The Relationship Between Self-Focus and Anxiety

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Introduction

- Self-focus has been linked with multiple psychological disorders, including anxiety and depression.¹,²,³
- Anxiety is the most prevalent mental illness in the United States, with a lifetime prevalence of 33.7%.²,⁴
- Anxiety symptoms often co-occur with depressive symptoms; therefore, depression and anxiety are often consolidated in research scenarios.³,⁵
- Past studies have shown a positive correlation between negative self-focus and depressive symptoms.¹,²,³
- With anxiety prevalence on the rise, it is worthy of attention independent from depression.³
- Anxiety is correlated with higher reports of self-focus and negative self-focus specifically.³
- This study will look at the relationship between anxiety and self-focus and negative self-focus.³
- We will consider whether depression mediates the relationship between anxiety and negative self-focus, which has yet to be analyzed in the literature.³

Predictions

1. Anxiety symptoms will be positively correlated with amount of self-focus.³
2. Anxiety symptoms will be positively correlated with negative self-focus.³
3. Depression symptoms will not fully mediate the relationship between anxiety and negative self-focus.³

Methods

- A college sample of 188 students were recruited to complete the Sentence Completion Task (SCT) and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI).³
- The SCT is an open-ended language task that provides participants with "stems" (e.g., I am; I think), and participants complete the stems in ways that are meaningful to them.³
- Responses to the SCT are coded for focus (e.g., self, other, both, or neither) and valence (positive, negative, or neutral).³
- The BAI is a 21-item questionnaire which assesses anxiety symptoms over the past month using a Likert scale.³

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

- A partial Pearson’s Correlation was calculated in SPSS 26 to measure the relationship between BAI scores and self-focused responses on a SCT.³

Table 1. Demographic Information

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<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13.12</td>
<td>11.641</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

- Our results argue that there may not be as strong of a relationship between anxiety and self-focus as previous data indicated.¹,²,³
- However, our sample of participants may have had data that were skewed toward normal levels of anxiety and lacked a wide distribution of anxiety scores.³
- Since there was not a significant relationship between anxiety and negative self-focus, we did not assess whether depression mediated the relationship between anxiety and negative self-focus.³
- Negative self-focus may be more closely related to other psychological symptoms, such as depression.³

Discussion

- Our results argue that there may not be as strong of a relationship between anxiety and self-focus as previous data indicated.¹,²,³
- However, our sample of participants may have had data that were skewed toward normal levels of anxiety and lacked a wide distribution of anxiety scores.³
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FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Given the prevalence and distressing nature of the symptoms, it is critical to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of anxiety.³
- Future research could evaluate if a strong relationship exists between external-focused attention and anxiety.³

References