An Examination of Fear of Positive and Negative Evaluation as Potential Mediators Between Social Anxiety and Self-Control

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Introduction

• Self-control is the capacity to control and regulate impulses, desires, and emotions.
• Exercising self-control proves to be beneficial by facilitating improvements in health, decision making, academic achievement, job performance, and interpersonal relationships.

• Research has shown, however, that self-control is a limited resource and becomes depleted after an individual engages in an initial self-control task (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000).
• Kashdan et al. (2011) surmised that depletion may be affected by both environment and disposition, and that socially anxious individuals may expend a large amount of self-control resources during social interactions, thereby depleting self-control.

• Further, this process may be driven by fear of both positive and negative evaluation such that the individual expends self-regulatory resources avoiding, suppressing, or discounting positive and negative interactions (Kashdan et al., 2011; Weeks et al., 2008).

• The current study examined the relationship between social anxiety and general self-control, and predicted that the relationship between the two would be mediated by fear of positive and negative evaluation.

Method

Participants

• 304 people (76 males, 228 females) participated in the study (M_age = 22.02, SD = 6.02).
• Participants received course credit for participation in the study.

Procedure

• Participants completed a series of brief self-report questionnaires online designed to measure personality, social anxiety, and self-control.

Procedure (cont.)

Self-Report Measures:

Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS; Liebowitz, 1987): Measures social anxiety based on fear/anxiety and avoidance of several situations.

Self-Control Scale – Brief Version (Tangney et al., 2004): A 13-item measure of general self-control.

Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale (FPE; Weeks et al., 2008): Assesses fear of positive evaluation.

Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (FNE; Leary, 1983): A brief measure of fear of negative evaluation.

Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999): Used to assess Neuroticism as higher neuroticism has been shown to be related to greater self-control depletion in social situations (Uziel & Baumeister, 2012).

Correlational Analysis

• Self-control was negatively correlated to social anxiety, fear of positive evaluation, fear of negative evaluation, and neuroticism.
• Social anxiety was positively related to fear of positive evaluation, fear of negative evaluation, and neuroticism.

Results

Multiple Regression Analysis

• Multiple regression was conducted entering social anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, fear of positive evaluation, and neuroticism as predictors of self-control, F(4, 299) = 17.87, p < .01.

• Self-control was significantly predicted by social anxiety, β = -.17, t = -2.51, p < .05; and neuroticism, β = -.32, t = -4.90, p < .01. Neither FPE nor FNE, however, were significant predictors of self-control.

Mediation Analysis

• A mediation analysis using a bootstrap model (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) was conducted entering self-control as the dependent variable, social anxiety as the predictor variable, FPE and FNE as mediator variables, and neuroticism as a control variable.

• There was a significant total and direct effect of social anxiety on self-control; neither FPE nor FNE mediated the relationship between social anxiety and self-control.

Conclusion

• Results suggest that higher social anxiety is related to lower general self-control, even when controlling for neuroticism.

• The mediation analysis showed, however, that neither fear of negative evaluation nor fear of positive evaluation mediated this relationship, which was inconsistent with our hypothesis.

• Future research should further investigate the relationship between social anxiety and self-control, as well as examine other possible mediators of this relationship, such as perceptions of social interactions.