standard instructions emphasizing participants’ typical comparison tendencies rather than comparison within any single social-media platform.” This creates a potential mismatch between the digital specificity of the predictor and the generality of the moderator. The authors should discuss whether a domain-general social comparison orientation adequately captures comparison occurring specifically in online environments and consider whether online social comparison might be a more theoretically proximal moderator.

The anxiety outcome was measured with the GAD-7, and the manuscript states that it was used as a continuous measure of symptom severity. This is reasonable, but the conceptual model repeatedly invokes social evaluation, fear of negative evaluation, and peer-based anxiety. The authors should justify the use of generalized anxiety rather than social anxiety or a multidimensional adolescent anxiety measure. It would also be helpful to clarify whether the hypothesized mechanism is expected to influence generalized anxiety broadly or specifically socially evaluative anxiety.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the Study Design and Participants section, the manuscript reports that “a total of 428 adolescents aged 13 to 18 years participated in the study,” but it does not provide an a priori sample-size justification. Because moderated mediation models, particularly interaction effects, require adequate statistical power, the authors should report a formal power analysis specifying the assumed effect size, alpha level, desired power, number of predictors, and minimum required sample. This is particularly important because the statistically significant interaction effect explains only a modest increment in variance.

The Participants section indicates recruitment from “seven public secondary schools located in Ontario and British Columbia using a multistage cluster sampling procedure.” More detail is needed regarding school selection and clustering. The authors should specify how schools and classrooms were selected, the number of eligible students approached, participation rate, whether recruitment differed across provinces, and whether observations were nested within classrooms or schools. If clustering was present, the authors should justify why multilevel modeling or cluster-robust standard errors were not used.

The eligibility criterion requiring participants to have “used at least one social networking platform during the previous six months” is too broad for a study centered on online peer validation. The authors should clarify whether minimum frequency or recency of social-media use was required and whether participants who used platforms only sporadically were included. Since peer validation mechanisms presumably require meaningful exposure to interactive feedback features, including very low-frequency users may attenuate or distort the estimated associations.

In the Data Collection Tools section, the “eight-item Online Peer Validation Scale developed for the present study” represents the most significant measurement concern in the manuscript. Because the scale is newly developed and constitutes the principal predictor, the authors should provide its complete item-generation procedure, expert-review process, pilot-sample characteristics, item-total correlations, exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis, factor loadings, explained variance, and evidence of convergent and discriminant validity. Reporting only internal consistency is insufficient to establish construct validity for a newly created instrument.

The Contingent Self-Worth section states that “a composite indicator reflecting externally contingent self-worth was calculated from the theoretically relevant approval- and appearance-related domains.” This analytic decision requires a much stronger psychometric and theoretical rationale. The authors should explain why these two domains were combined, whether their factor structure supported aggregation, whether a higher-order external-contingency factor was empirically tested, and whether the results remain stable when the domains are analyzed separately. Combining subscales post hoc may obscure domain-specific effects.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor's decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.