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Abstract

Social anxiety has been linked to both the Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) and the

Fear of Positive Evaluation, suggesting that receiving feedback (whether positive or negative) is

difficult for persons with social anxiety. However, little research has examined whether

receiving feedback in an evaluative setting (e.g., dating) can directly affect social anxiety levels.

Thus, this study examined whether varying types of feedback (negative, positive, and neutral)

can affect the levels of social anxiety for individuals in a dating scenario. Feedback was provided

to participants and examined in relation to their levels of FNE and FPE. Participants consisted of

undergraduate students who completed measures online both before and after being asked to

imagine themselves receiving feedback in a dating scenario. The results demonstrated that, in a

dating situation, receiving positive feedback can decrease social anxiety levels whereas receiving

negative feedback can increase social anxiety levels.

Role of Feedback and Social Anxiety in Dating Situations

Social anxiety is associated with experiencing a variety of maladaptive cognitions and behaviors in social situations. In particular, people with social anxiety often have difficulty in settings that involve potential social evaluation, such as dating. This paper examined the literature on the role that differing types of evaluation may play in dating situations. In addition, a study was proposed to examine these relationships.

Social Anxiety

Social anxiety is characterized as experiencing an out of proportion fear related to a social situation which leads to avoiding people and situations (APA, 2013). Individuals with social anxiety pay selective attention to their surroundings and negatively evaluate their behavior in that environment (APA, 2013). Due to this tendency, they may feel anxious and experience feelings of humiliation, embarrassment, or rejection. Thus, socially anxious individuals may avoid performing tasks in front of others, such as eating, drinking, having a conversation, or meeting unfamiliar people, as in situations like online dating.

A cognitive model of social anxiety was proposed by Clarks and Well (1995), as shown in figure 1. This model explains the cognitive processing of a socially anxious individuals in feared social situations. People with social anxiety often hold assumptions about themselves which are divided into three categories (Clark, 2001). The first category is having *excessively high standards for social performance*, e.g., the socially anxious individuals may think that they need to sound extremely interesting to their partner in a dating setting. The second category is *conditional beliefs concerning social evaluation*, e.g., "If I am quiet on my first date, then my dating partner will think that I am a boring person." The third category is *unconditional beliefs*

about the self, e.g., the person may think that their dating partner will never going accept and love them.

These assumptions may be activated when entering a social situation, and often the social anxiety increases (Clark, 2001). The individual may start focusing on detailed monitoring of oneself and others when interacting with others (e.g., paying excessive attention to whether their partner is smiling). After detailed monitoring, these individuals may start evaluating oneself negatively based on the internal thought processing and hints that they have observed in their surrounding *(processing of oneself as social object) (*Clark, 2001). After experiencing fear in the social situation, socially anxious individuals often engage in behaviors that keep them safe, such as avoidance, because they think that other people can observe their physical, behavioral, and cognitive symptoms related to anxiety, such as blushing, sweating, or fumbling (Clark, 2001).

Socially anxious individuals also tend to do a "post-mortem" (Clarks, 2001, p. 74) of the social situation after the event is completed. They evaluate their social interaction and compare them with their past interactions and then derive a conclusion about whether they have interacted properly or poorly. They tend to have a negative self-perception about themselves, and thus, they tend to evaluate the situation more negatively than it really was. Although the social interaction may look normal from an outsider's perspective, they may overjudge a situation, resulting in them experiencing subsequent excessive fear, distress, and anxiety. In the next section, we will discuss how social anxiety plays a role in a person developing the fear of negative and positive evaluation.

Fear of negative evaluation and social anxiety

The feeling of discomfort, anxiety, distress, or fear in social situations that one experiences by being judged by others are social-evaluative situations (Watson & Friend, 1969). Fear of negative evaluation (FNE) is described as fearing, avoiding, and feeling distressed about the negative evaluative social situation and expecting that one is going to be judged negatively (Watson & Friends, 1969). For example, socially anxious individuals may think that they do not know how to conduct themselves in front of others. People with social anxiety tend to negatively judge themselves in social situations. The judgments that they make about themselves, and others often are inaccurate because they are not based on actual information. Specifically, these judgements are based on their internal beliefs about themselves and what they have perceived about their surroundings, which is distorted much of the time (Clark and Wells, 1995).

Let us suppose that individuals with high levels of FNE go on a date, and they are sweating or blushing due to anxiety. They will try to hide or cover these symptoms; for example, they may say that they are feeling hot and that is why they are sweating, or they will cover their face to avoid people seeing their blushing. These behaviors are called "safety behaviors" (Clark & Wells, 1995) and help people with high FNE to avoid facing negative consequences because of their anxiety.

An individual with high levels of FNE may perceive that people notice them cover their face to hide their blushing, which in turn can lead to them experiencing increased physical and cognitive symptoms. Socially anxious individuals with high FNE interpret the situation differently as compared to what the actual surrounding is because they process the hints differently that are present in one's surrounding, such as ignoring positive feedback (e.g., a person smiling) and focusing more on negative feedback (e.g., a dating partner breaking eye

contact), which may make them derive a negative self-assessment (e.g., I'm not attractive).

Individuals with high FNE tend to engage in safety behavior, so that their anxiety is decreased.

However, their anxiety subsequently increases when using safety behaviors because engaging in

safety behavior involves avoidance. Therefore, the anxiety will persist in individuals with FNE

who engage in safety behavior.

Watson and Friend (1969) posit that FNE is present in any evaluative social situation,

such as being on a date, performing on stage, being interviewed for a job, or conversing with

one's supervisor. Individuals with FNE often do not accept criticism in a healthy way; instead,

they avoid such situations where criticism is more likely to occur because they fear criticism

(Watson & Friends, 1969). In contrast, individuals with low levels of FNE may prefer to work on

the area where they lack certain skills, and they may try to improve oneself by taking criticism in

a constructive way.

Numerous studies have found that non-anxious people rate their own social performance

more positively than socially anxious people (e.g., Beidel, Turner, & Dancu, 1985; Dodge,

Heimberg, Nyman, & O'Brien, 1987). Clark and Arkowitz (1975) & Glasgow and Arkowitz

(1975) found that college students who were socially anxious as compared to non-anxious

college students rated their performance more negatively in social situations as opposed to

ratings provided by a judge observing the performance. Furthermore, Stopa and Clark (1992)

found that individuals with social anxiety did not perform well, underrated their performance,

and had more negative self-evaluative thoughts. Edelmann and Baker (2002) found that people

with social tension (i.e., mental pressure developed by people in their surrounding) tend to think

more negatively about themselves, leading to wear and tear on the body as compared to people

without social nervousness.

Negative thoughts play an important role in regulating FNE in socially anxious individuals. Negative self-evaluative statements moderate the link between state anxiety and trait social anxiety, which means that state anxiety and trait social anxiety depend on negative self-evaluative statements (Schulz, Alpers, and Hofmann, 2008). Negative self-evaluative statements (e.g., 'I made a noise while drinking coffee and made my partner feel embarrassed in front of others' or 'I do not know how to greet others which will make others think that I lack social skills') are associated with thoughts that increase an individual's anxiety in evaluative social situations, such as dating situations.

FNE can be measured using the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (BFNES; Leary, 1983). Using this measure, numerous studies have found that FNE is correlated positively with social anxiety (Watson & Friend, 1969) (Beidel et al., 1985; Mansell & Clark, 1999; Rapee & Lim, 1992; Stopa & Clark, 1993; Stopa & Clark, 2000; Wenzel, 2004). In addition, the individual is highly involved in avoiding disapproval by others or seeking social approval when they score high on this construct, which may lead to avoiding evaluative situations.

Fear of positive evaluation and social anxiety

The concept of fear of positive evaluation (FPE) was proposed by Weeks, Heimberg, and Rodebaugh (2008). Individuals high in FPE often experience distress when receiving positive evaluation, especially in social situations, and therefore may avoid positive evaluations by others. Individuals with social anxiety are apprehensive and worried about receiving a compliment, appreciation, or reward for their performance in different settings. For example, a person with social anxiety may fear receiving a compliment from a professor for receiving the highest test score in the class. These individuals think that such compliments and appreciations put them in the spotlight, and everyone may notice them, which makes them anxious and fearful

of the social situation despite receiving a positive evaluation. For example, if a female partner

receives a compliment (e.g., "You look gorgeous") on her first date, then this compliment may

make her conscious about herself and think that everyone notices her. In addition, she may feel

the pressure to appear physically attractive on every date in order to meet the expected standards

of her partner. Thus, this situation may lead her to be fearful and distressed about the date and

the social surroundings, even though she has received a positive evaluation by her partner.

According to Weeks, Heimberg, Rodebaugh and Norton (2008), fear of positive

evaluation makes the individual experience similar symptoms as experienced by any other fear

of evaluation. To avoid experiencing physical and cognitive symptoms, these individuals engage

in safety behaviors when they enter a social situation where there may be an increased chance of

receiving a positive evaluation, as described in Clarks & Wells model (1995). Weeks and

colleagues (2008) noted that a structure to understand FPE may be provided by the Gilbert's

(2001) Psycho-Evolutionary Model, whereby FPE may be viewed as an increase in the position

in a hierarchical group symbolically in individuals with FPE. For example, an individual with

FPE may see the praise for their work as a sign of gaining higher status or position over others in

their work organization and therefore perceive the positive evaluation as a threat. The symbolic

increase can lead to distress and conflict with higher ranked individuals with FPE, whereas fear

of negative evaluation (FNE) represents a decrease in social rank symbolically (Weeks &

Howell, 2014).

Developed by Weeks, Heimberg, and Rodebaugh (2008), the Fear of Positive Evaluation

Scale (FPES) is a 10 item self-report scale used to measure FPE. An individual with an elevated

FPES score is highly uncomfortable in receiving positive evaluation after performing in front of

others, and thus they will be more likely to avoid situations where positive evaluation is likely to occur.

Furthermore, Weeks and colleagues (2010) examined undergraduate students and a clinical sample of persons with social anxiety disorder and found that scores on the Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale correlated with the person's tendency to dismiss possible positive social outcomes. Findings by Heimberg and Becker (2002) suggest that the disqualification of the positive social situation outcomes is a cognitive thought process involved in individuals with social anxiety.

In sum, numerous studies have documented the link between social anxiety and fear of both negative and positive evaluation. In addition, scores on the Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale correlate less strongly to measures of generalized anxiety symptoms/worry and depression as compared to social anxiety measures (Fergus et al., 2009; Weeks, Heimberg, & Rodebaugh, 2008; Weeks, Heimberg, Rodebaugh, & Norton, 2008), suggesting that social anxiety has a unique relationship here. Carter and colleagues (2012) compared FNE and FPE as predicting their response to social challenge, i.e., being anxious. The results demonstrated that FNE was a stronger predictor of anxiety than was FPE. The physiological responses were found to be same in both cases, when being evaluated negatively and positively. Furthermore, social anxiety helps individuals in coping with their feelings of fear of recognition and isolation by acting as a protective mechanism to these individuals (Rodebaugh, Weeks, Gordon, Langer and Heimberg, 2012). The balance between being recognized or being the focus of attention and being isolated or lonely can be achieved by using this mechanism, indicating that fear of both positive and/or negative evaluation can trigger anxiety in an individual.

Studies have found that, although FNE and FPE are correlated positively, they also appear to be distinct constructs, which has been discussed as the Bivalent Fear of Evaluation Model of social anxiety (Weeks, Jakatdar, & Heimberg, 2010). Specifically, studies (e.g., Carter et al., 2012; Rodebaugh et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2011) have found that FNE and FPE contributes different variance in the prediction of social anxiety. In the next section, we will discuss how feedback plays its role in social anxiety in people.

Feedback

Feedback plays an important role in changing a person's perception about himself/herself. Receiving feedback involves many cognitive processes, and after processing this social information, individuals typically categorize the feedback as negative, positive, or neutral/ambiguous (Glazier & Alden, 2019)). This mechanism of categorizing feedback is prominent in individuals with social anxiety (Glazier & Alden, 2019). The likelihood of a person performing a social behavior again in the future largely depends on the type of feedback received previously. Let us suppose that a person gave a dance performance and received positive feedback, such as "You danced gracefully and flawlessly." A typical person may be compelled to do more dance performances in the future because of this positive feedback.

However, feedback often works differently for people with high levels of either FNE or FPE. The situation of receiving feedback is perceived as threatening for individuals with high levels of FNE or FPE, and by extension, social anxiety. Weeks and colleagues (2010) found that people with FNE/FPE do not show any desire to receive any kind of feedback. In a study by Weeks, Howells, and Goldin (2013), FNE correlated positively with negative and positive feedback, whereas FPE correlated positively with positive feedback but not with negative feedback.

Zhang and colleagues (2018) examined trait anxiety and the influences on their cognitive processing of anticipating feedback. The high trait anxiety group experienced more anxiety as compared to low anxiety trait group when there was more waiting time for receiving the feedback. The low trait anxiety group was happier receiving feedback than was the high trait anxiety group. This study shows that anticipating feedback can impact individuals with high and low trait anxiety differently.

Self – confidence in females is dependent on the feedback that they receive after performing in a social evaluative context. Stewart and Corbin (1988) found an improvement in the self-confidence of females who received feedback about their performance as compared to females who did not receive it. People with low self-confidence typically are fearful of entering social evaluative situations. Thus, if a young woman with low self-esteem goes on a date, then it may be important for her to receive positive feedback about how she has presented herself, which may increase her confidence and reinforce social behaviors. However, it is largely unknown whether the same mechanism works for people with FNE or FPE; that is, whether feedback is helpful in social evaluative situations.

Lundh and colleagues (2002) suggest that audio-taped feedback can be used to lessen the negative self-evaluation of one's voice performance, such as giving a speech or presentation in class. The concept of using audio and video feedback with cognitive preparation may assist individuals with social anxiety by lessening the self-attention and help them in forming a practically valid evaluation (Nilsson and Lundh, 2016). Glazier and Aden (2019) showed that over time, participants with social anxiety recalled positive feedback as less positive in comparison to that did participants without social anxiety.

Positive feedback and social anxiety

In this section, we will discuss whether positive feedback helps in reducing social anxiety in individuals with FNE or worsens the situation for individuals with FPE. Individuals with high levels of FNE may assume that other people are evaluating them negatively, as they tend to focus on irrelevant cues in the surroundings. If they are provided with positive feedback, then their anxiety might be reduced. The reason for the reduction in anxiety could be their attention shifting from irrelevant social cues to the feedback. However, there are still questions regarding whether the attention eventually shifts to the irrelevant social cues in individuals with social anxiety after receiving the feedback or, in general, whether feedback has any effect in reducing social anxiety.

The same process needs to be explored with individuals with FPE. They are fearful of receiving positive evaluation about themselves because they may think that they will have to meet these high standards every time in the future in order to make others happy. These kinds of thoughts, such as not wanting to disappoint others or making others happy by meeting their expectations, can cause anxiety in individuals with high levels of FPE. Therefore, it may be difficult for them to cope with receiving positive feedback from others; instead, they may focus on cues that point towards evaluating oneself positively, which in turn can increase social anxiety.

Wallace and Alden (1997) support the above discussion, as they found that high standards that were formed in a social anxious person's cognition may lead them to experience more anxiety by perceiving that they may not meet those standards in the future. Also, individuals with social anxiety do not like to be the center of attention, which often leads them to avoid positive feedback, as it may increase competition among their peers for social attention. This process may negatively affect their relationships (e.g., Gilbert, 2001; Weeks et al., 2008).

Several studies show that individuals with social anxiety tend to avoid feedback more so than non-anxious individuals (e.g., Chen et al., 2012; Chen et al; 2015; Garner et al., 2006; Weeks et al., 2013). Avoiding feedback can act as a safety behavior for individuals with social anxiety, as discussed in the Clarks and Wells model (1995). Gilboa-Schechtman, Shachar, and Sahar (2014) and Kashdan (2007) found that people with social anxiety do not benefit from receiving positive feedback as their anxiety level does not decrease after receiving positive feedback. An inability to reduce the anxiety level in people with social anxiety after receiving positive feedback is called 'positivity impairment.' Weeks and colleagues (2008) found that individuals with social anxiety do not benefit from positive feedback. Therefore, this research suggests that people with social anxiety may lack the ability to profit from positive feedback.

Negative feedback and social anxiety

When receiving negative feedback, many if not most people will become upset, angry, or flustered. Negative feedback rarely makes anyone happy, but constructive negative feedback can help an individual grow and work on the areas where they need to improve. If the words are not chosen wisely while giving a constructive criticism, however, a person could become upset by harsh or insensitive negative feedback, in particular for someone with high levels of social anxiety. The situation can have a negative impact on an individual with social anxiety because they already tend to negatively evaluate themselves in social settings, even without any concrete evidence about the quality of their performance. People with FNE may exhibit physical symptoms in social situations, such as sweating or trembling. These symptoms may be observable by individuals and/or the person with social anxiety may perceive social cues that they interpret as such.

Researchers have identified four categories of feedback: neutral feedback, negative feedback, positive feedback, and non-feedback. Positive feedback is considered to be good as it makes the person feel good about themselves, makes them feel happy and increases their self-confidence. Negative feedback is considered to be bad as the person usually does not want to hear because they upset the people, makes them sad and reduces their self-esteem. Neutral feedback does not make any difference to a person when received because it typically does not elevate mood or affect confidence.

People with social anxiety tend to focus their attention on negative facial expressions, such as sadness and anger (Buckner, Dewall, Schmidt, & Maner, 2010) rather than focusing on positive facial expressions, such as happiness which was found in non-anxious individuals (Liang et al, 2017). Nowack and Mashihi (2012) found that negative feedback can have a harmful emotional effect on an individual (Nowack & Mashihi, 2012), which can be particularly salient for individuals with social anxiety. These individuals also experience physical symptoms, such as sweating, trembling, or shaking, apart from emotional effect.

Social anxiety in dating setting

Dating can be an anxiety-provoking situation. Even experienced people who are dating new partners often become anxious on their first date. Hence, it is natural for people with no experience to feel particularly nervous on their first date with a new partner, as people usually want the other person to like and accept them on the first date. Thus, our expectations for ourselves usually are high.

Dating for socially anxious individuals can be particularly difficult. People with high levels of FPE worry that they may set expectations too high for their next date. They may be

fearful of receiving compliments from their partner, such as "You look beautiful today" or "Your conversation kept me engaged." The individual with FPE will feel the pressure of looking beautiful or making the conversation interesting on upcoming dates. It is difficult for them to understand that it is not their sole responsibility to always keep the conversation interesting.

People with FNE tend to notice and interpret irrelevant cues from their social setting, which makes them more anxious. Sometimes, they fear that their dating partner can see that they are sweating & blushing because they are nervous or feeling shy. They tend to blame themselves if the date does not go right, which makes them fearful of going on other dates. If they make a minor mistake on a date, then they think that they have embarrassed everyone around them. It is difficult for people with FNE to understand that it is not a big deal to make mistakes on their dates, even on the beginning ones.

Excessive shyness, sweating, and trembling may make it difficult for the date to go smoothly. Sometimes, these symptoms are not evident to their partner, but their perception of getting noticed by the other partner ruins the date in their mind, this judgment may be inaccurate, and their partner might be enjoying the date. Does giving feedback on their dates, especially on the initial date, help make the socially anxious person comfortable and feel less anxiety? Positive feedback usually helps individuals in dating setting to put them at ease, but we do not know how feedback is processed or interpreted by individuals with FNE or FPE. Thus, we need to further examine the role of feedback in dating setting on social anxious individuals.

Current Study and Hypotheses

The primary goal of this study is to examine the possible role of feedback in social anxiety in dating settings. Prior research has consistently found a positive correlation between

social anxiety and FNE (Beidel et al., 1985; Mansell & Clark, 1999; Rapee & Lim, 1992; Stopa

& Clark, 1993; Stopa & Clark, 2000; Wenzel, 2004). Comparatively, there is a less literature

available on social anxiety and FPE, although results have indicated a consistent positive

correlation.

 With regard to different social-evaluative situations, there is an ample literature available

on socially anxious individuals in public speaking and testing settings. In contrast, there is much

less research on dating situations. This study can fill the gap in the literature by examining the

role of feedback in a dating setting on social anxious individuals. Specifically, this study

presented participants with dating scenarios in which they were provided various types of

feedback.

 Hypothesis 1 examined the impact of positive feedback on the level of social anxiety of a

person in the dating setting. We predicted that positive feedback provided in a dating setting

would decrease levels of social anxiety.

 Hypothesis 2 examined the impact of negative feedback on the level of social anxiety of a

person in the dating setting. We predicted that negative feedback provided in a dating setting

would increase levels of social anxiety.

 Hypothesis 3 examined the impact of neutral feedback on the level of social anxiety level

of a person in the dating setting. We predicted that neutral feedback provided in a dating setting

would not significantly change levels of social anxiety.

 Hypothesis 4 examined the relationship between (1) changes in social anxiety levels (post

minus pre) after receiving negative feedback and (2) fear of negative evaluation (FNE) scores.

We predicted that the difference score (post minus pre) for social anxiety for each negative

feedback scenario would be correlated with scores on the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale. Thus, we will be able to examine whether FNE levels are related to the affect that negative feedback has on participants.

Hypothesis 5 examined the relationship between (1) changes in social anxiety levels (post minus pre) after receiving positive feedback and (2) fear of positive evaluation (FPE) scores. We predicted that the difference score (post minus pre) for social anxiety for each positive feedback scenario would be correlated with scores in the Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale. Thus, we were able to examine whether FPE levels are related to the affect that positive feedback has on participants.

Method

Participants

Participants were undergraduate students in the Psychology Department SONA research pool. A priori power analysis for t-test for dependent means (1-tailed) was conducted and suggested that a sample size of 65 would provide adequate power at the .05 level.

The initial sample consisted of 139 participants. Fourteen people provided insufficient data to be included, yielding a final sample of 125 participants. The sample was 71.2% female (n = 89) and 26.4% male (n = 33); 2.4% participants identified as "other" (n = 3). Racially, participants identified 64% White/ Caucasian (n = 80), 27.2% Black or African American, (n = 34), 3.2% Hispanic or Latino/a (n = 4), 8% Asian or Pacific Islander (n = 1) and 4.8% "other" (n = 6). With regard to relationship status, 40.8% participants reported being in a relationship (n = 51), 53.6% participants reported being single (n = 67), 4.8% participants reported being in a complicated relationship (n = 6), and 1 participant reported being married.

Measures

Social Interaction Anxiety Scale

The Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS; Mattick & Clarke, 1989) measures social anxiety an individual experiences when interacting and having conversations with friends, strangers, or partners. The SIAS is a 20-item self-reported scale, and each item is rated from 0 to 4 (0 = "not at all characteristic or true to me" and 4 = extremely characteristic or true to me"), with possible scores ranging from 0 to 80 (Brown and colleagues, 1997). Reverse scoring is done on 3 items: 5, 9 and 11. High scores on this scale represent high level of social interaction anxiety in an individual. The scale has excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$; Carleton and colleagues, 2007). Also, the scale has high test-retest reliability and discriminant validity ($r > .90$) (Brown and colleagues, 1997). The scale has items such as "I feel tense if I am alone with just one other person," and "I have difficulty making eye contact with others."

Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale II

The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale II (BFNE-II; Leary, 1983) measures an individual's fear of being negatively judged. The BFNE - II is a 12-item self-report scale and each item is rated from 1 to 5 where 1 = "not at all characteristic to me" and 5 = "extremely characteristic of me", with possible scores ranging from 12 to 60. Reverse scoring is done on 4 items: 2, 4, 7, and 10. The scale has high internal consistency ($\alpha = .95$, Carleton and colleagues, 2007). BFNE-II items were correlated with independent measures of social anxiety (i.e., Social Phobia Scales & Social Interaction Anxiety Scales) and found to have moderate convergent validity ($.50 < r < .69$; Westgard, 1999). The scale has items such as "I often worry that I will say or do the wrong things" and "I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make."

Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale

The Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale (FPES; Weeks & colleagues, 2008) measures the fear of being judged positively. The FPES is a 10-item self-report scale, and each item is rated from 0 to 9 where 0 = "not at all true" and 9 = "very true", with possible scores ranging from 0 to 90. Reverse scoring is done on 2 items: 5 and 10. The scale has good internal consistency (α = .89) and test– retest reliability among wait-list participants (n = 27) over 4.5 months (r = .80; Weeks and colleagues, 2011). The scale has strong discriminant validity in a clinical sample (Weeks & colleagues, 2011). The scale also correlates positively with other social anxiety measures (Weeks and colleagues, 2011). The scale has items such as "I generally feel uncomfortable when people give me compliments" and "I don't like to be noticed when I am in public places, even if l feel as though I am being admired."

Dating Scenarios

The Dating Scenarios were developed by this author, based on items from the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (Liebowitz, 1987). These scenarios are divided into two categories: 1) eating and drinking and 2) partner interactions. The first category consists of scenarios involving eating or drinking in front of a partner. The second category consists of six scenarios: working while being observed by a partner, meeting a partner face to face for the first time, talking with a partner face to face for the first time, entering a dating setting where a partner is already seated, participating with a partner in an activity, and making eye contact with a partner face for the first time. For each scenario, the participant is provided with either positive, negative, or neutral feedback. Participants were asked to provide a base level of social anxiety via an item, "You have talked to your dating partner online via a dating site (e.g., Tinder, Bumble, Hinge, and Coffee Meets Beagle). Your dating partner is approaching you for the first time in-person in a

restaurant*"*; specifically, participants rated their social anxiety on a scale ranging from 0 to 3, where 0 = none and 3 = severe. After receiving the feedback, participants were then asked to provide their level of social anxiety of again (i.e., Post score) for each feedback in every scenario.

Procedures

Participants were asked to provide consent before completing the questionnaires via Qualtrics. Participants received course credit for their participation. They were randomly placed into one of three groups: (1) positive feedback, (2) negative feedback, or (3) neutral feedback. All participants received the "Baseline Dating Scenario" (see Appendix) and asked to provide a rating of their social anxiety on a 4-point scale; this initial scenario provided a baseline (pre) rating of the participant's social anxiety level. Participants then received the remaining dating scenarios and asked to rate their level of social anxiety when provided the described positive, negative, or neutral feedback; thus, these scores will serve as the post scores of the participant's levels of social anxiety. The scenarios (other than the Baseline Dating Scenario) were randomized for each participant within the three groups. A debriefing form was provided at the end of the study, which included the information related to the study and contact details for questions about the study.

<div align="center">

Results

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Descriptive statistics such as Mean, standard deviation and range were also calculated for each scale as shown in Table 1. For each scale, the Cronbach's alpha was calculated. The internal consistency for each scale is acceptable ranging from .75 to .94, as shown in Table 1. Furthermore, the alpha for participants' social anxiety levels after receiving feedback were

examined for negative, positive, and neutral feedback. Specifically, the alphas for the three

categories were all excellent (ranging from .84 to ,94), suggesting that averaging across the

participants' items in each category was acceptable. These averaged scores were used for all

subsequent analyses.

Correlations were also examined among social anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and

fear of positive evaluation. Fear of negative evaluation was correlated positively with fear of

positive evaluation ($r = .55$, $p<.001$), which is consistent of the moderate correlation found in

other studies (e.g., Weeks and colleagues, 2008). Social anxiety was correlated positively with

both fear of negative evaluation ($r = .66$, $p <.001$) and fear of positive evaluation ($r = .64$, p

$<.001$), which replicates findings from prior research (e.g., Beidel et al., 1985; Mansell & Clark,

1999; Rapee & Lim, 1992; Stopa & Clark, 1993; Stopa & Clark, 2000; Wenzel, 2004).

Main Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 predicted that positive feedback provided in a dating setting would decrease

levels of social anxiety. A t-test for dependent means was conducted on the pre- and post- levels

of social anxiety levels after receiving positive feedback in a dating setting (Table 2). At an alpha

level of .05 for one-tailed tests, results show that the social anxiety levels of individuals ($M =$

1.88, $SD = .82$) decreased significantly after receiving positive feedback ($M = 8.17$, $SD = 4.60$),

$t(46) = -9.984$, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that negative feedback provided in a dating setting would increase

levels of social anxiety. A t-test for dependent means was conducted on pre- and post-levels of

social anxiety levels after receiving negative feedback in the dating setting (Table 2). At an alpha

level of .05 for one-tailed tests, the social anxiety levels of individuals ($M = 1.82$, $SD = .83$)

significantly increased after receiving negative feedback (M = 13.92, SD = 7.27), $t(37)$ = -11.06, p <.001.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that neutral feedback provided in a dating setting would not significantly change levels of social anxiety. A t-test for dependent means was conducted on the social anxiety levels after receiving the neutral feedback in the dating setting (Table 2). At an alpha level of .05 for one-tailed tests, the social anxiety levels of individuals (M = 1.97, SD = .93) did not significantly change after receiving neutral feedback (M = 10.69, SD = 5.49), $t(38)$ = -11.09, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that that the difference score (post minus pre) for social anxiety in each negative feedback scenario would be correlated with scores on the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale. This hypothesis was not upheld, as there was not a significant relationship between the difference score of any items of negative feedback scenario and scores in the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale ($r(36)$ =.26, p = .12).

Hypothesis 5 predicted that the difference score (post minus pre) for social anxiety on each positive feedback scenario would be correlated with scores in the Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale). This hypothesis was not upheld, as there was not a significant relationship between the difference score of any items of positive feedback scenario and scored in the Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale ($r(46)$ =.24, p = .10).

Discussion

This study examined the possible role of differing types of feedback (positive, negative and neutral) on social anxiety levels in a dating setting. Relatively little research has explored social anxiety in dating situations, even though it is a commonly feared social situation. Thus, we

had participants imagine themselves in various dating situations and then rate their levels of

social anxiety after receiving feedback in order to test experimentally whether feedback could

affect their levels of social anxiety.

Dating often is an anxiety-provoking situation for many individuals with social anxiety.

People with social anxiety may find it difficult to hold a conversation with their dating partner, at

least on an initial date. Perhaps contributing to this problem, many people today seek dating

companions on various online dating apps such as Tinder, Bumble, or Coffee meets Bagel. Just

imagine how anxiety provoking and fearful this situation can be for a person with social anxiety

when meeting their partner on the first date, particularly given that the initial contact may have

been limited to online interactions.

Hypothesis 1 was upheld, as we predicted that positive feedback provided in an imaginal

dating setting would lead to a decrease in levels of social anxiety. Feedback in social situations

can be powerful, as it can put a person at ease or provoke anxiety, depending on the type of

feedback. The findings of the present study demonstrate that a person's social anxiety can

decrease if they receive positive feedback from a dating partner, even when using imaginal

scenarios. In this study, a person who was socially anxious before their date was put at ease

when they received positive social feedback from their dating partner. Likewise, findings

indicated that negative feedback from a dating partner can increase the social anxiety of a person

in an imaginal dating situation. People with social anxiety often criticize themselves without

reason and focus or even ruminate on negative feedback. If socially anxious individuals may

already be primed to think that they are badly dressed or that they will not make a favorable

impression on a date, then receiving negative feedback from their partner can validate their

already skewed and negative-leaning thought processes. Thus, this process can lead to an

increase in their feelings of social anxiety and make them feel more self-conscious about their perceived flaws during a date, especially when given credence by a dating partner.

Hypothesis 2 was also upheld, as we predicted that negative feedback provided in a dating setting would lead to an increase in levels of social anxiety. Negative feedback may reinforce the negative thoughts that people with social anxiety often have about their social abilities and so forth (e.g., their physical appearance) in social situations. A person with social anxiety often gives great value to the opinions of other people, especially in situations with a heavily social aspect, such as dating. Therefore, this negative feedback may make a college student doubt themselves as a potential romantic partner, especially if they are prone to social anxiety.

Hypothesis 3 was upheld, as we predicted that neutral feedback provided in a dating setting would not lead to a significant change in levels of social anxiety among college students. Neutral feedback would seem to leave neither a positive nor a negative impression on the other person. Thus, unsurprisingly, neutral feedback did not result in changes in social anxiety in this study.

Hypothesis 4 was not upheld, as we predicted that that the change in anxiety before and after receiving negative feedback for each dating scenario would be related to the fear of negative evaluation. This finding was surprising because one might assume that because social anxiety involves the fear of negative evaluation (c.f., Clark & Wells, 1995) that the degree of social anxiety change based on feedback would be linked to how much people in our study reported fearing negative evaluation. That is, if one is prone to fearing negative evaluation, then it would make sense that actually receiving negative feedback would be particularly likely to provoke social anxiety. One reason for this

finding could be that the negative feedback was basically "too negative" and affected people whether they had an inherent fear of negative evaluation or not. Although people with social anxiety are particularly sensitive to negative evaluation, it may be that in a socially charged situation that most college students would respond in a socially anxious manner if they were openly criticized by a dating partner.

Hypothesis 5 was also not upheld as we predicted that the difference score (post- minus pre-levels of social anxiety) for each positive feedback scenario would be linked with the fear of positive evaluation. It seems like participants in our study did not feel that they are in the spotlight in these scenarios after receiving the positive feedback from their partner. The participants did not feel the mental pressure to meet the expectations of their partner on the next date even after receiving the positive feedback from their partner. Therefore, their fear of getting evaluated positively was not related to the positive feedback received in the dating scenarios.

Limitations

The dating scenarios were created specifically for this study by adapting items on the Liebowitz's Social Anxiety Scale (Liebowitz, 1987). The scenarios were reviewed by clinical psychology master's students, who provided revision feedback. However, no additional testing was done to help determine whether the scenarios demonstrated adequate reliability or validity. In addition, using scenarios to observe the possible change in social anxiety among college students is inherently less reliable and valid than a study whereby college students are in actual dating settings, which was not feasible for this study. Finally, the pre-score for social anxiety was only assessed once, before any of the additional scenarios and feedback were provided. Thus, we did not obtain a pre-level of social anxiety before each item. Although the scenarios were

presented in randomized order for each participant, we cannot rule out the possibility that the

accumulation of feedback across the scenarios may have skewed the results.

Clinical Implications

Gallagher (2007) found that 23% of the college students seeks counseling for to

dating and related problems. Young adults tend to place a strong emphasis on forming

romantic and other relationship. According to Erick Erickson's Psychosocial

Development Theory (Erickson, 1950), college students are typically in Stage 6, which

focuses on the developmental challenge of Intimacy vs. Isolation; young adults either

form intimate and strong relationship or will feel lonely and isolated. If a college student

with social anxiety is in therapy, then perhaps a clinician could use these scenarios to

help decrease social anxiety related to dating by helping the client habituate to receiving

feedback in various social settings. The clinician could also make a hierarchy of these

scenario depending on the social anxiety level of their client and then can eventually

expose the clients to these scenarios based on their client's anxiety.

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Table 1

Descriptive statistics of main study variables

	M	*SD*	*Observed Range*	*Possible Range*	*α*
Social Anxiety	28.46	12.03	0-57	0-80	.88
FNE	36.71	9.13	13-57	12-60	.89
FPE	37.46	14.51	5-69	0-90	.75
Positive Feedback	8.17	4.60	0-19	0-24	.85
Negative Feedback	13.92	7.28	0-24	0-24	.94
Neutral feedback	10.69	5.49	0-21	0-24	.84

Note. Social Anxiety = Social Anxiety Interaction Scale, FNE = Brief Fear of Negative

Evaluation – II, FPE = Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale

Table 2

T-tests for dependent means between social anxiety level before (Baseline) and after (Post)

Group	N	Baseline dating scenario		Post feedback		t	p	d
		M	SD	M	*SD*	*t*	*p*	*d*
PF	47	1.88	.82	8.17	4.60	-9.98	<.001	4.36
NF	38	1.82	.83	13.92	7.27	-11.06	<.001	6.74
NeF	39	1.97	.93	10.69	5.49	-11.09	<.001	4.91

Note. PF = positive feedback group, NF = negative feedback group, Ne = neutral feedback group

Figure 1

Clarks and Wells Model (1995)
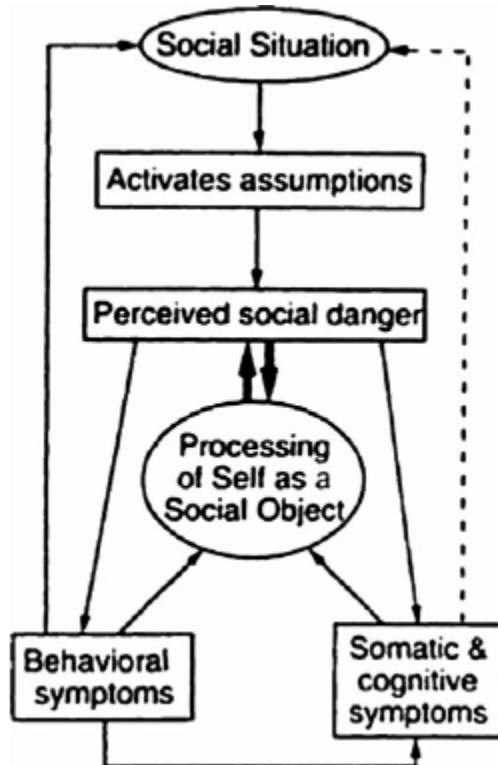
Note. A model proposed by Clark and Wells in 1995 about the cognitive processes that a socially anxious individual go through when he/she enters a feared social situation. The following figure is taken from international handbook of social anxiety (International handbook of social anxiety, 2001, pp. 407)

Appendix A

Social Interaction Anxiety Scale

Instructions: For each item, please circle the number to indicate the degree to which you

feel the statement is characteristic or true for you. The rating scale is as follows:

0 = **Not at all** characteristic or true of me.

1 = **Slightly** characteristic or true of me.

2 = **Moderately** characteristic or true of me.

3 = **Very** characteristic or true of me.

4 = **Extremely** characteristic or true of me.

I. I get nervous if I have to speak with someone in authority (teacher, boss, etc.).

2. I have difficulty making eye contact with others.

3. I become tense if! have to talk about myself or my feelings.

4. I find it difficult to mix comfortably with the people I work with.

5. I find it easy to make friends my own age.

6. I tense up if I meet an acquaintance in the street.

7. When mixing socially, I am uncomfortable.

8. I feel tense if I am alone with just one other person.

9. I am at ease meeting people at parties, etc.

10. I have difficulty talking with other people.

11. I find it easy to think of things to talk about.

12. I worry about expressing myself in case I appear awkward.

13. I find it difficult to disagree with another's point of view.

14. I have difficulty talking to attractive persons of the opposite sex.

15. I find myself worrying that I won't know what to say in social situations.

16. I am nervous mixing with people I don't know well.

17. I feel I'll say something embarrassing when talking.

18. When mixing in a group, I find myself worrying I will be ignored.

19. I am tense mixing in a group.

20. I am unsure whether to greet someone I know only slightly.

Appendix B

Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale

Read each of the following statements carefully and indicate

how characteristic it is of you according to the following

scale:

1 = Not at all characteristic of me

2 = Slightly characteristic of me

3 = Moderately characteristic of me

4 = Very characteristic of me

5 = Extremely characteristic of me

1. I worry about what other people will think of me even when I know it doesn't make

any difference.

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2. I am unconcerned even if I know people are forming an unfavorable impression of me.

3. I am frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings.

4. I rarely worry about what kind of impression I am making on someone.

5. I am afraid others will not approve of me.

6. I am afraid that people will find fault with me.

7. Other people's opinions of me do not bother me.

8. When I am talking to someone, I worry about what they may be thinking about me.

9. I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make.

10. If I know someone is judging me, it has little effect on me.

11. Sometimes I think I am too concerned with what other people think of me.

12. I often worry that I will say or do the wrong things.

Appendix C

Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale

Read each of the following statements carefully and answer the degree to which you feel

the statement is characteristic of you, using the following scale. For each statement,

respond as though it involves people that you do not know very well. Rate each situation

from 0 to 9. Please fill in only one bubble for each statement.

1. I am uncomfortable exhibiting my talents to others, even if I think my talents will

impress them.

2. It would make me anxious to receive a compliment from someone that I am

attracted to.

3. I try to choose clothes that will give people little impression of what I am like.

4. I feel uneasy when I receive praise from authority figures.

5. If I have something to say that I think a group will find interesting, I typically say

it.

6. I would rather receive a compliment from someone when that person and I were

alone than when in the presence of others.

7. If I was doing something well in front of others, I would wonder whether I was

doing "too well".

8. I generally feel uncomfortable when people give me compliments.

9. I don't like to be noticed when I am in public places, even if l feel as though I am

being admired.

10. I often feel under-appreciated, and wish people would comment more on my

positive qualities.

Appendix D

Dating Scenarios

<u>Baseline Dating Scenario: Meeting your dating partner</u>

You have talked to your dating partner online via a dating site (e.g., Tinder, Bumble, Hinge, and Coffee Meets Beagle). Your dating partner is approaching you for the first time in-person in a restaurant.

How socially anxious would you feel in this situation?

(Note - Social anxiety is when people feel nervous, scared, or embarrassed in situations with other people. They may be worried that they are being judged by others for their acts, for example, for eating, drinking, or talking).

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 – Severe

Category 1: Eating and drinking habits

<u>*Scenario 1: Eating in front of my partner.*</u>

Your partner asks you to order the food of your choice on your first date with him/her. You go ahead and order Alfredo pasta with garlic bread that you think is good. You both are having the meal for 30 minutes and then your partner says…..

Positive Feedback: The pasta was an excellent choice.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Neutral Feedback: The pasta was an okay choice.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Negative Feedback: The pasta was a terrible choice.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Scenario 2: Drinking in front of my partner.

Your partner asks you to order the wine of your choice on your first date with him/her. You go ahead and order the wine that you think is good. You both are having the wine for approximately 30 minutes and then your partner says…..

Positive Feedback: You made a great choice with the wine.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Neutral Feedback: You made an okay choice with the wine.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Negative Feedback: You made a terrible choice with the wine.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Category 2: Interaction with the partner

Scenario 1: Working while being observed my partner.

You are on your first date with this partner, and you receive a call from your office regarding some work. You apologize to your partner for using the laptop and fixing some issues related to the work. Your partner is watching you while you are working on your first date. After some time, your partner says…

Positive Feedback: Wow! You seem to enjoy doing your work.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Neutral Feedback: Go ahead and finish your work.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Negative Feedback: I thought I will have a good time with you. This is disappointing.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Scenario 2: Meeting the partner face to face for the first time.

You have always talked to your partner through the dating app. This is your first time meeting your partner in a restaurant. It is cold and windy outside. Your partner greets you and then says…

Positive Feedback: I really like the way you are dressed. You have a great style.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Neutral Feedback: You are wearing warm clothes today.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Negative Feedback: You could have dressed nicer for this fancy restaurant.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Scenario 3: Talking with the partner face to face for the first time.

You have always talked to your partner through the dating app. This is your first time talking to your partner in a restaurant face to face. Your partner greets you and then says…

Positive Feedback: You have a really great voice.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Neutral Feedback: I did not know what to expect your voice to sound like.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Negative Feedback: Your voice is really hard to understand.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Scenario 4: Entering a dating setting where your partner is already seated.

Your partner is waiting for you in a restaurant from 30 minutes. You enter the restaurant and apologize to your partner. Then your partner says…

Positive Feedback: That's okay. I understand how busy the road might be at this time, and I'm happy to finally meet you.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Neutral Feedback: No worries.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Negative Feedback: You should be more considerate of my time. I almost left.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Scenario 5: Participating with your partner in an activity.

There is a couple dance competition happening in the restaurant that you and your partner are

going for the date. Your partner asks you to join the competition with him/her. After dancing for

some time, your partner says…

Positive Feedback: Your moves are really good, and I am enjoying dancing with you. I think we

may win.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Neutral Feedback: Let's keep dancing.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Negative Feedback: You do not really know how to dance. I think we are going to lose.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Scenario 6: Looking at your partner face for the first time in person.

You are talking to your partner for the first time in person. You realize that your partner is noticing your face from some time. After few minutes, your partner says…

Positive Feedback: You look even more attractive than you did in your dating site pictures.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Neutral Feedback: You look just like your dating site pictures.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe

Negative Feedback: You do not look as good in person as you did in your dating site pictures.

How anxious or fearful do you feel in this situation after receiving the feedback?

0 – None

1 – Mild

2 – Moderate

3 - Severe