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Efficacious Self Presentation and Social Physique Anxiety: The Role of Depression

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Abstract

The research study aimed to examine the relationship between Social Physique Anxiety (SPA) and its correlates, including Efficacious self-presentation and Depression. Social physique anxiety refers to the fear of negative evaluation by others based on one's physical appearance. Efficacious self-presentation encompasses efforts to project a positive and confident self-image to others. Depression refers to a state of persistent sadness and low mood. The present research assessed the experience of social physique anxiety, depression and efficacious self-presentation among university students (N =250) including males (n = 125) and females (n = 125) enrolled in a four-year undergraduate program. The study included a sample of participants who completed self-report questionnaires assessing their levels of SPA, efficacious self-presentation, and depression. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between SPA and depression, indicating that individuals with higher levels of SPA were more prone to experiencing depressive symptoms. Furthermore, the study found a negative correlation between SPA and efficacious self-presentation, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of SPA were less likely to engage in effective self-presentation strategies. This finding suggests that SPA may contribute to difficulties in presenting oneself in a positive and confident manner to others. Overall, the study highlights the detrimental effects of SPA on mental well-being, specifically in relation to depression and self-presentational abilities. The findings emphasize the importance of addressing SPA in therapeutic interventions and promoting positive body image to enhance psychological well-being.

Keywords: Social Physique Anxiety, Efficacious self-presentation, Depression, Psychological well-being.

Introduction

According to Leary and Kowalski (1995), social physique anxiety arises due to the intense societal emphasis on the importance of physical attractiveness and the corresponding fear of negative evaluation based on one's physical appearance. University students, like individuals in any age group, can experience social physique anxiety due to various factors such as societal pressure, cultural beauty ideals, and comparison with their peers. Fear of being judged negatively in terms of their physique can be a constant source of depression for many students. The need to present perfect self in front of others and to hide ones' imperfection negatively affects a person's health and well-being (Ferreira et al., 2018). Self- presentation is related to social goals such as to be accepted by others. Students who present themselves confidently and effectively are more likely to make a good impression, be included in group projects, and build positive relationships with classmates. Some university students may have good and efficacious self-presentation skills, while others may struggle in this area. Depression among university students is a significant concern. The transition to university life can bring about various stressors, including academic pressures, financial burdens, social changes, and increased independence.

The effects of depression on university students can be far-reaching and impact different aspects of their lives. Academically, depression may lead to difficulties concentrating, reduced motivation, poor performance, and an increased risk of dropping out. Students with depression may experience a decline in self-esteem and self-confidence, making it challenging to engage in social activities or seek support.

Social physique anxiety (SPA) is the anxiety experienced when a person believes they are being observed or judged on their appearance. (Hart E.A.et al;1989).

One study by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) and Fredrickson et al. (1998) proposed that individuals with social physique anxiety are more likely to perceive their bodies as objects to be evaluated by others, rather than as integrated and functional aspects of their self-identity. This objectification leads to increased body surveillance and a heightened awareness of one's physical appearance, which in turn serves to increase social physique anxiety. (Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) and Fredrickson et al. (1998). Individuals with high levels of social physique

anxiety may engage in frequent and intense social comparisons, which can lead to negative self-perceptions, body dissatisfaction, and heightened anxiety. (Festinger (1954).

According to Leary, Tchividjian, and Kraxberger (1994), individuals with social physique anxiety are overly conscious of their physical appearance, leading to heightened self-consciousness in social situations. They may fear negative evaluations from others based on their body shape or size, which in turn increases their anxiety levels. (Leary, Tchividjian, and Kraxberger (1994). Gender difference have been observed in social physique anxiety with females reporting higher levels than males. (Hart et al, 1989, Cash et al, 2004). This may be due cultural pressures for women to meet specific standards of beauty and shape. (Tiggeman and Slater, 2014).

According to study conducted by Toma and Hancock (2010), women tend to present themselves in a more positive way, with an emphasis on physical attractiveness, while men tend to focus more on their accomplishments and status (Toma, C.L and Hancock, J. T (2010). Self-Presentation theory posits that self-presentation is driven by individuals' desire to maintain a positive social identity and enhance their self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to this theory, individuals tend to display attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics that align with their group's norms and values in order to gain acceptance and approval from others. (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Individuals use various strategies, such as self-promotion, ingratiation, and intimidation, to manage the impressions they make on others. (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

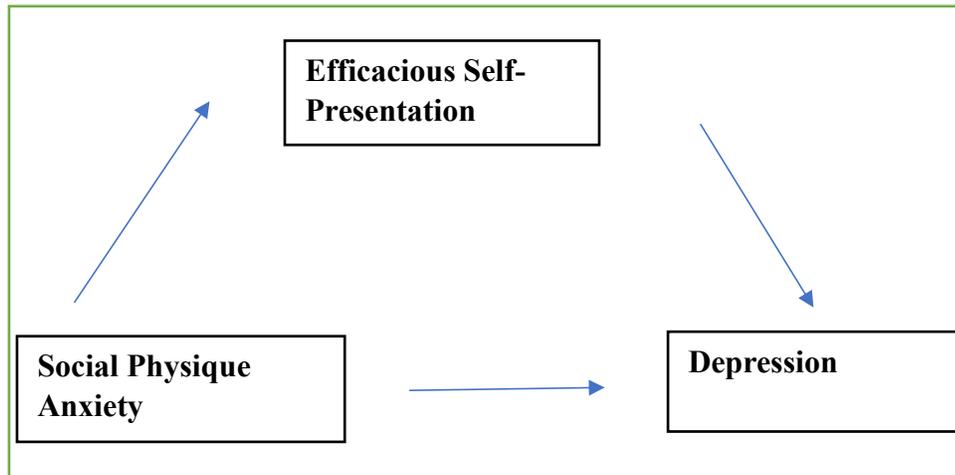
Depression is caused by cognitive distortions and negative thinking patterns. People with depression have a tendency to interpret events and situations in a negative way, leading to a sense of hopelessness and low self-esteem. Smith et al. (2018) reported that approximately 16% of adults experience major depressive episodes in their lifetime, with substantial implications for social functioning and quality of life. (Smith et al. 2018). Research suggests that biological factors play a crucial role in the development of depression. According to a meta-analysis by Sullivan et al. (2019). Genetic factors contribute to approximately 40% of the risk for depression (Sullivan et al, 2019) while dysregulation of the hypothalamic pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis and neurotransmitter imbalances are also implicated (Smith & Johnson, 2021)

In study by Kim, J., & Lee, Y. link between social physique anxiety, efficacious self-presentation and depression was explored. Results revealed that social physique anxiety was positively correlated with depressive symptoms, while efficacious self-presentation was negatively correlated. Efficacious self-presentation mediated the relationship between social physique anxiety and depressive symptoms. (Lee Y & Kim J, 2020)

In another study by Lee, Y., & Kim, J. social physique anxiety negatively impacted efficacious self-presentation, which in turn increased depressive symptoms.

The above empirical data shows that there is a link between SPA, Efficacious self-presentation and depression but largely missing from the literature is specification of any explanatory mechanism leading from social physique anxiety to efficacious self-presentation and depression. Researchers have found that SPA leads to depression. In this paper, it proposes that Efficacious Self Presentation mediate the relationship between SPA and Depression.

Figure 1: *Theoretical Model Proposed by the Research*



Objectives

1. To examine the effect of Social Physique Anxiety on the level of Depression among adult university students.
2. To identify the effect of Efficacious Self presentation on the level of Depression among adult university students.

Method

Sample

The study aimed to examine the relationship between social physique anxiety and depression with focusing the moderating role of efficacious self-presentation. The study was based on cross sectional survey research design. Data was collected from different subgroups of adult university students divided across gender and age. Questionnaire booklets were distributed among the students to record their response. 250 participants from University Of Poonch, Rawalakot were taken as sample of study with age range of 20-24. Participants should be university students and anyone having any diagnosis of mental disorder were not included. The sample of 250 participants was further divided into 125 males (25%) and 125 females (25%), randomly taken from any department.

Measures

Social Physique Anxiety Scale (Hart, Leary and Rejeski,1989)

Scale is developed by Hart, Leary and Rejeski in 1989. This scale consists of 12 items and 4 subscales. 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Maximum score of this scale is 60 and minimum score is 12. (Hart, Leary and Rejeski, 1989). Scale has good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .92, indicating high reliability. (Martin, Cox, Petrie, 1996)

Efficacious Self Presentation Scale (Fiorenzo et al, 2011)

The scale consists of 36 items and 6 subscales including social self confidence, self image regulation, bodily self confidence, social sensitivity, social openness and social desirability. ESPS is based on positively worded statements. The scale is based on a 5-point Likert-type scale with response categories including (Strongly disagree=1, Generally Disagree=2, Undecided=3, Generally agree=4, Strongly agree=5). The self-report scale was administered to 760 16 to 19 years old subjects. Maximum score of this scale is 180 and minimum score is 36. (Fiorenzo et al, 2011). ESPS exhibits good internal consistency with Cronbach alpha coefficient ranging from 0.85 to 0.89 across different social situations. (Nezlek, Leary & Downs, 1999).

Depression (Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995.)

Depression is a subscale of DASS developed by Lovibond and Lovibond in 1995. This subscale consists of 7 items and is based on a 4-point Likert-type scale with response categories including Always=1, Most of the time=2, Some of the time=3, Never=4. The minimum score is 0 and the maximum score is 21. The scale has high internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.91. (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

Procedure

Authority letter from the department of Psychology, University of Poonch, Rawalakot, was obtained. Participants were personally approached for the purpose of data collection. Nature, purpose and objectives of the study were shared with participants. Consent was taken and they were told that they can leave any time. Willingness and confidentiality of their information was ensured. There was no time limitation and participants were thanked properly after completion of the questionnaire. Participants were not subjected to any physical or psychological harm and all ethical practices were followed. Participants were instructed to complete the questionnaire at their own pace. After the data was collected, analyses were run on the SPSS software to find out the results.

Results

Table 1:

Cronbach Alpha of DASS, Social *Physique Anxiety Scale* and *Efficacious Self- Presentation*

Scale	k	α	M	SD	Range	
					min	max
Social Physique Anxiety	.596	-.251	31.5	4.20	12	60
Efficacious Self Presentation	-.164	.776	1.09	16.74	36	180
DASS	-.242	-.04	13.1	2.10	0	21

Scale

Note: α = Alpha; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

Table 1 shows Cronbach’s α reliability of Depression is - .04 which indicates low consistency. The cronbach’s α value of social physique anxiety Scale is -.25 which indicates low consistency. The cronbach’s α value of efficacious self-presentation .776 indicates good consistency. The alpha coefficient reliability of scale shows that they are internally consistent. Similarly, the skewness and kurtosis shown by all scales is within the acceptable range.

Table 2

Correlation among Social Physique Anxiety, Efficacious Self-Presentation and Depression

	1	2	3
Social physique Anxiety	-.04	-	
Efficacious Self Presentation	-.19**	.21**	-
Depression	-		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 2 revealed that social physique anxiety has a negative non-significant correlation with depression ($r = -0.4$, $p > 0.05$) and efficacious self-presentation has negative significant correlation with depression ($r = -.19$, $p < .01$). Social Physique Anxiety and Efficacious Self Presentation has positive significant correlation ($r = .21$, $p < .0$)

Table 3:

Regression analysis for Mediation between Depression, Social physique anxiety and Efficacious Self Presentation

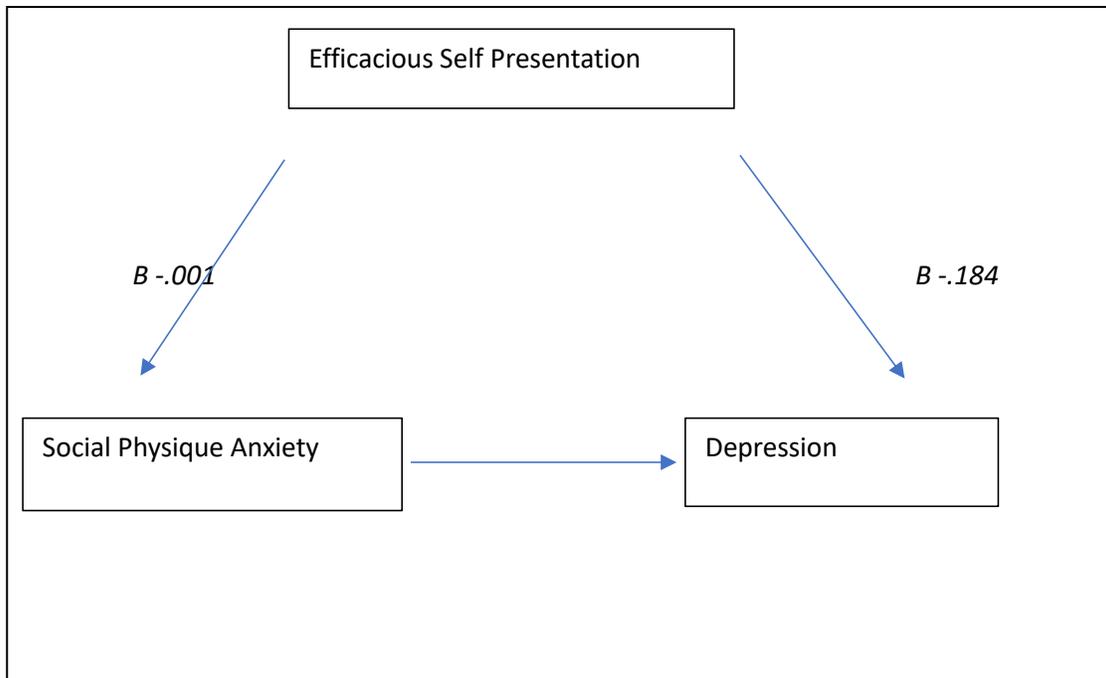
Variables	B	B	SE
Social Physique Anxiety	.000	-.001	.042
Efficacious Self Presentation	-.031	-.184	.011
Depression	12.78		1.584
R2	.034		

Table 3 shows the impact of social physique anxiety and efficacious self-presentation on depression. The r2 value of 3.4 revealed that the predictor variable explained 3.4% variance in the outcome variable. The findings revealed that efficacious self-presentation negatively predicts the level of depression and social physique anxiety positively predicts level of depression.

Figure 2

The Standardized Regression Coefficient for Social Physique Anxiety and Depression that is Mediated by Efficacious Self-Presentation

Figure 2 shows that the total effect of efficacious self-presentation on social physique anxiety is $-.001$ which was significant and predicted depression. The effect of efficacious self-presentation on depression is $-.184$ which indicated more significance and thus predicted that



efficacious self-presentation does play a mediating role in the relationship between social physique anxiety and depression.

Discussion

This study explored the role of Social Physique Anxiety in depression in particular while taking ESP as mediating variable.

One study by Hart et al. (2011) examined the relationship between SPA and efficacious self-presentation in a sample of college students. They found that individuals with higher levels of SPA had lower levels of efficacious self-presentation. This suggests that individuals who are more anxious about their physical appearance may have less confidence in their ability to present themselves positively to others. (Hart et al,2011)

Another study showed that individuals with high SPA are more likely to engage in self-presentational behaviors, such as trying to appear more attractive, to gain social approval in exercise settings. (Gilliland, S.E., & Dunn, J., 2003)

Furthermore, several studies have also found a significant relationship between SPA and depression. For example, a study by Tylka and Sabik (2010) found that SPA was positively associated with depressive symptoms in a sample of women. (Tylka and Sabik,2010)

In addition, a meta-analytic study by Fardouly et al. (2015) examined the relationship between body image concerns, including SPA, and depression. They found a moderate positive correlation between these variables, indicating that individuals who experience higher levels of SPA are more likely to report symptoms of depression. (Fardouly et al,2015)

We also explored the mediating relationship between social physique anxiety and depression. The results indicate that efficacious self-presentation mediated the relationship of social physique anxiety with depression. This may be because students, in general, feel a lot of peer pressure to appear as appealing to others as possible; they tend to display the best of themselves while trying not to disclose their weaknesses to the audience. By failing to do so they may experience depression, which may further contribute in negative impression about their appearance, thus, triggering feelings of social physique anxiety.

Overall, past research has consistently shown a relationship between SPA and both efficacious self-presentation and depression. Individuals who are highly anxious about their physical appearance may struggle with presenting themselves confidently and positively to others, which can contribute to feelings of depression. It is important for future research to further investigate these relationships and identify potential interventions to help individuals cope with SPA and its related negative consequences.

Limitation

Much of the existing research focuses on young adults, limiting the generalizability of findings to other age groups. More research is needed to understand how SPA and its correlates may vary across different populations, such as older adults or individuals with specific clinical populations.

Most of the research is based on self-report measures, which can be subject to social desirability bias and may not fully capture the complexity of SPA.

Strength of the research on SPA and its correlates is the use of empirical evidence to support the relationship between these variables. Numerous studies have consistently found significant associations between SPA, efficacious self-presentation, and depression, providing strong support for the existence of these link

Additionally, the study utilizes a large sample size, which enhances the generalizability of the results. The study employs a cross sectional design, allowing for the examination of associations between variables at a specific point in time.

Future Research Directions

Longitudinal studies: Conducting longitudinal studies that track individuals over a period of time to better understand the causal relationship between social physique anxiety, efficacious self-presentation, and depression. This would help determine whether social physique anxiety leads to depression or if depression leads to social physique anxiety.

Cultural factors: Examining how cultural factors influence social physique anxiety, efficacious self-presentation, and depression. Exploring whether certain cultures, such as those with higher emphasis on appearance, have a higher prevalence of these variables.

Social media influence: Exploring the impact of social media on social physique anxiety, efficacious self-presentation, and depression. Investigating whether social media use and exposure to idealized body images contribute to the development of social physique anxiety and subsequent depressive symptoms.

Intervention and prevention strategies: Developing and evaluating interventions and prevention programs targeting social physique anxiety and its related outcomes. This could involve therapeutic approaches, educational programs, or digital interventions aimed at reducing social physique anxiety and promoting positive body image and self-esteem.

Physiological aspects. Exploring the physiological mechanisms underlying social physique anxiety and its correlates. Investigating whether physiological stress responses, such as changes in cortisol levels, are associated with social physique anxiety and subsequent depression.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research study provides evidence of a significant correlation between social physique anxiety (SPA) and both efficacious self-presentation and depression. The

findings suggest that individuals with higher levels of SPA tend to employ more effective strategies for self-presentation, likely in an attempt to manage their appearance-related anxiety. However, this enhanced self-presentation does not seem to alleviate depressive symptoms, as participants with higher SPA also reported higher levels of depression.

Overall, this research adds to the growing body of literature on SPA and its psychological consequences. By understanding the relationship between SPA, efficacious self-presentation, and depression, mental health professionals can develop targeted interventions to support individuals struggling with body image concerns and their associated emotional distress.

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