Subjective Social Status and Social Anxiety of College Students: Mediating Impact of Core Self-assessment

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Abstract. To investigate the association between college students' social anxiety, core self-evaluation, and subjective social standing, a total of 260 students were chosen and assessed using the social anxiety, communication, and core self-evaluation scales. The findings demonstrated that: (1) Subjective social status showed a significant positive correlation with core self-evaluation; (2) Subjective social status demonstrated a significant negative correlation with both social anxiety and core self-evaluation; and (3) Subjective social status demonstrated the ability to both directly and indirectly influence social anxiety through core self-evaluation.

Keywords: Subjective social status; Social anxiety; Core self-evaluation

1   Introduction

According to academic theories, social anxiety is defined as a person's irrational and excessive fear of other people and their performance in social situations. This fear is particularly expressed as a strong emotional experience of uneasiness and distress in social situations, as well as a behavioral response to avoiding social situations [1]. According to some study findings, college students are more prone than those in other age groups to feel social anxiety, and most college students have experienced symptoms of social anxiety [1, 2]. According to their level of anxiety, students may be categorized as having low, moderate, or high levels of social anxiety. There is a notable variation in social anxiety across different groups of students [2]. Studies have shown that 27.2% of Chinese college students are in a state of high anxiety, and 14.1% are in a state of high communication fear [3].

Subjective social status (SSS) is the term used to describe how someone subjectively assesses their own social standing by comparing oneself to others in a range of resources. This evaluation not only includes their cognition at the current stage but also includes the subjective assessment of their social status. It is also about the cognition of past stages and the cognition of future stages [3]. Research has shown that adolescents with greater SSS had better mental health [3]. People with low SSS experience worsening physical and emotional well-being [4]. Mental health distress is a potential outcome of low SSS [5]. It is extremely important for college students to have healthy physical,

psychological, and good interpersonal relationships. Individuals will also feel the social support in addition to their subjective perception of social resources [3]. Studies have proved that social anxiety affects social interaction and interpersonal relationships to a certain extent [6, 7]. Meanwhile, Baumeister et al believe that if interpersonal trust is low, individuals will feel excluded from important social groups, which is the main cause of anxiety [8]. Social anxiety and SSS are closely related, and SSS is a significant predictor of expression inhibition and depression [9]. Therefore, the present investigation posited hypothesis H1, which suggests a negative association between social anxiety and the perceived social standing of college students.

The most fundamental assessment of a person's own worth and abilities is known as core self-evaluation. Four characteristics serve as indicators of core self-evaluation: emotional stability, locus of control, general self-efficacy, and self-esteem [10]. Core self-evaluation research has steadily improved in the fields of interpersonal communication and mental health in recent years. Research has demonstrated the positive impacts of core self-evaluation on mental health outcomes [11]. Core self-evaluation is significantly positively correlated with all facets of interpersonal communication effectiveness and strongly negatively correlated with attachment avoidance and anxiety [11]. Thus, the study's second hypothesis, H2, states that social anxiety and core self-evaluation are negatively correlated.

Research has shown that there is a noteworthy moderating influence of core self-evaluation on the association between interpersonal trust and subjective social standing [12]. People who score highly on core self-evaluation also tend to score highly on self-esteem and self-efficacy, which means they feel more valuable, see the good in other people's words and deeds and are more likely to build strong, wholesome relationships with other people. On the other hand, those who struggle with poor self-worth or low self-efficacy often want to defend themselves in social situations and exhibit strong psychological defenses. As a result, the consequences of an individual's subjective social position on interpersonal trust vary depending on their degree of core self-evaluation [13]. Previous research has demonstrated a significant negative correlation between social anxiety and self-esteem as well as a significant negative correlation between social anxiety and interpersonal trust. Additionally, social anxiety has been shown to partially mediate the relationship between social anxiety and self-esteem [7]. Thus, the third hypothesis (H3) put out by this research is that social anxiety in college students is indirectly influenced by their subjective social standing as perceived by their core self-evaluation.

2   Method

2.1   Research Object

The online questionnaire survey in this research was administered to freshmen and seniors in college using a random cluster sampling technique. An 83.60% effective rate was achieved by recovering 260 valid surveys out of 311 original ones.

2.2   Research Tools

Cheng et al. [6] constructed the college students' SSS questionnaire. The questionnaire includes seven predictive indicators: popularity, talent level (referring to hobbies), social practice ability, family conditions, academic achievement, satisfaction with love or single status, and image and temperament. The score is in the form of a 10-level ladder, the higher the ladder level corresponds to the position of the subject. The ladder level that the participant chooses is converted into a point value between one and ten as part of the scoring process. The overall score is then calculated by adding the scores acquired for each item. The α coefficient in this research is 0.76.

The Communication Anxiety Scale (IAS) was developed by Leary based on clinical experience. IAS mainly measures an individual's internal subjective emotional experience of communication anxiety, with a total of 15 questions. It adopts 5-point Likert-style scoring and has a single dimension [14]. The α coefficient in this investigation is 0.83.

The fundamental scale of self-assessment was revised by Ye [15], which consists of 8 items and adopts 5 grades and a single dimension. The degree of core self-evaluation increases with the scale score. The α coefficient in this investigation is 0.84.

2.3   Data Analysis

In this investigation, the SPSS23.0 and Process 3.4 plugins were used to statistically evaluate the data.

3   Results

3.1   Deviation Between Statistical Method and Common Method

The self-assessment approach used by college students provided the data for this research, and there may be common methodology bias, so further statistical testing of the sample data should be conducted. All of the study's three variables' questions underwent exploratory factor analysis. Given that the KMO values assessed by Bartlett and KMO fall between 0.8 and 0.9 ($p < 0.001$), factor analysis may be performed on the data. The findings revealed that the entire cumulative variance contributed 64.36% and that there were 14 components with eigenvalues larger than 1. Less than 40%, or 16.53%, of the variance derived from the first component, suggests that the data do not exhibit a significant common method bias.

3.2   Correlation Analysis

Table 1 shows that SSS had a positive correlation ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$) with core self-evaluation and a negative correlation ($r = -0.30$, $p < 0.01$) with social anxiety. Core self-evaluation and social anxiety had a negative correlation ($r = -0.37$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 1. Correlation analysis of subjective social status, social anxiety and core self-evaluation.

	M	SD	1	2	3
1 subjective social status	38.06	8.23	-		
2 social anxiety	48.68	8.86	-0.30**	-	
3 core self-evaluation	24.09	5.61	0.36**	-0.37**	-

$**p < 0.01$

3.3   Regression Analysis

SSS had a substantial positive predictive influence on core self-evaluation ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$), as shown in Table 2 using Hayes's SPSS macro program (PROCESS Model 4). No other information was included in the analysis. There was a substantial negative predictive influence on college students' social anxiety ($\beta = -0.19$, $p < 0.01$) and their core self-evaluation ($\beta = -0.31$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Regression analysis among variables.

| dependent variable	independent variable	R	R²	F	β	t
core self-evaluation	subjective social status	0.36	0.13	39.06	0.36	6.25***
social anxiety	subjective social status	0.41	0.17	26.46	-0.19	-3.04**
	core self-evaluation				-0.31	-5.06***

$**p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001$

3.4   Analysis of Intermediary Role

With SSS (X) serving as the independent variable, social anxiety (Y) serving as the dependent variable, and core self-evaluation (M) serving as the intermediary variable, the mediation model testing program proposed by Wen et al. states that the SPSS macro program (PROCESS Model 4) developed by Hayes was used to test the mediation effect. The interval estimate technique for the analysis of the mediation effect was the deviation-corrected percentile Bootstrap approach. The sample size was selected as 5000, and whether the 95% confidence interval (95%CI) contained 0 was used as the basis for judging whether the mediation effect was significant. If 95%CI contains 0, the mediating effect is not significant. If 95%CI does not contain 0, it is significant.

As can be seen from Table 3, 95%CI of SSS → social anxiety is (-0.305-0.065), excluding 0, indicating a significant direct effect (63% effect). The 95%CI of SSS → core self-evaluation → social anxiety was (-0.172-0.060), excluding 0, indicating a considerable mediating influence (37%) from core self-evaluation. That is, SSS can have a direct impact on social anxiety, or it can indirectly have a negative impact on social anxiety through core self-evaluation (Figure 1).

Table 3. Examines the medium through which subjective social status and social anxiety are influenced by fundamental self-evaluation.

		Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Effect ratio
total effect	subjective social status→social anxiety	-0.30	0.06	-0.41	-0.18	
direct effect	subjective social status→social anxiety	-0.19	0.06	-0.31	-0.07	63%
indirect effect	subjective social status→core self-evaluation→social anxiety	-0.11	0.03	-0.17	-0.06	37%
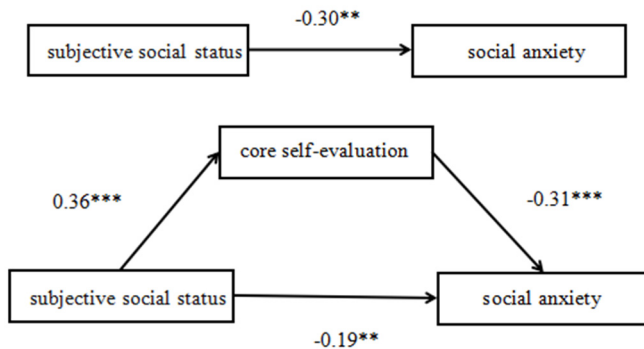
Fig. 1. Models of social anxiety, subjective social status, and fundamental self-evaluation.

4   Discussion

4.1   The Connection Between Social Anxiety and Perceived Social Status

This study confirms Li Yishun's research findings by finding a significant inverse correlation between social anxiety and college students' perceived social standing [9]. An individual's subjective view of social resources is intimately linked to their subjective social standing [3]. The stronger a person feels in control and happy they are, the higher their SSS; conversely, the lesser the danger they perceive in their decision-making, the stronger their feeling of future security, and therefore, the greater social interpersonal trust [16]. According to pertinent research on the topic, the primary cause of social anxiety is poor interpersonal trust, which makes people feel as if they are being shut out of significant social groups [8]. Consequently, a person's subjective social standing positively correlates with their feeling of interpersonal trust, their projected likelihood of being excluded from significant social groups, and their likelihood of experiencing social anxiety.

4.2   The Connection Between Fundamental Self-evaluation and Perceived Social Status

Consistent with Zhang's research [12], this study demonstrates a substantial positive correlation between college students' fundamental self-evaluation and their subjective social standing. Core self-evaluation may be seen as a cognitive schema, but college students with high SSS scores also perceive and judge themselves as more popular and image temperamental [10]. Higher levels of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-worth are found in those who have high core self-evaluations. They often interpret the words and behaviors of others positively and form positive self-schema, so it is easier to establish a healthy relationship with others. And positive relationships, that is, people will be better, outward appearance more confident, and friendly.

4.3   The Connection Between Social Anxiety and Basic Self-evaluation

According to this study's findings, college students' levels of social anxiety decrease with greater core self-evaluations, which is consistent with Li and Meng's research findings [17]. Individuals with high-core self-evaluation experience less tension and stress compared to those with low-core self-evaluation. Additionally, they tend to employ fewer avoidance coping mechanisms. At the same time, the internal emotional stability of individuals regulates the relationship between stressors and tension, thus reducing the possibility of social anxiety [17]. Conversely, poor core self-evaluation often shows up as low self-efficacy and low self-esteem, and it is easy to produce negative self-doubt, self-denial, and false self-blame in social interaction and problem-solving, thus triggering a series of anxiety emotions.

4.4   The Basic Self-evaluation's Mediating Function

According to this research, social anxiety and perceived social status are mediated by core self-evaluation. In addition to having a direct impact on social anxiety, subjective social status may also have an impact via core self-evaluation, which contributes to a better understanding of the underlying dynamics of the relationship between SSS and social anxiety. Social anxiety arises in specific situations and is manifested as negative tension. On the one hand, when individuals perceive higher social support, they will have higher core self-evaluation, and then they will perceive fewer stressors. When the pressure and tension are lower, the positive emotions of individuals will be higher [17], and the negative emotions will be reduced, thus reducing the generation of social anxiety. Therefore, people with high subjective levels may harm social anxiety by perceiving higher social support, obtaining better interpersonal relationships, improving self-confidence, and reducing stress and tension.

5   Conclusions

This study collected data through an online questionnaire and random sampling. Most of the subjects were college students in Guangdong province, so the representativeness of the samples had certain limitations. Furthermore, since this study was cross-sectional in nature and did not employ intervention research to investigate the causal relationship between the variables analyzed in college students' core self-evaluations, it is appropriate to discuss future research based on this limitation. The practical implications of the study inspire educators to assist college students in overcoming social anxiety by bolstering their core self-evaluation, their degree of self-recognition and confidence, and their sense of self-worth when confronted with the issue of social anxiety in students and when changing their SSS proves to be challenging.

Acknowledgments

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