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## Body Image and Social Interaction Anxiety among Undergraduate Students

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### ABSTRACT

Psychological well-being is an essential need for humans. The need to be satisfied with one's own body can affect to a great extent. The way in which a person perceives his or her body can either build or destroy their self-esteem in a social setting. A negative perception of one's self can cause an individual to separate from a social setting. The present study focuses on the impact of perception of one's body and the role of gender as a factor in causing social interaction anxiety in a social setting. The study is conducted among 79 undergraduate students that include males and females from Kerala. The result indicates firstly that there is significant relationship between body image and social interaction anxiety secondly there is no significant difference in body image and thirdly there is no significant difference in social interaction anxiety among male and female college students.

**Keyword:** Body image, Perception, self-esteem.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The ideas of how a person views their own body are changing at an increasing rate as a result of the wide-ranging revolutions that the 21st century has brought about. The claim that college students experience social interaction anxiety due to concerns about their bodies is the main point of the essay. The self-perception and self-attitudes, which include thoughts, ideas, feelings, and behaviors, are referred to as body image (Cash,2004; Grogan,2006). The beauty of the human body is being given more consideration by the younger generation. This has brought expectations in one's mind about his or her body. When the perception of their body image contradicts to the level of expectation, dissatisfaction of one's body occurs. The individuals tend to shrink within the boundaries of their insecurity and try to be less socially active. Social interaction anxiety or social phobia is a chronic mental condition in which social interactions causes irrational anxiety, fear, self-consciousness and embarrassment. The study explores the correlation of two variables: body image, social interaction anxiety.

The objective of the study is to understand the pressure of the social standards on an individual in perceiving one's body and the way in which the perception affects social interactions. The study is very significant especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The awareness of an obstacle helps an individual to overcome the situation in a more effective way.

The sample selected for the study was a group of undergraduate students to measure the extent of correlation between the two variables: body image and social interaction anxiety. This sample helps to understand the new perspective among this generation and the pressure that is exerted by the society on the minds of the undergraduate students. This is the age group where people are highly conscious about their body image.

The term 'body image' was coined by an Australian neurologist and psychoanalyst Paul Schilder in 1935 in his book 'The Image and Appearance of the Human Body'. Body Image is how an individual perceives their own body. The physical attributes are the deciding factor in perceiving body image. The nature and attitude of the individuals is a major aspect in deciding whether the perception can be satisfactory or

dissatisfactory. Dissatisfaction about one's body occurs when the expectation of their body does not stand up with that of the social standards. It is often found that body dissatisfactions can cause a drop in confidence level, body esteem and those individuals tend to escape from situations where there is a need of social interaction or places where they feel they are being watched.

In the case of an increased body weight it was found that the social pressure from peer were high on those individuals which forces them to drop their body weight which in turn leads to body dissatisfaction (Goldfield et al., 2011). Body image plays an important role in psychological wellbeing. The feeling of dissatisfaction causes a drop in self-esteem. When one loses confidence it indirectly affects their performances. They often feel hard to walk around in daily situations and are often found less motivated. They feel highly insecure about their own body and try maximum to stay away from social interactions. The role of gender has differences in feeling social pressure in accordance with body image. It can be noticed that females feel more pressurized to have an ideal body. (Esnaola et al., 2010). Males are comparatively less affected. It is also found that the individuals with low body satisfaction are often teased and it affects them to a great level that they fear the social interaction.

Those schemas where an individual keeps it as a goal to reach the ideal body, comparison occurs. Comparison of one's body leads to a higher chance of body dissatisfaction. Once dissatisfaction occurs the individual tries to cover up or try to obtain the ideal body. This mental need is often not acquired fast and the individual feels less confident in one's own will power. And when time moves on the individual finds it harder to accept the reality and feel extremely disturbed.

The second variable under the study is social interaction anxiety or social phobia. It is an anxiety disorder where an individual feels extremely anxious, embarrassment and stress in a normal day to day settings. Social anxiety disorder is a chronic disorder which can be treated by psychotherapy and medicine.

A person with Social anxiety disorder (SAD) feels extensively high fear or anxiety in a social situation where they have to perform or is being watched or judged. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). They find it hard to cope-up with daily activities. They are often seen less active and introverted. Social interaction anxiety is a state of significant impairment in functioning which ranges from school drop outs (Stein & Kean, 2000), to students who find it hard to achieve success in academics (Wittchen et al., 1999), to a state where individuals experience diminished work productivity and even unemployment (Lecrubier et al., 2000). Individuals find it hard to move forward and they feel they have lost the control of their life. They often feel less valued. They try to cover this up from their real image but often fail, so they feel deeply depressed. Those individuals tend to be socially isolated and try to avoid friendship and romantic relationships. These individuals often feel that they are not understood by others or feel a disconnection from others.

Individuals with social interaction anxiety are often found to be embarrassed about themselves. They often doubt themselves. They find it hard to believe in their own capabilities. Those capabilities are often perceived as a thought and feel completely worthless.

Social interaction anxiety creates up a mental state in an individual that they are unwanted and inadequate for life survival and feel helpless. Social interaction anxiety can be observed not mentally alone but physically too. Social interaction anxiety can lead to physiological changes in many individuals resulting in an increase in adrenaline and cortisol and other stress hormones are released in the body. As a result, strong symptoms such as trembling, sweating, an increased heart rate and a feeling of sickness are shown. At times the individuals find it hard to handle and often fail to keep the confidence level.

Gender also plays a role in Social interaction anxiety. Epidemiological studies show that, there are high chances for Social interaction anxiety to occur in women than Men. For a life time diagnosis of Social interaction anxiety studied have shown, a rate of 1.5 times in female than men. (Magee et al., 1996; Schneier et al., 1992).

The several risk factors such as family history where there is a higher risk of chance for social interaction anxiety to occur if their biological parents have that condition. The other factor is Negative Experience of individuals who experienced bullying, rejection, humiliation in their childhood has a greater risk of social interaction anxiety. The other factors include individuals who are shy and timid. They find it hard to deal with a new situation.

Thus, the two variables body image and social interaction anxiety are interconnected. The efficiency of social interaction starts from how an individual perceives oneself. Body Image perception plays a major role. This perception can either be satisfactory or dissatisfactory. If the perception is satisfactory then positive attributes like confidence, self-esteem are all added up. But in the other case where the perception is dissatisfied negative attributes are added. These negative attributes like doubtfulness, less confidence and getting anxious can result in an individual to suffer from social interaction anxiety. The perception alone is not the deciding factor. The feedback or comments of others also plays a role in one's perception. Females tend to be affected more in the two variables. Therefore, a person with a dissatisfied body image has a greater chance to suffer from social interaction anxiety.

### **1.1. HYPOTHESES**

1. There is significant relationship between body image and social interaction anxiety among college students.
2. There is significant difference in body image among male and female college students.
3. There is significant difference in social interaction anxiety among male and female college students.

### **1.2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Nathan A. Kimbrel \*, John T. Mitchell, Rosemary O. Nelson-Gray (2009) conducted a study on the topic "An examination of the relationship between behavioural approach system (BAS) sensitivity and social interaction anxiety". The aim of the study shows that social anxiety has been linked to both behavioural approach system (BAS) sensitivity and behavioural inhibition system (BIS) sensitivity. However, results on the relationship between BAS and social anxiety have been conflicting. Furthermore, new research indicates that low BAS levels can be linked exclusively to social anxiety's social interaction subdimension. Three large analogue samples were given the BIS, BAS, social interaction anxiety, and social observation anxiety tests. As predicted, BAS was unrelated to social observation anxiety across all three populations but inversely associated with social interaction anxiety. Furthermore, compared to people who have limited or specialised social worries, people with generalised social anxieties were shown to report both greater levels of BIS and lower levels of BAS.

David Fredrick and Jamal H. Esaayli conducted a research (2016) on the topic 'Male body image: The roles of sexual orientation and Body mass index across five National US studies. The aim of the experiment was to study the difference between heterosexual and gay men to access different aspects of body image. This study was conducted on 11958 heterosexual men and 4398 gay men. They analysed five surveys which was posted on the official news website of NBC news for 2 weeks in 2003, 2006, 2010, 2011 in 2012. The findings indicate that sexual orientation plays a major role in predicting the body image concerns among men but the difference varies depending on the way they are assessed.

Goldfield et (2010) Xanthopoulos (2011) This study aimed to find how gender and a number of other variables, including weight and race, impacted how satisfied youngsters were with their bodies. There were 1212 students in grades 4 through 6 that took part. The study used the subscale of Eating Disorder Inventory 2 (EDI-2). The findings showed that female students had higher levels of body dissatisfaction. Numerous studies have demonstrated that low self-esteem, depression, prior eating disorders, and other variables can contribute to body dissatisfaction.

Sing Lee, King Lam Ng, Kathleen P S Kwok, Adley Tsang (2009) conducted a study aimed to assess the prevalence of social anxiety over the previous 12 months in which 3006 Chinese people aged 15 to 45 from Hong Kong. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the sample and it gathered

sociodemographic data of the participants. The findings suggested that social anxiety was higher in women than in men. Fear of a negative assessment or the anticipation of the worst outcome, among other things, can make someone anxious during social interactions.

Body image and social interaction anxiety was researched by Izgiç F, Akyüz G, Dogan O, and Kugu N (2004). The study aimed to understand social phobia and how it relates to one's self-esteem and body image. The method used in the study was Diagnostic Interview Schedule-III-Revised (DIS-III-R). 1003 students from Cumhuriyet University were recruited as study subjects. According to the findings, there were 9.6% of university students who experienced social phobia, and such people had poorer self-esteem.

## 2. METHOD

The sample present under the study is 79 undergraduate students including 39 males and 40 females. The sample was collected using convenient sampling. The dependent variable of the study is social interaction anxiety. The independent variable of the study is body image.

Social interaction anxiety is measured using Social Interaction Anxiety Scale, (SIAS, Mattick and Clarke, 1998). The Scale consists of 20 questions that measures the social anxiety of an individual. The Scale has ratings from 0 to 4 that is not at all characteristic or true of me to extremely characteristic or true of me. The second variable body image is measured by Body Image Scale (BIAS, Bruchon-Schweitzer, 1987). The Scale consist of 19 questions to measure the perception of the individuals body image. It consists of ratings 1 to 5 which represents two extremies. The statistical procedure used in this study was Descriptive Statistics and t-test.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Body image and social interaction anxiety: a subjective perception of one's own physical appearance and its role on an individual's social setting. It is the extreme fear experienced by an individual. Table1.1 shows the correlation between body image and social interaction anxiety.

Table 1.1 Pearson correlation,sig.(2-tailed)

Subscale	SIAS	BIAS
SIAS	PEARSON CORRELATION	-0.407490
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000194
	N	79
BIAS	PEARSON CORRELATION	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000194
	N	79

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).

Table 1.1 shows Pearson Correlation and sig (2 tailed) p-value of social interaction anxiety and body image among undergraduate students. Between the variable's social interaction anxiety and body image, the Pearson correlation coefficient is -0.407, and the associated p-value is 0.000194. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. Hence the hypothesis is accepted. There is significant

relationship between Social interaction anxiety and body image. Social interaction anxiety is negatively correlated with body image and vice-versa. It indicates the increased social interaction anxiety is related to decrease positive body image. Increase positive body image is related to decreased social interaction anxiety.

Studies (Izgiç F, Akyüz G, Dogan O, Kugu N,2004) have shown that there is significant correlation between the two variables. Dissatisfaction in perception of an individual’s body image develops social phobia. Individuals often lose their self-esteem and try to avoid social gathering. Dissatisfaction of body image causes anxiety and it is internalized and projected in the form of social phobia. Individuals who experience teasing, bullying, rejection, ridicule or humiliation of an individual’s body can cause social anxiety disorder. They become insecure of their body and are found troubled in making friends and maintaining close relationships. Hence, they isolate from a social setting.

**Body image:** Body image has often been defined as the self-perception of the physical self and the feelings and thoughts that result from that perception (Cash, 2004; Grogan, 2006).

Table 1.2 Mean, standard deviation, t-value and significance level of the sample population group for body image.

Subscale	Group	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t-value	p-value
BAIS	FEMALE UNDERGRADUATES	40	61.75	7.605	-1.290	.201
	MALE UNDERGRADUATES	39	64.08	8.418	-1.288	.202

Table 1.2 shows the mean, standard deviation-value and significance level of the sample population group for social interaction anxiety. The result is obtained using t-test for statistical analysis. The mean value of undergraduate females and undergraduate males are 61.75 and 64.08 respectively. The standard deviation of undergraduate females and undergraduate males are 7.605 and 8.418 respectively. The t-value of undergraduate females and undergraduate males are -1.290 and -1.288 respectively. The p-value of undergraduate females and undergraduate males are .201 and .202 respectively. This indicates that the difference is not significant. Thus, the hypothesis is rejected. Studies (Goldfield et al., 2010; Xanthopoulos et al., 2011) have shown that gender difference do play a role in perceiving one’s own body and that females are more affected than men. This result must have occurred because the sample is small and might be because of other internal and external factors.

**Social Interaction Anxiety:** Social interaction anxiety is an intense, persistent fear experienced by an individual in a social setting. They are often ruled by the fear that they are being watched and judged by others. It makes them harder to cooperate with their environment. Table 1.3 shows the role of gender on social interaction anxiety.

Table 1.3 Mean, standard deviation, t-value and significance level of the sample population group for social interaction anxiety.

Subscale	Group	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t-value	p-value
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	<b>FEMALE UNDERGRADUATES</b>	40	31.88	16.125	-.455	.651
<b>SIAS</b>	<b>MALE UNDERGRADUATES</b>	39	33.28	10.782	-.457	.649

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Table 1.3 shows the mean, standard deviation, t-value and significance level of the sample population group for social interaction anxiety. The result is obtained using t-test for statistical analysis. The mean value of undergraduate females and undergraduate males are 31.88 and 33.28 respectively. The standard deviation of undergraduate females and undergraduate males are 16.125 and 10.782 respectively. The t-value of undergraduate females and undergraduate males are -.455 and -.457 respectively. The p-value of undergraduate females and undergraduate males are .651 and .649 respectively. This indicates that the difference is not significant. Thus, the hypothesis is rejected. But there are studies that have shown gender difference in social interaction anxiety (Lee, Ng, Kwok, & Tsang, 2009) where females are more affected than men. This may be because of a small sample and other internal and external factors.

#### 4. IMPLICATION

Physical appearance is a deciding factor which contributes to form a body image of oneself. The study mainly focused on how the body image plays a role in generating social interaction anxiety among the undergraduate students. The degree to which one is able to enjoy and benefit from interaction impacts the development of personal relationships. The behavioral manifestations of social anxiety may have implications for social outcomes. Unfortunately, little is known about how anxiety shapes social interaction. The present study gives awareness of how dissatisfaction in perception of body image can cause social interaction anxiety. Understanding the problem helps the society to find ways to tackle the obstacles and move forward ensuring psychological as well as physical well-being.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The objective of the study was to form a correlation between the two variables body image and social interaction anxiety among undergraduate college students. The hypothesis of the study was 1. There is significant relationship between body image and social interaction anxiety among college students. 2. There is significant difference in body image among male and female college students. 3. There is significant difference in social interaction anxiety among male and female college students. The sample was conducted in 79 students including 39 males and 40 females. The tool Used to measure social interaction anxiety was Social Interaction Anxiety Scale ((SIAS, Mattick and Clarke, 1998). The Scale consists of 20 questions that measures the social anxiety of an individual. The tool used to measure body image was (BIAS, Bruchon-Schweitzer, 1987). The Scale consist of 19 questions to measure the perception of the individuals body image. The analysis was done by t-test. From the score obtained, there is significant correlation between body image and social interaction anxiety. The study can be beneficial for the society since the psychological well-being starts from the attitude and perception of an individual. This study provides awareness to the new generation and helps them to tackle their insecurities about their bodies. It can also lead to lift up their self-esteem and overcome social interaction anxiety.

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