

Interpersonal Dependence as A Predictor of Fear of Negative Evaluation Among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

The study investigated interpersonal dependence as a predictor of fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students, one hundred and twenty (154) undergraduate students with a mean age of 19.46 and SD of 2.814 were drawn using multi-stage (cluster, simple random: by balloting and purposive) sampling techniques as participants from Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. Hirschfield et al. (1977) Interpersonal Dependency Inventory (IDI) and Watson and Friend (1969) Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) were used for data collection, correlational design was adopted and multiple hierarchy linear regression using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27 software was used to analysis the data. Findings shows that emotional reliance $St\beta = -1.345^$ and $t = -2.297^*$ and lack of self-confidence $St\beta = -1.204^*$ and $t = -2.041^*$ at $p < .05$ dimensions of interpersonal dependence negatively predicted fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate student. Assertion of autonomy $St\beta = -.799$ and $t = -1.825$ at $p < .05$ failed to predict fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate student. Interpersonal dependence is related to fear of negative evaluation at $r = .352$, it contributed 12.4% variance to the dependent variable, interpersonal dependence predicted fear of negative evaluation $sig. = .000$ at $p < .001$. Hence, school management should introduce a course that can help grow student grow in confidence of themselves for them to be self-reliant, this will help to reduce fear of been evaluated negatively.*

Keywords: *interpersonal dependence, fear of negative evaluation, undergraduate, students*

Introduction

Nearly everyone has feelings of anxiousness – fear and worry - as an emotional response to everyday situations that are a normal part of life (Bamber & Schneider, 2016). However, some people experience severe feelings of anxiousness, do not subside over time, and negatively impact day-to-day living (The National Institute of Mental Health, 2016); these more severe or long-lasting feelings of anxiousness are described as anxiety. Anxiety is defined medically as an abnormal or overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear (Merriam-Webster, 2018). The National Institute of Mental Health reports that approximately 30% of adolescents and adults have experienced anxiety and that women are more likely than men to report having anxiety (The National Institute of Mental Health, 2016). Seventy five percent of people with anxiety experience their first episode by age 22 and only about one-third of people who are struggling with anxiety received treatments (American and Depression Association of America, 2018). Anxiousness most times can be caused by fear of negative evaluation. And there are limited

literature linking interpersonal dependence to fear of negative evaluation. Hence, the study on interpersonal dependence as a predictor of fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students.

Fear of negative evaluation (FNE) refers to the sense of dread associated with being unfavourably evaluated while anticipating or participating in a social situation (Watson & Friend, 1969; Weeks et al., 2005; Cooper & Brownell, 2020). Fear of negative evaluation is the individual's fear of potential and possible negative evaluations of others (Weeks & Howell, 2012; Li et al., 2023). In the cognitive-behavioural model, the most important manifestation of social anxiety is the fear of negative evaluations, which is an individual's assessment of the possibility of negative evaluations in social situations (Rapee & Heimberg, 1997; Li et al., 2023). Fear of negative evaluation is distinct from the broader term test anxiety, which refers to an individual's fear of being evaluated in any situation, including situations that are not social (Cassady & Johnson, 2002; Cooper & Brownell, 2020). Although test anxiety is commonly misused to exclusively reference anxiety about tests or exams, test anxiety is meant to describe an individual's fear of any evaluative situation, either social or non-social. In contrast, fear of negative evaluation refers specifically to a social situation, and thus we predict that fear of negative evaluation is particularly prominent in active learning classrooms compared to traditional lecture.

Fear of negative evaluation is also often conflated with communication anxiety, more commonly referred to as communication apprehension. Communication apprehension is defined as fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated oral communication (McCroskey, 1977; Cooper & Brownell, 2020). Communication apprehension has been studied for over 40 years and is exclusively associated with poorer outcomes of academic achievement (Cooper & Brownell, 2020). This concept is distinctly different from FNE because fear of negative evaluation describes why a student may experience communication apprehension (Cooper et al., 2018). For example, a student may have a fear of talking with someone in class because they are afraid that the other student will negatively evaluate them. High levels of fear of negative evaluation have also been identified as a defining characteristic of social anxiety (Watson & Friend, 1969; Cooper & Brownell, 2020), one of the most prevalent and concerning mental health conditions among college students (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2015).

Students with FNE tend to monitor their environment for a possible threat of social evaluation, such as being called on by the instructor in front of the entire class, or being asked a question from a student nearby. If students are scanning their environment for threats, then they are likely to have a diminished cognitive capacity to engage in thinking about a science problem (Heimberg et al., 2010; Cooper & Brownell, 2020). Additionally, if a student fears that making a mistake can reflect negatively on other peoples' perceptions of their overall ability, then this can also negatively impact their performance (Cooper & Brownell, 2020). High levels of anxiety can be particularly debilitating when students are required to hold and manipulate speech-based information (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992; Owens et al., 2008; Rapee & Barlow, 1991; Cooper & Brownell, 2020), which may explain why it is so difficult for students with FNE to talk about science content with others during class. Lastly, students expend their cognitive capacity when monitoring their own behaviours that may be perceived negatively by others such as sweating, misspeaking, or stuttering, which increases their cognitive load and

can negatively affect their ability to articulate their thoughts about science (Heimberg et al., 2010; Cooper & Brownell, 2020).

How might such detrimental effects of fear of negative evaluation influence student participation in active learning? There is some evidence to suggest that students with high FNE are less willing to participate in class (Young, 1990; Cooper & Brownell, 2020), and more specifically less willing to participate in active learning college science classes (Cooper, Downing, et al., 2018). Given these findings, it is important to consider how active learning practices may differentially favour those students who do not experience high levels of FNE and are more comfortable and willing to participate. Fear of negative evaluation may explain why some students are particularly resistant to participating in active learning activities (Cooper, Ashley, et al., 2017; Cooper & Brownell, 2016; Seidel & Tanner, 2013) and why some students report feeling less comfortable in active learning classrooms compared to traditional lecture (Cooper et al., 2017; Cooper & Brownell, 2016; Cooper et al., 2018).

Importantly, a student's comfort in active learning, particularly in small group work, has been shown to positively predict a student's mastery of the science content they are learning (Theobald et al., 2017). Therefore, creating more comfortable active learning classrooms may be important for maximizing student learning. Fear of negative evaluation has been shown to decrease if students develop a positive relationship with the students they work with in active-learning classrooms (Cooper et al., 2018). Specifically, when students establish a relationship with other students, they feel as though they are less likely to be negatively evaluated, which may explain why students report that they are more likely to collaborate than to passively listen when they have a friend in their group (Eddy et al., 2015) and why students feel more comfortable when they have a friend in their group (Theobald et al., 2017). Many factors can necessitate fear of negative evaluation, interpersonal dependence is the factor to be considered in this study if it can predict it.

Interpersonal dependency is a personality style wherein individuals are predisposed to seek guidance, help, and support from others, even in situations where they can function autonomously and meet challenges independently (Bornstein, 1992; 1993; Anyaegbunam & Nwafor, 2022). It is associated with a desire to get advice, conform to the surrounding environment, and willingness to meet up with other people's requests (Bornstein, 1999; Anyaegbunam & Nwafor, 2022). It is an attitudinal belief that a person or group of persons is perhaps socially poor and helpless that he/they cannot help themselves but must depend on assistance from outside.

Interpersonal dependence is similar to the concept of attachment, wherein high scores share ties with insecure attachment (Pincus & Wilson, 2001; Anyaegbunam & Nwafor, 2022). High scores on interpersonal dependency by individuals indicate an unhealthy situation. People with this social disposition tend to be more sensitive to peer pressure and less stable in their attitudes and beliefs. They have a more pronounced need for acceptance by others and a tendency to face increased psychological impairment through lower self-esteem, depression, loneliness, and overall emotional dysregulation (Overholser, 1992; Bornstein, 2009; Anyaegbunam & Nwafor, 2022).

Ties with others impact a person's cognition, motivation, affective reactions, and natural behavioural patterns (Bornstein, Porcerelli et al., 2009; Anyaegbunam & Nwafor, 2022).

Hirschfield et al. (1977) describe interpersonal dependency in three dimensions: (a) Emotional reliance, which is the tendency to depend on others for one's emotional satisfaction. (b) Lack of self-confidence is the tendency to lack self-reliance and be other directed. Furthermore, (c) Assertion of autonomy is the tendency to be self-directed. Anyaegbunam and Nwafor (2022) description of interpersonal dependency relates to this concept, divided into three dimensions: (a) Healthy dependency, which denotes confidence, autonomy, desire for looseness, and situation appropriate help seeking trait. (b) Dysfunctional functioning denotes destructive over-dependence often characterised by a weak self, fear of negative evaluation, and reassurance seeking behavioural trait. Moreover, (c) Dysfunctional detachment denotes fear of being hurt, being overwhelmed by others, and a consequent need for control over social situations.

Beck (2011) cognitive behavioural theory is adopted as the theoretical framework for this study because it is based on the premises that thoughts, emotions, and behaviours are inextricably linked and that each of these aspects of human functioning continuously effects and influences the others. Cognitive-behavioural theory posits that thoughts about the self, relationships, the world, and the future shape emotions and behaviours. The meaning and interpretation one gives to event determine how the individual react to situations. This theory helps to connect the two variables together, because the ability of the individual to possess positive thought about his or herself will determine if they will suffer from fear of been negatively evaluated, and always will tell if the student will be able dependent on their own or rely on others for help. This necessitated this hypothesis

Interpersonal dependency will significantly predict fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students.

Method

Participants

One hundred and twenty (154) undergraduate students with a mean age of 19.46 and SD of 2.814 were drawn using multi-stage (cluster, simple random: by balloting and purposive) sampling techniques as participants from Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. The students were cluster according to their faculties, simple random: by balloting was used to pick the faculties, while purposive: a criterion selection-based sampling techniques was used to select the participants from thirty-three (33) from Applied natural sciences, twenty-eight (28) from Management sciences, twenty-five (25) from Environmental sciences, thirty-four (34) from Pharmacy and twenty-one (21) from Law.

Instrument

Two sets of instruments were used, namely,

- Hirschfield et al. (1977) Interpersonal Dependency Inventory (IDI) and
- Watson and Friend (1969) Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE).

Interpersonal Dependency Inventory

The Interpersonal Dependency Inventory was used to evaluate the participants' level of dependency. The 48-item inventory is designed to assess the "thoughts, behaviour, and feelings revolving around the needs to associate with others" (Hirschfield et al. 1977). As a measure of aspects of personality characteristics, IDI consists of 3 subscales, which are:

- a. Emotional reliance – the tendency to depend on others for one's emotional satisfaction.

- b. Lack of self-confidence – the tendency to lack self-reliance and to be other-directed.
- c. Assertion of autonomy – tendency to strive to be self-directed.

Reliability: Hirschfield et al. (1977) reported split-half reliability coefficients ranging from .72-.91 for the three subscales of IDI. The researcher carried out a pilot study with thirty (30) participants from the University of Nigeria Enugu campus, with Cronbach's alpha of .99

Watson and Friend (1969) Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)

Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) was a 30-item instrument designed to measure social anxiety characterized by marked and persistent fear of social or performance situations appraised from being evaluated by others. It was scored using a Likert response pattern of 1 to 4, where 1 = Some or a little of the time, 2 = Some of the time, 3 = Good part of the time, and 4 = Most or all of the time. All the items are directly scored. Watson and Friend (1969) reported a reliability coefficient of KR -20 = .94 and one one-month interval test-retest = .78 for FNE. On Nigerian validity, Odedeji (2004) in correlating FNE with STAI Y-2 (Spielberger, 1983), obtained a concurrent validity coefficient of .63.

Procedure

Undergraduate students were drawn as participants from four faculties in Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) using multi-stage sampling (cluster, simple random: by balloting, and purposive) techniques for this study. The students were clustered according to their faculties, simple random: balloting was used to pick the faculties while purposive sampling techniques were used to draw the students for this study. The researchers employed research assistants who are faculty executives from the selected faculties to help distribute and retrieve the instrument. One hundred and sixty-one (161) copies of instruments were sent out, and one hundred and fifty-nine (159) were returned. Among the returning ones, three (3) bears multiple initials and the other two (2) were not properly responded to, which makes the numbers properly responded to be one hundred and fifty-four (154), which was used for data analysis.

Design/Statistics

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted based on the cross-section of the population to be sampled across ages. The statistical test used for data analysis is multiple hierarchy linear regression using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25 software. Thus, Means and standard deviation distributions will be investigated. These will help to determine the direction and strength of the relationships among the study variables (George, 2008)

Result

Table I: descriptive statistic

S/N	Variables	M	S. D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Fear of negative Evaluation	17.51	8.641	1	.352	.246	.301	.318	.057	-.010
2	Interpersonal Dependency	116.11	43.00		1	.876	.894	.699	.024	-.052
3	Emotional Reliance	38.37	18.97			1	.712	.406	.026	-.062
4	Lack of Self Confidence	46.42	18.41				1	.457	.021	-.007
5	Assertion of Autonomy	31.96	13.58					1	.017	-.051

6	Age	19.46	2.814	1	.017
7	Gender	1.539	.5001		1

Table I above shows that fear of negative evaluation positively related with the dimensions of interpersonal dependence of emotional dependence $r = .246$, lack of confidence $r = .301$ and assertion of autonomy $r = .318$, this implies the increase in the different dimensions of interpersonal dependence will cause an increase in fear of negative evaluation.. Age $r = .057$ and gender $r = -.010$ did not relate with fear of negative evaluation.

Table II: regression statistics

Model	R	R ²	St β	t
1	.352	.124		
Emotional Reliance			-1.345*	-2.297*
Lack of Self-Confidence			-1.204*	-2.041*
Assertion of Autonomy			-.799	-1.825
Age			.057	.753
Gender			.020	.258

Dependent variable= fear of negative evaluation, at $p < .05^*$, $p < .001^{*}$. R= relationship, r^2 = relationship square, St β = standardization beta, sig.= significant.**

Table II above shows that emotional reliance St $\beta = -1.345^*$ and $t = -2.297^*$ and lack of self-confidence St $\beta = -1.204^*$ and $t = -2.041^*$ at $p < .05$ dimensions of interpersonal dependence negatively predicted fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate student, this implies that increase in the listed dimensions of interpersonal dependence will cause a decrease in fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate student. Assertion of autonomy St $\beta = -.799$ and $t = -1.825$ at $p < .05$ failed to predict fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate student. Interpersonal dependence is related to fear of negative evaluation at $r = .352$, it contributed 12.4% variance to the dependent variable, interpersonal dependence predicted fear of negative evaluation sig.= .000 at $p < .001$.

Age St $\beta = .057$ and $t = .753$ and gender St $\beta = .020$ and $t = .258$ at $p < .05$ failed to predict fear if negative evaluation among undergraduate student.

Discussion

The hypothesis tested which stated that interpersonal dependence will independently and jointly predict fear of negative evaluation was confirmed, hence the hypothesis was accepted. The result shows that interpersonal dependence is a major factor that can bring about the occurrence of fear of negative evaluation. The result obtained shows that emotional reliance and lack of self-confidence dimensions of interpersonal dependence negatively predicted fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate student, this implies that increase in the two listed dimensions of interpersonal dependence will cause the decrease in fear of negative among undergraduate.

The result from this study shows that interpersonal dependence can cause the occurrence of fear of negative evaluation, but got a conflicting result when it comes to the dimensional level, the findings prove that depending on others for survival can affect the student moral of the student which might lead to been scared of been evaluated negatively by others. The phobia

that they will get a negative rating from others is as a result of depending on others to make decisions.

Implications of the result

The result obtained is in congruity with Beck's (2011) cognitive behavioural theory, which was adopted as the theoretical framework for this study because it is based on the premises that thoughts, emotions, and behaviours are inextricably linked and that each of these aspects of human functioning continuously affects and influences the others. Cognitive-behavioural theory posits that thoughts about the self, relationships, the world, and the future shape emotions and behaviours. The meaning and interpretation one gives to an event determine how the individual reacts to situations. This theory helps to connect the two variables because the ability of the individual to possess positive thought about his or herself will determine if they will suffer from fear of been negatively evaluated, and always will tell if the student will be able to be dependent on their own or rely on others for help.

The result obtained has added to literature that can be cited by future researchers.

The findings from this study indicated that interpersonal dependence significantly predicted fear of negative evaluation, and only two dimensions of interpersonal dependence negatively predicted fear of negative evaluation. Hence, school management should introduce a course that can help students grow in confidence in themselves for them to be self-reliant; this will help to reduce the fear of being evaluated negatively. Secondly, therapists should carry out enlightenment campaigns on the importance of self-confidence among students, this will help them to overcome fear of the unknown.

Limitation of the Study

So many factors militated against this study, one of such is the sampled size. The use of only one state government university reduces the population of participants, the number would have increased assuming more than one university was sampled.

Secondly, this study was conducted when some of the departments were facing accreditation, which limited the number of students available.

Suggestion for further study

Future researchers should consider sampling more than one school to increase the numbers of students that will participate in the work.

Future researchers should consider carrying out this study when students are less busy and available.

Summary and conclusion

The study investigated interpersonal dependence as a predictor of fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students, the finding revealed that interpersonal dependence significantly predicted fear of negative evaluation. Hence, school management should introduce a course that can help students grow in confidence in themselves for them to be self-reliant; this will help to reduce the fear of being evaluated negatively.

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