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Examining the Association Between Trust and Fear of Negative Evaluation

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Fear of negative evaluation, the belief that there is high cost associated with negative evaluation by others, is a core risk factor for social anxiety. Fear of negative evaluation is considered to originate from personality and this study sought to better understand causes of fear of negative evaluation by extending existing findings that trust correlates with fear of negative evaluation. This study examined the association between trust and fear of negative evaluation in a cross-sectional study and then provided the first known examination of whether low levels of trust may be a causal factor of fear of negative evaluation in a subsequent randomized experimental study. A sample of 590 undergraduate students completed self-report measures and trust was examined at a trait level in relation to fear of negative evaluation. Although trait trust shared a small negative bivariate relationship with fear of negative evaluation, contrary to study predictions, trait trust did not explain unique variance in fear of negative evaluation when accounting for statistical overlap among neuroticism and extraversion. Among a subset of those participants who chose to participate in a subsequent in-person randomized experimental study (N = 161), trust was manipulated to examine its causal role in relation to fear of negative evaluation. Although the experimental manipulation evoked a large increase in distrust, there were no group differences in state fear of negative evaluation. Implications of study findings and future directions surrounding the potential relevance of trust to social anxiety are discussed.

Keywords: fear of negative evaluation; personality; social anxiety; trust

Introduction

Fear of Negative Evaluation

Social anxiety disorder is highly prevalent and burdensome (Kessler et al., 2012; Ruscio et al., 2008; Stein & Stein, 2008), with cognitive-behavioral conceptual models implicating fear of negative evaluation as critical to the development and maintenance of social anxiety (Clark & Wells, 1995; Rapee & Heimberg, 1997). Fear of negative evaluation represents beliefs related to higher likelihood and greater cost associated with being negatively evaluated by others (Leary, 1983). Individual differences in fear of negative evaluation evidence strong stability (*r*s ranging from .68-.75 after weeks to months; Leary, 1983; Rotter, 1967), while evidencing moderate-to-strong (*r*s ranging from .31-.64) positive correlations with social anxiety (Carleton et al., 2007; Kocovski & Endler, 2000; La Greca & Lopez, 1998; Leary, 1983; Weeks et al., 2005; Winton et al., 1995) and predict worse social anxiety over time (Watson & Friend, 1969; Weeks et al., 2005; Weeks et al., 2008; Wells et al., 1995).

Continued examinations as to novel correlates and causes of fear of negative evaluation is important, as about 35-50% of people experiencing social anxiety disorder do not respond to a first dose of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and between 65-90% of people do not experience remission from social anxiety symptoms (Cuijpers et al., 2016; Davidson et al., 2004; Heimberg et al., 1998; Leichsenring et al., 2013; Leichsenring & Leweke, 2017; Rodebaugh et al., 2004). Though reduction of fear of negative evaluation is suggested to lead to reduction of social anxiety symptoms within CBT, fear of negative evaluation remains heightened even after CBT for social anxiety disorder compared to the general population (Auyeung et al., 2020; Dogaheh et al., 2011; Hope et al., 1989; Mattick et al., 1989; Mattick & Peters, 1988). This finding underscores a continued need for improving our understanding of correlates and causes of fear of negative evaluation to ultimately strengthen existing treatments for social anxiety. The major aim of this set of studies is to examine trust as novel cause of fear of negative evaluation.

Fear of negative evaluation putatively originates from personality (Levinson et al., 2014; Rapee & Heimberg, 1997; Rodebaugh et al., 2017) and the Five Factor Model is the most widely accepted model used to describe personality (McCrae & Costa, 2008; McCrae & John, 1992). Among those traits, neuroticism and (low) extraversion have been the focus of existing studies examining how personality traits relate to fear of negative evaluation (Bienvenu et al., 2001a, 2001b, 2007; Kaplan et al., 2015; Kotov et al., 2007; Norton et al., 1997; Rodebaugh et al., 2017; Rosellini & Brown, 2011; Uliaszek et al., 2010). Rather than focusing on the broader domain level of personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, extraversion), existing findings suggest that focusing on facets, subdimensions of the broader trait, may help elucidate novel associations with social anxiety (Bienvenu et al., 2001b; Kaplan et al., 2015).

Trust

The focus of this set of studies is on a facet of agreeableness known as trust. Trust is most commonly viewed as unidimensional and necessary for all human interaction (Thielmann & Hillbig, 2015). On the one end is the expectation that others' intentions and behaviors are generally benevolent and reliable and on the other end is the expectation that others' intentions and behaviors are generally harmful and exploitive (Costa et al., 1991; DeYoung, 2015; DeYoung et al., 2007; Rotter, 1971; Thielmann & Hillbig, 2015; Van Lange, 2015). Individuals who are trusting may believe others are compassionate and polite when the trustor makes mistakes, while individuals with high levels of distrust may fear social evaluation and believe that they must minimize damage that can be caused by a more powerful other (Gilbert & Trower, 2001; Simpson, 2007; Van Lange, 2015).

Trust exists both at a trait level and at a state level (Fleeson & Leicht, 2006; Weiss et al., 2021). Peoples' trust typically revolves around a central tendency point thought of as the trait level of trust. Trait trust is stable across time and is consistent throughout multiple interactions (Fleeson & Leicht, 2006), with trait trust predicting trust in daily living (Weiss et al., 2021). Individuals who are trait distrusting (i.e., low trait trust) are more inclined to hold negative views of others given no additional context and believe that others have harmful intentions across social situations (Glanville & Paxton, 2007; Simpson, 2007; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). Importantly, situational factors can influence how likely someone is to trust in a given moment, which is referred to as state trust (Goto, 1996; Roberts & Mroczek, 2008; Scott, 1980; Thielmann & Hillbig, 2015; Van Lange et al., 2011; Weiss et al., 2021). Within social situations, the trustor must determine the trustee's trustworthiness using data like their closeness of relationship (e.g., "friend" versus "stranger"), the trustee's warmth, competence, and morality to make this decision (Fleeson & Leicht, 2006; Weiss et al., 2021). In a situation involving individuals who are untrustworthy the trustor is less likely to show vulnerabilities and may experience increased fear of negative evaluation within a social situation from that person. Given that situational factors play a role in someone's willingness to trust, trust can be experimentally manipulated to examine causal relations (Tedeschi et al., 1969; Van Lange et al., 2011). No known published study has yet examined whether being in a distrustful state causally worsens fear of negative evaluation.

Relationship Between Fear of Negative Evaluation and Trust

Previous studies have examined the relationship between trust and social anxiety disorder, more broadly, with findings suggesting that there may be a small relationship between social anxiety disorder and low levels of trust (*r*s of -.22 and -.32; Glinski & Page, 2010; He, 2022; Kaplan et al., 2015). When more specifically examining fear of negative evaluation and high trust, Shabahang et al. (2022) found a moderate, negative relationship (r = -.48).

Although informative, a limit of only examining bivariate associations is that trait trust may overlap with neuroticism and extraversion. Lower trust may be related to neuroticism because distrusting individuals tend to avoid threatening situations and anticipate negative outcomes resulting from social interactions (Rodebaugh et al., 2017; Thielmann & Hilbig, 2015). Additionally, though extraversion is not as robustly related to fear of negative evaluation compared to neuroticism, distrusting people may not approach social situations because of a diminished tendency to view the situations as rewarding (Rodebaugh et al., 2017; Thielmann & Hilbig, 2015). Thus, when considering the relation between trust and fear of negative evaluation, it is important to examine if lower trust accounts for unique variance in fear of negative evaluation independent of shared variance accounted for by neuroticism and extraversion.

Present Study

The present study aims to extend on existing findings that fear of negative evaluation and trust share a moderate, negative relationship and examine whether this relationship remains when accounting for other personality traits such as neuroticism and extraversion. The first aim of the present set of studies was to explore this relationship further and it was predicted that lower trust would continue to share an association with fear of negative evaluation when accounting for shared variance with neuroticism and extraversion. Additionally, state trust can be experimentally manipulated, though, no current studies have investigated whether trust is a causal factor in fear of negative evaluation. The second aim of the present set of studies was to examine this possibility and it was predicted that causing a reduction in state trust would worsen fear of negative evaluation.

Should study predictions be supported, implications would be that trust contributes unique information to our understanding of fear of negative evaluation beyond commonly implicated risk factors (i.e., neuroticism, extraversion) and that trust plays a causal role in relation to worsening fear of negative evaluation. That information may ultimately have implications for the treatment of social anxiety. For example, and particularly if trust serves a causal role in fear of negative evaluation, improving trust of others through intervention may be used as an adjunctive approach to existing CBT protocols in an effort to further reduce fear of negative evaluation. Interestingly, preliminary research suggests existing CBT treatment packages for social anxiety disorder can improve trust (Glinski & Page, 2010). Building upon current intervention strategies to more readily target trust might thus help further reduce fear of negative evaluation beyond what is seen in existing interventions.

Method

Procedure

Data collection occurred in two phases, in which participants in the first phase (i.e., Phase I; online, cross-sectional self-report study) had the opportunity to subsequently complete the second phase of the study (i.e., Phase II; in-person, randomized experimental study). This approach was used to examine group equivalency on trait fear of negative evaluation and personality traits across experimental groups in the randomized experimental study. One study credit was given to participants for each phase of the study.

The first phase, examining Hypothesis I, was conducted online through Qualtrics. Participants completed electronic informed consent and provided responses to study measures, including the measures of sociodemographics, BFNE-S, and the BFI-2. Study participants who completed Phase I of the study were eligible to complete Phase II of the study, which examined Hypothesis II, and recruitment occurred through SONA. Phase I participants were not required to complete Phase II nor were they specifically recruited to participate in Phase II (e.g., via e-mail). Phase I participants simply became eligible to view and sign-up for Phase II through SONA. Prior to enrollment for Phase II, randomization using a random number generator occurred for Phase II group assignment: trust and distrust. The research assistant and participant were blind to group assignment. Enrolled participants were greeted by a research assistant, who led the participant to an individual room. A confederate was located in a neighboring lab room and was visible to the study participant upon entering the larger lab room; however, the confederate was not visible while the participant was seated in the individual lab room.

Participants initially completed electronic informed consent through Qualtrics and completed the PANAS to assess for current affect. After completing these questions, they were given a handout with the prompt. The research assistant left the study participant and gave a handout to the confederate. After five minutes, the research assistant collected the papers with descriptions from the study participant and from the confederate and gave the study participant the confederate's descriptors. Based on group assignment, descriptions of the confederate were intended to prompt state trust or distrust from the participant. After the description task, participants completed a measure of state trust to determine if the task prompted state trust or distrust appropriately. Participants also completed a measure of state fear of negative evaluation through Qualtrics. After completing the measures, participants were debriefed. No interaction in fact took place between the participant and confederate.

Participants

The sample included undergraduate students at a Southern university (ages 18 years old and above). A total of 590 participants completed Phase I (438 female-identifying, 137 male-identifying, and 15 data missing) and 162 participants (130 female-identifying, 29 male-identifying, and 3 data missing) of Phase I participants chose to complete Phase II. Gender identification, race/ethnicity make up, and age of participants across phases are reported in Table 1. Among the 590 Phase I participants, the majority self-identified as female and there was a relatively diverse race/ethnicity makeup with about 45% of participants identifying as non-white. Participants who completed Phase II were generally equivalent to participants who only completed Phase I on sociodemographic

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants Across Phases

Variable	Phase I %	Phase I Only %	Phase II %	χ^2	*t*	*p*
Participants	590	428	161			
Gender				4.22		.040
Male	23.3	25.9	17.7			
Female	74.2	73.4	80.5			
Missing	2.5	0.7	1.8			
Race/ethnicity				2.80		.834
Asian	14.3	14.3	15.3			
Bi-/Multi-	4.7	5.1	3.7			
Black/African American	7.5	7.2	8.6			
Hispanic/Latinx	15.3	15.4	15.3			
Native American	0.3	0.5	0.5			
White	55.2	56.8	54.6			
Other	0.7	0.5	1.2			
Missing	2.0	0.2	0.0			
Age	18.76 (1.16)	18.83 (1.24)	18.59 (0.87)		2.19	.029

characteristics and study variable scores with a few exceptions. There were about 7% more women among Phase II participants and age was slightly younger among Phase II (Cohen's $d = 0.22$) participants compared to participants who completed Phase I and did not choose to complete Phase II.

Phase I Measures

Sociodemographics. Participants completed questions regarding their age, ethnic/racial background, and gender. To determine gender, participants were asked, "What is your gender?" and were provided *male*, *female*, and *other* as response options.

Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation-Straightforward version (BFNE-S; Weeks et al., 2005). The BFNE-S is an 8-item self-report measure assessing trait fear of negative evaluation with items scored on a 5-point scale ranging from *not at all characteristic of me* to *extremely characteristic of me.* The BFNE-S is significantly correlated with other measures of social anxiety (*r* ranging from .40-.59; Weeks et al., 2005) in prior research. In the current study, this measure demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$).

Big Five Inventory-2 (BFI-2; Soto & John, 2017). The BFI-2 is a 60-item self-report measure assessing for Big Five personality traits and facets. Items are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from *disagree strongly* to *agree strongly* and each of the five personality traits is assessed using a 12-item subscale score. Pursuant to the study aims are the neuroticism and extraversion scales of the BFI-2. In the current study, the neuroticism scale and the extraversion scale demonstrated good internal consistency (both $\alpha = .89$). The BFI-2 was selected because the trust scale is content-balanced (i.e., consists of two items of trust and two items of distrust). The trust scale evidenced internal consistency estimates below conventional guidelines of .70 in the present study ($\alpha = .59$).

Phase II Materials

Vignette. Previous studies show that state trust can be manipulated in an experimental setting (Tedeschi et al., 1969; Van Lange et al., 2011). Prior research has *not* used the method described. Nonetheless, situational influences (e.g., warmth, competence, morality, relationship closeness) have been found to impact state levels of trust (Goto, 1996; Roberts & Mroczek, 2008; Scott, 1980; Thielmann & Hillbig, 2015; Van Lange et al., 2011), with previous findings suggesting that trustors were more likely to trust trustees with selected descriptions, such as warmth (Weiss et al., 2021). Based upon these research findings, it is expected that providing descriptive information about a prospective trustee, particularly surrounding warmth in this case, can influence someone's trust towards the trustee.

To manipulate state trust, participants were initially given a prompt: "You will be meeting another study participant for a conversation. Before meeting them, please write down five words of how others would typically describe you. Examples of words that people often use to describe themselves include words like 'talkative' or 'quiet.' Please write down five words that you think are descriptive of you and I will be back to collect that paper to give to the other participant." After providing a list of five words, participants were given a description of a confederate with words that are expected to prompt state trust (i.e., understanding, cooperative, cheerful, down-to-earth, considerate) or expected to prompt state distrust (i.e., bossy, hot-tempered, irritable, strong personality, aggressive). Words prompting trust were selected through support of previous studies by focusing on warmth-related words and antonyms for each trust word were identified through an online resource to select words to promote distrust (Fiske et al., 2007; Goodwin et al., 2014; Weiss et al., 2021).

Phase II Measures

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988). The PANAS is a 20-item self-report measure

assessing positive and negative affect. This scale presents single word emotions with ten items assessing positive affect and ten items assessing negative affect. Items of the PANAS are scored on a 5-point scale with the scale ranging from *very slightly or not at all* to *extremely*. For the current study, the negative affect scale of the PANAS was focused on to assess state negative because heightened negative affect could be associated with fear of negative evaluation (Rodebaugh et al., 2017). The PANAS negative affect scale has moderate to strong correlations with other measures of negative affect (*r* ranging from .51-.74). In the current study, the negative affect scale demonstrated good internal consistency (α = .85).

State Trust Scale. Currently, no measure of state trust exists. As such, the present study used a method described in the literature by which the wording of measures of trait constructs are modified to convey present tense statements as a means to assess the respective state construct (Lorona et al., 2018). Therefore, trait trust items from the BFI-2 (Soto & John, 2017) were adapted to be in the present tense to assess current state levels of trust and referenced the prospective trustee. The adapted state trust items were: "I assume the best about the other person;" "The other person has a forgiving nature;" "I am likely to find fault with the other person;" and "I am suspicious of the other person's intentions." Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The second two of the four items, looking at distrust, were reverse coded ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. In the current study, the state trust scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency (α = .95).

State Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale. Currently, no state fear of negative evaluation measure exists. As such, the same method described above was used to develop a state measure of fear of negative evaluation for the proposed study. More precisely, the items from the BFNE-S (Weeks et al., 2005) were adapted to the present tense to assess state fear of negative evaluation. The adapted state fear of negative evaluation items were: "I am worried about what the other person will think of me even though I know it doesn't make a difference;" "I am afraid the other person will notice my shortcomings;" "I am afraid the other person will not approve of me;" "I am afraid the other person will find fault with me;" "I am worried what the other person will think of me;" "I am worried about the impression I make;" "I am concerned with what the other person will think of me;" and "I am worried that I will say or do the wrong things." Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from *disagree strongly* to *agree strongly*. In the current study, the state trust scale demonstrated good internal consistency (α = .82).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

The sample included 590 participants who completed Phase I of the study. This sample was used to examine Hypothesis I. Of the total participants, 162 went on to complete Phase II with 81 participants randomly assigned to the Distrust experimental group and 80 participants randomly assigned to the Trust experimental group. Data from one participant, in the trust condition, was discarded due to that participant not following the study protocol and was removed from analysis. This sample was used to examine Hypothesis II.

Prior to testing study hypotheses, descriptive statistics were used to examine group equivalency on study variable scores for participants who completed Phase I only, participants who chose to complete Phase II, and total Phase I data (all participants in the study combined). A full range of fear of negative evaluation scores was observed (possible and observed range of 8 to 40). Participants in groups were comparable across trait fear of negative evaluation, trait extraversion, trait neuroticism, trait trust, and trait negative affect (magnitude of *t*-values all 2.56 or less, *p*s > .127). Additionally, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to ensure that the study vignette was successful in manipulating state trust and determined that the manipulation used to prompt trust or distrust was effective in changing state trust. Individuals in the Distrust group had lower levels of trust than individuals placed in the Trust group with a large effect size (Cohen's d = 1.87).

Hypothesis I: Unique Variance

Hypothesis I predicted that trust would account for variance in fear of negative evaluation above neuroticism and extraversion. Bivariate relationships between study variables from Phase I are shown below in Table 2. There was a significant, small negative correlation between trait trust and fear of negative evaluation. The first aim of the study was not supported. A multiple linear regression was used to examine the relationship between trust and fear of negative evaluation when controlling for extraversion and neuroticism. Neuroticism and extraversion accounted for a significant portion of variance in fear of negative evaluation (R^2 = .28, p < .001), with both variables significantly associated with fear of negative evaluation (neuroticism: β= .52 and extraversion: β = –.10). When controlling for extraversion and neuroticism, the relationship between trait trust and fear of negative evaluation became nonsignificant (β = .06, p = .131).

Hypothesis II: Causal Role of Trust

Hypothesis II, that individuals who are placed in a situation where their state distrust increased would increase fear of negative evaluation in Phase II of the study, was not supported. Despite the manipulation being effective and individuals in the Distrust condition having significantly lower levels of state trust than individuals in the Trust condition (Cohen's d = 1.88, t = 11.90, p < .001), fear of negative evaluation did not significantly increase in individuals in the Distrust group. A one-way ANOVA determined that there was not a statistically significant difference in fear of negative evaluation in participants between the trust and distrust group (Cohen's d = 0.02, t = 0.15, p = .880).

Discussion

Existing research supports fear of negative evaluation as being

Table 2. Correlation Matrix Between Study Variables

	BFNE-S	SIAS	Extraversion	Neuroticism	Trust
BFNE-S	-	.54**	-.26**	.54**	-.15**
SIAS		-	-.70**	.52**	-.29**
Extraversion			-	-.32**	.26**
Neuroticism				-	-.35**
Trust					-

Note. N = 590. BFNE-S= Fear of Negative Evaluation-Straightforward; SIAS=Social Interaction Anxiety Scale; Extraversion, Neuroticism, Compassion, Respectfulness, Trust are scales from the Big Five Inventory Second Edition.
*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*
** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

important to the development, maintenance, and treatment of social anxiety disorder (Auyeung et al., 2020; Carleton et al., 2007; Clark & Wells, 1995; Leary, 1983; Rapee & Heimberg, 1997; Weeks et al., 2005). Many individuals receiving treatment for social anxiety disorder do not respond to the first dose or experience symptom remission (Davidson et al., 2004; Heimberg et al., 1998; Leichsenring et al., 2013). This less-than-ideal response to treatment may suggest that fear of negative evaluation is not sufficiently reduced by existing treatments, and more research is needed to understand the etiology of fear of negative evaluation. Fear of negative evaluation is believed to be the result the result of personality (Levinson et al., 2014; Rapee & Heimberg, 1997; Rodebaugh et al., 2017) and preliminary evidence indicates an association between trust and fear of negative evaluation (Shabahang et al. 2022). The purpose of this study was to examine whether trust shared unique variance in fear of negative evaluation when accounting for neuroticism and extraversion and to determine whether distrust was a causal factor of fear of negative evaluation.

Hypotheses

Aim 1. The first aim of the study examined whether trait trust accounted for a unique variance in fear of negative evaluation when controlling for relevant covariates (i.e., neuroticism and extraversion). Replicating Shabahang et al.'s (2022) finding, there was a small negative bivariate correlation between trust and fear of negative evaluation. However, trait trust did not account for unique variance in fear of negative evaluation when including neuroticism and extraversion within multivariate analyses. There are several possibilities that could explain these findings. One possibility is the current findings are the result of limits surrounding the measure used to assess trust in the present study. Trust and distrust may be better understood as a distinct construct rather than as being a part of the same continuum (Lewicki et al., 1998; Patent & Searle, 2019; Saunders et al., 2014). The BFI-2 combines both trust and distrust into a single construct and conceptualizes trust as a opposite ends as a continuum. However, internal consistency among the trait trust scale from the BFI-2 was less than ideal and one item (i.e., "Has a forgiving nature") did not correlate with two of the measure items. As such, this BFI-2 scale may lack content validity and may contain too few items to fully assess both polarities of trust.

Potential measurement limits aside, the present findings suggest the relationship between trust and fear of negative evaluation may be better explained by its overlap with neuroticism and extraversion (Thielmann & Hillbig, 2015; Evans & Revelle, 2008). Consistent with literature, there was a moderate positive correlation between fear of negative evaluation and neuroticism and a small negative correlation between fear of negative evaluation and extraversion (Hazel et al., 2014; Rodebaugh et al., 2017). Both neuroticism and extraversion shared significant associations with fear of negative evaluation within multivariate analyses. Although trust has been conceptualized as loading on agreeableness, research suggests that trust may have secondary loadings on neuroticism indicating that trust may potentially map onto both agreeableness and neuroticism (Widiger & Oltmanns, 2019). Individuals who are not trusting may be more likely to avoid risky situations or are more likely to perceive situations as threatening. The current study supported the idea that individuals who are unwilling to take risks in social situations due to fear of negative evaluation may be likely to have low levels of extraversion or high levels of neuroticism (DeYoung, 2015; Thielmann & Hillbig, 2015).

Aim 2. The second aim of the study looked at whether state trust played a causal role in fear of negative evaluation. To examine the effect of state trust on fear of negative evaluation, participants were randomized to receive a novel manipulation of state trust.

The manipulation was supported, as individuals in the Distrust group reported lower levels of trust than individuals in the Trust group with a large effect size. Despite the trust manipulation appearing effective, the randomization to experimental condition was not found to cause greater state fear of negative evaluation. One explanation could be that trust does not cause fear of negative evaluation and conceptual links that suggest that trust may play a role in fear of negative evaluation, as discussed, may be better explained by shared relationship other traits (e.g., high neuroticism). However, there are also additional possibilities for why the experimental manipulation did not cause greater fear of negative evaluation.

An alternative possibility is that the measure used to assess state fear of negative evaluation may not have adequately assessed participants' state fear of negative evaluation. The measure that was used was adapted from trait fear of negative evaluation measure items. As such, transforming items into present tense may not have adequately evaluated state fear of negative evaluation. While there is evidence for adjusting wording in measures to assess for present state (Lorona et al., 2018), no studies have supported the use of a state BFNE-S measure. Additionally, distrust may worsen social anxiety, but not through fear of negative evaluation. Though fear of negative evaluation is the putative driver of social anxiety, state social anxiety symptoms were not assessed following the trust manipulation. Thus, increasing distrust may have impact on social anxiety, though not through a mechanism related to fear of negative evaluation. Distrust may increase social anxiety through social assumptions related to the type of social cost rather than fearing negative evaluation. For example, they may be more fearful of others inflicting physical harm or using information provided against them (Horton, 2014). As such, suspiciousness of others' intentions could lead them to be anxious within social situations without worrying about negative evaluation from others. Future studies could investigate whether distrust may worsen aspects of social anxiety that were not examined in this study.

Limitations

Study limitations should be considered when interpreting results of the current study. The sample of participants was undergraduate students from a religious university in the Southern U.S. who primarily identified as female. The generality of study findings is important to elucidate in future studies (e.g., potential impact of age; Bailey et al., 2016). Related to the generality of study findings, the present study used an unselected sample, based upon the dimensional nature of fear of negative evaluation and trust, rather than selecting participants based upon severity of scores. It is nonetheless possible a divergent pattern of findings may be evidenced when specifically examining individuals who are most prone to fear of negative evaluation. An additional study limitation is that the single confederate used may have influenced study findings. Participants were likely able to make reasonable assumptions about the confederate's age, gender, and ethnoracial identification based on seeing the back of the confederate. Participants may be more comfortable interacting with individuals who are more similar to them. Therefore, matching the confederate to the participant on age, gender, and ethnoracial identification could impact study findings by affecting trust and fear of negative evaluation of participants. Individuals interacting with someone of perceived different ethnoracial identity, gender, or age identification could reduce participant trust toward confederate or increase fear of negative evaluation related to assumptions about the other based on these visible characteristics.

Conclusions

Overall, the present results suggest that trust does not explain unique variance in fear of negative evaluation and is not a causal factor of fear of negative evaluation. Although the focus of the present study was on fear of negative evaluation, trust may share importance to our understanding of social anxiety more broadly. Distrust may contribute to social anxiety through social assumptions related to social cost (e.g., physical harm) rather than fear of negative evaluation. Continuing to examine the relationship between trust and social anxiety may provide valuable insight and improve our current conceptualization and treatment of social anxiety disorder.

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