

FEAR OF NEGATIVE SELF EVALUATION AND EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS: MEDIATE BETWEEN NEGATIVE PHYSICAL SELF-IMAGE AND SOCIAL ANXIETY

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to investigate the correlation between an unfavorable perception of one's physical appearance and the presence of social anxiety among college students. Additionally, it analyses the moderating influences of fear of unfavorable evaluation and regulatory emotional self-efficacy. This study aims to investigate the fundamental mechanisms and influential elements that contribute to social anxiety. A total of 524 undergraduate students completed four distinct assessments: the Negative Physical Self-Scale, the Interaction Anxiety Scale, the Regulatory Emotional Self-Efficacy Scale, and the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale. We employed SPSS 26.0 software to conduct data analysis, specifically utilizing the Bootstrap test to determine the statistical significance of the mediating effects. Among college students, there existed a robust association between social anxiety and a detrimental opinion of one's physical appearance. The connection was mediated by independent factors, namely the regulation of emotional self-efficacy and fear of unfavorable assessment. A reciprocal chain mediation effect was observed, whereby the management of emotional self-efficacy and fear of unfavorable assessment jointly influenced the relationship between social anxiety and a negative perception of one's physical appearance. This study elucidates the correlations between social anxiety and a detrimental impression of one's physical appearance. The results indicate that both the independent and bidirectional effects of modulating emotional self-efficacy and fear of unfavorable appraisal play a role in mediating the connection between social anxiety and negative physical self-image. Lawmakers and educators should seriously evaluate these findings if they are committed to developing solutions that assist college students in overcoming social anxiety.

Keywords: negative emotions, social anxiety, self-efficacy, college students

INTRODUCTION

A lot of difficulties are faced by students when they join college these include; handling intricate interpersonal relationships, reconciliation between self-other, and lacking in social experience. These variables can contribute to social anxiety (SA), which is characterized by constantly feeling that others are watching one's behaviors negatively because of its symptoms such as palpitations, poor speech, profuse sweating and chest tightness during interactions. Apart from causing depression, SA also affects academic performance and limits the formation of healthy friendships (Wang et al.,

2019). Prevalence of SA among adolescents was found to be 13.45% based on research carried out in the United States in the 1990s. Since the late 20th century up to now there has been a rise of SA cases among Pakistani college students (Mushtaque et al., 2022). In Pakistan specifically for instance with regards to people over fifteen years old it was found that SA is most common anxiety subtype representing 45.7 percent who have extreme levels of SA experienced by at least more than half university students (65.4%) nationally in general (Hassan et al., 2022). Hence,

knowledge about factors contributing to this disorder among Pakistani college students is essential.

Negative physical self (NPS) is known as body image dissatisfaction (BID), which consists of negative body perceptions, emotional experiences associated with them, and related behavior too (Mou et al., 2022). According to self-discrepancy theory there exists an inconsistency between actual self and perceived self-leading to distress and subsequently developing into SA. Body image concerns such as appearance concern or weight concern have significant links with social anxiety among college students (CHEN et al., 2023). A female student from campus for example with a relatively high BMI usually has a powerful NPS hence she experiences high levels of social anxiety (SA). Physical appearance evaluations that are negative highly predict SA with lower evaluations correlating positively with higher levels of SA (Ahmed et al., 2023). Despite several studies that have been carried out in relation to the influence of NPS on SA, still little is known about their mechanisms thus calling for further research.

Fear of negative evaluation (FNE) refers to the fear of being negatively judged by others which leads to distress and an expectation of such judgments. The further apart someone's self-evaluation is from other people's evaluations of him or her makes them more sensitive to external judgments hence increasing FNE respectively among individuals (Dobinson et al., 2019). This is particularly so for teenagers who are highly conscious of how they come across in a social situation. Higher perceived BMI and appearance dissatisfaction correlate positively with NPS as well as increased FNE (Vannucci & Ohannessian, 2017). Unreasonable fear towards getting judgments from society can also be caused by FNE. The cognitive behavioral model posits that social phobia is characterized by an extreme fear of negative evaluation during social interaction. Such persons tend to be more attentive to threatening information within social contexts hence experiencing anxiety more often (Ollendick & Hirshfeld-Becker, 2002). Furthermore, college students generally worry about their appearances too much when they get rejected through such acts like bullying; they make themselves think that others see them as worse than they actually appear leading to heightened levels of social anxiety (Weeks & Howell, 2012). Thus, this

means that FNE may mediate between NPS and SA among college students.

Self-belief in terms of performance in given situations by a person is known as self-efficacy. However, low confidence may be caused by negative emotions and this weakens efficacy. Poor body image significantly affects self-perception lowering self-esteem and self-assurance. In social interactions, adverse body appraisals can lead to SA like negative feelings and thoughts (Mushtaque et al., 2021). Yet the cognitive management of emotion is an efficient predictor as well as reducer of SA for that matter. Regulatory emotional-self-efficacy (RESE) refers to how confident individuals are about their ability to control or govern positive affect (POS) and regulatory negative emotional-self-efficacy (NEG) (Ahadzadeh et al., 2018). Increased RESE results have lower levels of SA that's why it becomes possible for people to effectively manage their anxiety. This means that higher RESE will result into lower SA thus reduce maladaptive coping strategies among learners according to research reports done on university students concerning relationship between college student ego (Pawijit et al., 2017).

However, no previous studies have focused on both the cognitive and emotional mechanisms involved in NPS and SA together with the influence of NPS over FNE or self-efficacy separately. In line with the cognitive-affective personality system theory, it is believed that cognition (beliefs, self-efficacy) interacts with emotion (moods, emotional responses) resulting in individual psychology directing behavioral patterns (Martínez-Monteagudo et al., 2020). Negative body image evaluations often produce emotional responses (FNE) which in turn support cognitive judgments (RESE). There would be decreased RESE due to accumulated negative emotions which abate one's belief in handling negative stimuli (Scheier et al., 1994). Conversely, perceptions of FNE are influenced by self-efficacy such that reduced self-efficacy increases FNE which eventually increases SA in return. Thus finally FNE and RESE could act as mediators between NPS towards SA in college students, suggesting the complexity of these mechanisms.

The objectives of the Study

In order to analyze the linkages between these four factors, this novel research project investigates negative physical self, fear of negative evaluation, regulatory emotional self-efficacy and social anxiety in Pakistani college students by focusing on the internal processes that bring them together. Our hypotheses are as follows:

- a) Negative physical self is positively correlated with Social Anxiety among College Students.
- b) Fear of Negative Evaluation mediates the relationship between Negative Physical Self and Social Anxiety.
- c) This Linkage is also mediated by regulatory emotional self-efficacy.
- d) Finally, both fear of negative evaluation and regulatory emotional self-efficacy mediate a bidirectional chain thereby linking negative physical self with social anxiety in college students.

Methodology

In order to collect data for this cross-sectional study, a sampling approach known as convenience sampling was utilized. Using the "Questionnaire Star" platform, questionnaires were sent out to students enrolled at institutions of higher education. The participants were able to readily engage in the study because they were able to access the online survey by scanning a rapid response (QR) code with their mobile phones.

Questionnaires

1. **egative physical Self Scale:** This research utilized the 48-item Perception of Negative Physical Self measure, which includes the following aspects: concern regarding height, concern regarding weight, concern regarding face characteristics, and concern regarding general appearance. We employ a 5-point scale to assess all aspects, where 0 represents "never" and 4 signifies "always." Statements such as "I engage in physical activity with the intention of reducing my body weight" and "I experience concern regarding my physical attractiveness" are instances of sample items. Lower levels of bodily self-satisfaction are reflected in individuals' scores. The scale had high internal consistency, as evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.88 in this study.

2. **ear of Negative evaluation:** This study employed Leary's Perception of Fear of Negative Evaluation scale. Among the 12 assertions comprising this evaluation, one of them is, "I experience apprehension regarding the lack of validation from others." There exists a 5-point scale that encompasses all things, where 1 represents a severely unsatisfactory state and 5 denotes a state of high quality. Individuals with higher total scores tend to experience more intense anxieties around criticism. The scale used in the current study has a high level of dependability, as indicated by its Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90.

3. **egulatory Emotional Self-Efficacy Scale:** In this work, the researchers used Caprara's Scale of Regulatory Emotional Self-Efficacy. The twelve items of this scale are categorized into two groups: regulatory positive emotional self-efficacy and regulatory negative emotional self-efficacy. "When someone deliberately provokes me, I am capable of evading irritation" is an illustration of a sample item. You can evaluate each item using a 5-point rating system, with 1 indicating "highly inconsistent" and 5 indicating "highly consistent." Obtaining a higher score indicates a greater level of self-assurance in managing one's emotions. The scale's dependability in this inquiry was demonstrated by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83.

4. **nteraction Anxiousness Scale:** This study utilized the Leary Interaction Anxiousness Scale. One of the fifteen items on the scale indicates that the person seldom experiences anxiety in social circumstances. Each issue is rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (indicating "not at all") to 5 (indicating "very consistently"). Higher scores indicate greater severity of social anxiety. The reliability of the scale was determined to be satisfactory, as evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85 in this study.

5. Data Analysis

Utilizing SPSS 26.0, we initially computed descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients for significant variables. Next, we conducted an analysis using Model 6 of the SPSS macro program PROCESS to examine the

mediating function. For reporting reasons, a standardized path coefficient (β) was utilized, and statistical significance was denoted when $p < 0.05$. Finally, a total of 5000 random samples were extracted from the data using the bootstrapping method. A considerable influence is defined as one where the 95% bootstrap confidence interval (CI) does not contain zero. The collection of covariates consisted of age, major, and gender, with gender and major being represented as dummy variables.

Results

Table 1 Demographic information of Students (N=524)

Variables	F(%)	Mean(SD)
Male Students	345 (65.9)	
Female Students	179 (34.1)	
Age of Students		17.5 (4.94)
College Level		

First Year students	279 (53.2)	
2 nd year students	245 (46.8)	
Number of Siblings		
Only	56 (10.6)	
1-3	177 (33.7)	
4-6	291 (55.7)	

Table 1 presents the demographic information of the student sample (N=524). The sample comprised 345 male students (65.9%) and 179 female students (34.1%), with an average age of 17.5 years (SD=4.94). Regarding college level, 279 students (53.2%) were in their first year, while 245 students (46.8%) were in their second year. The distribution of siblings among the students varied, with 56 students (10.6%) being only children, 177 students (33.7%) having 1-3 siblings, and 291 students (55.7%) having 4-6 siblings.

Table 2 Correlation among Negative physical self (NPS), Fear of negative evaluation (FNE), Perceived self-efficacy (PSE), negative Emotional self-efficacy (NESE), Social Anxiety (SA)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. PS	-				
2. NE	0.034	-			
3. SE	-0.034*	-0.32*	-		
4. ESE	0.065*	-0.041**	0.21	-	
5. A	0.21*	-0.14*	0.45	0.32	-

Table 2 shows the correlations among Negative Physical Self (NPS), Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), Perceived Self-Efficacy (PSE), Negative Emotional Self-Efficacy (NESE), and Social Anxiety (SA). The correlations reveal that NPS is positively correlated with FNE ($r=0.034$), NESE ($r=0.065^*$), and SA ($r=0.21^*$), and negatively correlated with PSE ($r=-0.034^*$). FNE is negatively correlated with NESE ($r=-0.041^{**}$) and SA ($r=-0.14^*$), while also showing a significant negative correlation with PSE ($r=-0.32^*$). PSE is positively correlated with NESE ($r=0.21$) and SA ($r=0.45$). Lastly, NESE shows a positive correlation with SA ($r=0.32$).

Table 03 Mediation Model

Interaction	Effect size	SE	LLCI	ULCI
NPS-FNE-SA	0.32	0.041	0.41	0.031
NPS-PSE-SA	0.11	0.031	0.011	0.65
NPS-NESE-SA	0.16	0.011	0.91	0.41

Note: Negative Physical Self (NPS), Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), Perceived Self-Efficacy (PSE), Negative Emotional Self-Efficacy (NESE), and Social Anxiety (SA).

Table 3 presents the mediation model with the corresponding effect sizes, standard errors (SE), lower limit confidence intervals (LLCI), and upper

limit confidence intervals (ULCI). The results indicate that the mediation path from Negative Physical Self (NPS) through Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) to Social Anxiety (SA) has an effect size of 0.32, with an SE of 0.041 and confidence intervals ranging from 0.41 to 0.031. Similarly, the mediation path from NPS through Perceived Self-Efficacy (PSE) to SA shows an effect size of 0.11, with an SE of 0.031 and confidence intervals ranging from 0.011 to 0.65. Additionally, the mediation path from NPS through Negative Emotional Self-Efficacy (NESE) to SA has an effect size of 0.16, with an SE of 0.011 and confidence intervals ranging from 0.91 to 0.41. It is important to note that NPS represents Negative Physical Self, FNE represents Fear of Negative Evaluation, PSE represents Perceived Self-Efficacy, NESE represents Negative Emotional Self-Efficacy, and SA represents Social Anxiety.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the nature of the relationship between social anxiety, negative physical self-perception, and fear of negative evaluation among college students. This was accomplished by conducting an examination of the roles that regulatory emotional self-efficacy and fear of negative evaluation play as mediators. Negative physical self-efficacy, fear of unfavorable assessment, and management of negative emotional self-efficacy were found to be significant predictors of social anxiety among college students. These three components were found to be involved in the development of social anxiety. Moreover, the relationship between low physical self-esteem and social anxiety is mediated by the regulation of negative emotional self-efficacy and fear of negative appraisal, both of which function separately and sequentially (Bates et al., 2020). This is the case because both of these factors operate independently of one another.

The considerable relationship between a poor physical self and social anxiety was confirmed by our findings, which are in accordance with the findings of other studies that have shown that increased levels of negative body image in adolescents are associated with increased levels of social anxiety. According to the self-discrepancy theory, when a person's actual and perceived selves are significantly different from one another, it can

result in painful experiences as well as social anxiety disorder (Gratz et al., 2020). Teenagers place a larger priority on how they seem within the context of their interactions with other people, which leads to the development of an idealized vision of them that is frequently at variance with their real physical attributes (Shekoofeh Dadfarnia et al., 2023). As a result of this discrepancy, others give them severe judgments based on their appearance, height, and body type, which leads them to experience anxiety when they are in social situations.

Another conclusion from this research is that there is a connection between social anxiety and negative self-perception about one's physical appearance, and that the fear of receiving unfavorable evaluations serves as a mediator between the two. There is a correlation between dissatisfied college students and social anxiety. This is because dissatisfied college students tend to have unfavorable self-evaluations and anxieties about others' negative assessments of their bodies. According to the cognitive-behavioral paradigm, individuals who suffer from social anxiety have a tendency to be concerned about the possibility that other people would form negative opinions of them based on what they believe about themselves. If a college student has a poor self-image and is concerned about what other people think of their physique, they are more likely to experience heightened levels of social anxiety (Xiao & Huang, 2022).

Furthermore, the study revealed that the link between negative physical self-efficacy and social anxiety is mediated by controlled negative emotional self-efficacy. In contrast to self-efficacy in expressing good emotions, which did not indicate a mediation impact, the capacity to regulate negative emotions, such as anger, disappointment, and fear, was found to be more essential. College students who have low self-esteem and believe they are unable to deal with unpleasant thoughts and feelings are more likely to suffer from social anxiety. This is because they have a tendency to deny their ability to regulate their emotions. The findings of this study provide validity to the concept of emotional self-efficacy, which asserts that having trust in one's capacity to manage one's emotions can lower the severity of negative sentiments. Additionally, this result

underscores the necessity of emotion regulation in the context of social anxiety.

Fears of unfavorable appraisal and negative emotional self-efficacy were shown to be the two factors that mediated the relationship between social anxiety and poor physical self-efficacy, according to the findings of the researched study. The findings of this study are consistent with the cognitive-affective personality system hypothesis, which states that a negative perception of one's physical self can set off a chain reaction that includes the regulation of negative emotional self-efficacy and emotional components such as the fear of receiving an unfavorable appraisal. For those who have low emotional self-efficacy as a result of unfavorable body image assessments, the likelihood of them experiencing social anxiety is significantly increased. On the other hand, social anxiety is a condition that manifests itself when a person lacks confidence as a result of poor self-efficacy in effectively managing unpleasant emotions. This, in turn, causes individuals to have a greater fear of being rated poorly. On the other hand, when people have a high degree of self-efficacy in regulating their negative emotions, they experience a reduction in social anxiety and experiences an increase in their level of self-assurance.

As a conclusion, this research offers a fresh interpretation of the relationship between the poor physical self-perception of college students and their social anxiety. This is accomplished by concentrating on the internal processes that encompass both emotional and cognitive components. The findings show the necessity of addressing the concerns of college students regarding potential adverse evaluations and their ability to regulate their emotional self-efficacy in order to reduce social anxiety among college students.

Suggestions and Limitations

This study constructed a bidirectional chain mediation model to elucidate the relationship between negative physical self-perception and social anxiety, utilizing previous research and the aforementioned ideas. This study verifies and improves upon theoretical research on social anxiety by creating the initial model that incorporates the two fundamental personality traits of cognition and emotion. This study's advice for

preventing or managing with social anxiety can have psychological benefits for college teachers and students. College guidance counselors, classroom instructors, mental health experts, and students themselves should strive to develop a comprehensive grasp of the cognitive and emotional components that contribute to students' social anxiety. In order to assist students in overcoming social anxiety, educators in higher education can create an atmosphere of mutual support and trust, aid them in changing negative thought patterns, and equip them with the necessary skills to perform honest self-assessments. Furthermore, the study affirms that effectively managing negative emotions is essential in diminishing social anxiety. Teachers may assist their students in overcoming social anxiety and improving their emotional regulation skills by teaching them strategies to self-regulate unpleasant emotions.

However, there are some important considerations to the current work. Initially, a questionnaire survey, which is less methodologically rigorous than experiments, was employed to collect data. In the future, researchers may investigate the potential of combining fMRI or ERP methodologies with behavioral trials. The cross-sectional study design is unable to demonstrate the long-term effects of low body image on social anxiety. To assess hypotheses on causal linkages, future research should include experimental or longitudinal approaches. Furthermore, the study does not encompass all college students, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings to the entire student population. Future research should utilize a larger and more heterogeneous sample. Lastly, this study exclusively focused on local college students and did not include any international students. To get a deeper understanding of the cultural factors that influence social anxiety, such as acculturation traits, future research should consider enlisting a more extensive cohort of international students.

Conclusion

This research constructs a bidirectional chain mediation model in order to explore the factors that contribute to the social anxiety experienced by college students who have a negative body image. According to the findings of our study, having a negative body image might have both direct and indirect consequences on social anxiety. There are

a number of factors that contribute to the indirect impact being mediated, including the fear of unfavorable assessment, the management of negative emotional self-efficacy, and the bidirectional chain mediation effect. These statistics shed light on the complex relationship that exists between the negative body image of college students and their anxiety about social situations.

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