# Social Anxiety Among College Students and Its Relation to Negative Self-Portrayal

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## Abstract

Social anxiety is a fear of social activities, and the people associated with them, which leads to high levels of anxiety, and serves as a reason for the socially-anxious person to avoid them.People with social anxiety disorder frequently report experiencing heightened negative self-portrayal i.e., a person who would negatively evaluate themselves in relation to the way they think they appear before others in feared social situations. The purpose of this study was to find the relationship between college students 'social anxiety and their negative self-portrayal, age group between 18 to 25 years. Seventy (N= 70) undergraduate and post graduate students completed self-report measure of social anxiety scale and negative self-portrayal scale The collected data is analyzed by using correlation and regression. Results suggested that the college students who have more level of social anxiety also experience a significant level of negative self-portrayal. In addition, the negative portrayal of social competencies has significant relationship with their social anxiety but the negative portrayal does not have significant relationship with social anxiety, the study also revealed that there was no gender difference in negative self-portrayal and social anxietyand Clinical implications of these results are discussed.

**Key words:** Social anxiety, negative self-portrayal, social competence, physical appearance, gender

## Introduction

Social Anxiety Disorder is defined by the DSM-5 as a debilitating disorder characterised by anxiety of one or more specific social circumstances, such as public speaking, peeing in a public bathroom, or eating or writing in a public area. When people are exposed to certain social situations, they are more likely to believe that they will be scrutinised and judged negatively by others, or that they will act in a degrading or humiliating manner. Because of their elevated level of concerns, people with social anxiety disorder would either want to escape the social setting or bear it with extreme pain.People who experience social anxiety disorder (SAD) often have distorted self-images about how they seem to others in stressful social situations (Hackmann, Clark &McManus, 2000). The idea that 'negative self-imagery' has a role in creating and maintaining social anxiety is a core element of most cognitive theories of SAD. When socially anxious people approach a dreaded social scenario (Clarks &Wells, 1995) for example, the model proposes that they shift their focus to internal cues and employ this insight to estimate how they appeared to others. Internal information is commonly expressed as a flawed, negative self-image that people believe is accurate.

A series of experimental research have provided empirical support for the causative role of negative imagery in social anxiety (Hirsch, Mathews, Clark, Williams & Morrison, 2003, Hirsch, Clark, Williams, Morrison & Mathews, 2005; Hirsch, Mathews & Clark, 2007). Hirsch and colleagues carried out experiments in which socially anxious people were instructed to keep a picture in their heads while participating in two discussions with strangers.During one conversation, participants were directed to think of a negative picture similar to what they would think of in anxiety-provoking social circumstances, while in the other, they were encouraged to think of a less negative (control) image (based on a memory of a social situations in which they felt relaxed). When holding the negative picture, participants reported feeling more worried than when keeping the benign image. They also rated their social performance less favourably, exhibiting higher anxiety symptoms and having problem during the talk.

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Experimental research with low anxious participants has offered more evidence for the causal role of negative imagery in social anxiety. Prior to making a speech, individuals who were generally confident public speakers were instructed to develop a negative, positive, or control (unrelated) self-image (Hirsch et. al., 2005). Participants in the negative imagery condition reported more anxiety and rated their social performance as inferior than those in the positive imagery condition, according to findings from socially anxious populations. Another line of research looked into how negative images affected how people interpreted uncertain social situations. The study of interpretive processes is especially important in the context of social anxiety, because socially anxious people have been demonstrated to have a predisposition to view ambiguous social situations negatively (Hackmann, Clark & McManus, 2000). In (Hirsch et.al.,2003) study participants were told to construct negative self imagery while constructing "online" (i.e., as theyread) interpretations of unfamiliar social information.Participants allocated to a control (unrelated) activity showed the typical non-threatening interpretation bias seen in non-anxious people (Hirsch & Mathews, 1997), while those assigned to the negative self-imagery condition did not.Interestingly, the link between imagery and bias was further shown to be reciprocal. Participants (Hirsch, Mathews & Clark, 2007) practised accessing positive or negative interpretations of ambiguous social situations over and over again, a process known as "cognitive bias modification" (CBM; Mathews & Mackintosh, 2000). Participants were instructed to envision themselves in confusing social settings after completing the CBM process. The negative condition participants created more negative self-imagery than the positive condition participants, demonstrating the reciprocal impact of bias on negative self-imagery.

Furthermore, when asked to envision themselves in a challenging social setting, individuals in the negative group assessed their anticipated anxiety as higher and their anticipated social performance significantly poorer than those in the positive group. The bidirectional relationship between imagery and interpretation bias suggested that the combined role of cognitive biases in the maintenance of social anxiety should be investigated (Hirsch, Clark, & Mathews, 2006).

## Method
## Objective
To study the relationship between social anxiety and negative self-portrayal among college students

## Plan of the Study
The study was intended to be conducted among students of various colleges in Chennai. The sample for the research is selected by applying simple random sampling technique. The data for the research is collected by using two different questionnaires namely Severity Measure for Social Anxiety Disorder and Negative Self Portrayal Scale (NSPS). The collected data is analyzed using the SPSS software.

## Hypothesis
1.There will be no significant relationship found in social anxiety and negative self-portrayal; negative portrayal of social competence and social anxiety; negative portrayal of physical appearance and social anxietyof college students

2. There will be no significant gender difference found in the level of social anxiety and level of negative self-portrayal among college students.

**Variables:** Dependent variable: Social Anxiety of the college students.

**Independent variable:** Negative self-portrayal of the college students.

**Sample:** The samples for the present study consisted of 70 college students within the age group of 18 to 25 years chosen from Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India by simple random sampling method.

## Measures
**Severity Measure for Social Anxiety Disorder:** The Severity Measure for Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia)—Adult is developed by DSM-5 Anxiety Disorders Workgroup in 2015. It is a 10-item measure that assesses the severity of symptoms of social anxiety (social phobia) in individuals age 18 and older. High internal consistency was observed for scale items, providing evidence that individual items are reliably measuring the same construct. The scale demonstrated convergent validity through significant relationships with scores on valid and reliable self-report measures. Each item on the measure is rated on a 5-point scale (0=Never; 1=Occasionally; 2=Half of the time; 3=Most of the time; and 4=All of the time). The raw scores on the 10 items should be summed to obtain a total raw score and the raw score is converted to obtain average total score (raw score X 10/10). The average total score indicates the severity of the individual's social anxiety disorder in terms of none (0), mild (1), moderate (2), severe (3), or extreme (4). The total score can range from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating greater severity of social anxiety disorder.Discriminant validity for the scale was

established through the SAD-D's non-significant relationship with the MASQ depression subscale.

**Negative Self Portrayal Scale (NSPS):** The scale was developed by David A. Moscovitch (2012). The scale has 27 items which are negative self-attributes which are divided into 3 nonorthogonal factors: Social competence, signs of anxiety and physical appearance. The scale consists of 27 items divided into 3 subgroups and the respondent is asked to rate the degree to which they are concerned about certain aspects of themselves when in anxiety-provoking social situations. Response options per item ranged from 1 to 5, with descriptive anchors listed as "not at all concerned" to "extremely concerned." The maximum score that can be obtained is 135. There were no reverse-scored items and higher scores represented greater self-portrayal concerns. The NSPS exhibited good internal consistency (0.95 for full scale and 0.87 to 0.92 for the 3 subscales) and 1-week test-retest reliability (0.75), as well as adequate convergent and discriminant validity (0.63 to 0.70) with symptom measures of Social Anxiety.

**Statistical analysis:** The data was analysed using IBM SPSS version 25 Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to interpret the data. Pearson correlation coefficient was used for correlation analysis between variables and an independent sample t-test was used to analyse the difference between the two groups (male and female) and ANOVA used to compare the significant of difference between the various age groups

### Results and Discussion

**Table 1**

**Mean, SD, and Correlation between Social Anxiety and Negative Self-portrayal among College Students**

| Variables | Mean | SD | Correlation | (Pearson) | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social Anxiety | 12.03 | 5.9 | 0.248* | 0.019* | Significant |
| Negative Self-Portrayal | 59.07 | 19 | | | |

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The research results shows that the level of Social Anxiety and the level of Negative Self-Portrayal of the college students across various colleges in Chennai (N=70). Table 1 shows the mean score of social anxiety and Negative Self-portrayal. The Pearson's correlation used to find the relationship betweensocial anxiety and Negative Self-portrayal of college students**,** Coefficient value r= 0.248 shows that there is positive correlation i.e., as social anxiety increases the level of negative self-portrayal would also increase. The statistically significant value 0.019 (2-tailed) shows that there is statistically significant relationship between social anxiety and Negative Self-portrayal at 0.05 level. This shows that the negative self-portrayal of college students has been positively related to the social anxiety level.This indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected and the mean, correlation and significance level justify the rejection of null hypothesis. A comparative study done on high and low socially anxious participants found that, the participants that held the negative self-image experienced higher levels of anxiety, were more self-focused, experienced more negative self-cognitions, rated their anxiety as more visible, appraised their performance more negatively, and engaged in more negative and less positive Post Event Processing than participants that that held the control self-image (Grisham, 2011).

**Table 2**

**Mean &Correlation, of Social Anxiety and Social Competence Dimension among College Students**

| Variable | N | Mean | SD | Correlation | (Pearson) | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level Of Social Anxiety | 70 | 12.03 | 5.9 | 0.243* | 0.043** | Significant |
| Social Competence Dimension | | 24.93 | 8.6 | | | |

**Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 shows the mean score of social anxiety and Social Competence Dimension. The Pearson's correlation is used to find the relationship betweenSocial anxiety and Social Competence Dimension of college students, Coefficient value r= 0.243 shows that there is positive correlation i.e., as social anxiety increases the level of social competence would also increase. The statistically significant value 0.043 (2-tailed) shows that there is statistically significant relationship between social anxiety and

Social Competence at 0.05 level. This shows that the level of social anxiety has a significant impact on the level of social competence. This shows that the null hypothesis is rejected and the mean, correlation and significance level justify the rejection of null hypothesis. A study found that socially disturbing people may also be hyper-attuned to inner or outside danger cues, thereby drawing attention far from crucial social cues and undermining suitable degrees of engagement that support social competence (Kaeppler, 2017).

**Table 3**
**Mean &Correlation of Social Anxiety and Physical Appearance Dimension among College Students**

| Variable | N | SD | Mean | Correlation | Pearson | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level Of Social Anxiety | 70 | 5.9 | 12.03 | 0.230 | 0.056* | Not Significant |
| Physical Appearance Dimension | | 6.9 | 17.33 | | | |

Table 3 shows the mean score of social anxiety and Physical Appearance Dimension. The Pearson's correlation is used to find the relationship betweenSocial anxiety and Physical Appearance Dimension of college students, Coefficient value r= 0.230 shows that there is positive correlation i.e., as social anxiety increases the level of physical appearance would also increase but the statistically significant value 0.056 (2-tailed) shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between social

anxiety and Physical Appearance at 0.05 level. This shows that the level of social anxiety does not have a significant impact on the level of physical appearance.

This shows that the null hypothesis is accepted and the mean, correlation and significance level justify the acceptance of null hypothesis. A study done on young adults found similar results that when the amount of concern regarding physical appearance increases, the social anxiety of individuals also increases (Dixit & Luqman, 2018).

**Table 4**
**Mean, SD & t-value of Social Anxiety among College Students**

| Variable | Gender | N | Mean | Sd | Df | t | Sig (2-Tailed) | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level of Social Anxiety | Female | 40 | 11.23 | 6.062 | 68 | -1.321 | 0.191 | Not Significant |
| | Male | 30 | 13.1 | 5.622 | | -1.335 | 0.187 | |

Table 4 shows the mean score, Standard Deviation, Degree of Freedom, t-value and level of significance of social anxiety among female and male college students. The t-test is used to find the gender difference in relation with the level of social anxiety among college students. The mean value is 11.23 for females and 13.1 for males and the SD score is 6.062 for females and 5.622 for males. The df value is 68 with the t value as

– 1.321 for females and – 1.335 for males. The statistically significant value (2 tailed) 0.191 for females and 0.187 for males shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between social anxiety and gender of college students (0.05 level).

This indicates that the null hypothesis is accepted. The mean, standard deviation, Degree of freedom, t-value and significance level justify the acceptance of

null hypothesis.This shows that mere gender of the person does not have impact on the level of social anxiety among the college students. The results indicate that there is no gender difference but the mean score shows that males are affected more than females in relation with the level of social anxiety. A reviewed literature on gender differences in social anxiety disorder (SAD) indicated that women are more likely to have SAD compared to men. Women with SAD report elevated severity and physiological arousal compared to men. Despite the findings above, men with SAD seek treatment more than women (Asher, Asnaani, &Aderka, 2017).

**Table 5**
**Mean, SD, & t value of Level of Negative Self-portrayal among College Students**

| Variable | Gender | N | Mean | Sd | Df | t | Sig (2-Tailed) | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level of Negative Self-Portrayal | Female | 40 | 59 | 17.659 | 68 | -0.036 | 0.971 | Not Significant |
| | Male | 30 | 59.17 | 21.078 | | -0.035 | 0.972 | |

Table 5 shows the mean score, Standard Deviation, Degree of Freedom, t-value and level of significance of negative self-portrayal among female and male college students. The t-test is used to find the gender difference in relation with the level of negative self-portrayal among college students. The mean value is 59 for females and 59.17 for males and the SD score is 17.659 for females and 21.078 for males. The df value is 68 with the t value as – 0.036 for females and – 0.035 for males. The statistically significant value (2 tailed) 0.971 for females and 0.972 for males shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between negative self-portrayal and gender of college students (0.05 level).

This indicates that the null hypothesis is accepted. The mean, standard deviation, Degree of freedom, t-value and significance level justify the acceptance of null hypothesis.

This shows that mere gender of the person does not have impact on the level of negative self-portrayal among the college students. A study done among people between the age group of 19-63 found that males and females do not differ in independent self-concept, self-esteem (Marcic & Grum, 2011)

**Conclusion**

The study was done among college students across various colleges in Chennai. The Severity Measure for Social Anxiety Disorder and Negative Self Portrayal Scale (NSPS) were used to collect the sample responses from college students (N= 70) and proper statistical analysis were followed to test the hypothesis. This study concluded that the negative self-portrayal, negative portrayal of social competence, negative portrayal of physical appearance of college students has positive correlation on social anxiety and there is no gender difference appeared.

**Limitations of the study**

Further proceeding of the research can be made by altering the sample with individuals who already have anxiety. The study can be further replicated on a larger sample size.Limitedly the research study was done only among college graduates from Chennai and also the study was done on a small sample size which limits the generalization of the results among samples from other demography.

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