

The Negative Self-Portrayal Scale: Development, Validation, and Application to Social Anxiety

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The Negative Self-Portrayal Scale (NSPS) is a new questionnaire designed to assess the extent to which individuals are concerned that specific self-attributes they view as being deficient will be exposed to scrutiny and evaluation by critical others in social situations. These concerns have been proposed to drive symptoms of social anxiety and account for individual differences in social fears and avoidance behaviors (Moscovitch, 2009). Here, we introduce the NSPS and examine its factor structure and psychometric properties across two large samples of North American undergraduate students with normally distributed symptoms of social anxiety. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported a 3-factor solution representing concerns about (a) social competence; (b) physical appearance; and (c) signs of anxiety. The NSPS was found to have good internal consistency and test-retest reliability, strong convergent validity, and adequate discriminant validity. In addition, NSPS total scores accounted for a significant proportion of unique variance in self-concealment (i.e., safety) behaviors over and above established symptom measures of social interaction anxiety, social performance anxiety, and depression. Results are discussed in relation to theoretical models of social anxiety and the potential utility of the NSPS for both clinical research and practice.

THERE IS A GROWING consensus that the perception of self plays a crucial role in the pathogenesis and persistence of social anxiety (cf. [Stopa, 2009a](#)). Although specific conceptualizations of the self differ across contemporary cognitive and interpersonal models of social anxiety ([Alden & Taylor, 2004](#); [Clark & Wells, 1995](#); [Hofmann, 2007](#); [Leary & Kowalski, 1995](#); [Rapee & Heimberg, 1997](#)), there is now strong empirical support for the view that symptoms of social anxiety arise from the discrepancy produced by the motivation to convey a desired social impression of oneself to others in combination with the expectation that one will fail to do so (e.g., [Schlenker & Leary, 1985](#)). Indeed, numerous studies have shown that highly socially anxious individuals significantly underestimate their social performance abilities as well as other salient social self-attributes, and routinely provide self-ratings that fall well below their perception of the standard they believe is required by relevant “audience” evaluators (e.g., for reviews of this literature, see [Moscovitch & Hofmann, 2007](#); [Orr & Moscovitch, 2010a](#); [Moscovitch, Orr, Rowa, Gehring Reimer, & Antony, 2009](#)).

Under social threat, highly socially anxious and phobic individuals allocate increased attentional resources toward monitoring their internal anxiety cues and other perceived negative features of the self ([Rapee & Heimberg, 1997](#); [Spurr & Stopa, 2002](#)). This increase in self-monitoring coincides with the experience of spontaneous, recurrent, intrusive, and often vivid negative mental self-images that are viewed from an observer's perspective ([Hackmann, Clark, & McManus, 2000](#); [Hackmann, Surawy, & Clark, 1998](#)). These images tend to be negatively

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distorted and exaggerated representations of the self; nevertheless, they are perceived and processed by socially anxious individuals as being accurate. As a result, these images capture precious emotional and cognitive resources and possibly prevent the encoding of salient positive social and interpersonal cues in the external environment (Clark & Wells, 1995).

On the basis of clinical observations and the burgeoning empirical literature on the central role of the self in social anxiety, Moscovitch (2009) recently recommended that scientist-practitioners engaged in assessing and treating patients with social anxiety disorder (SAD) within an exposure-based cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) framework shift their focus in treatment from targeting patients' feared social situations, to targeting more directly the core feared stimuli in SAD. Moscovitch proposed that the feared stimuli in SAD are specific self-attributes that socially anxious individuals perceive as being flawed or contrary to perceived sociocultural norms, hypothesizing that it might be possible to organize these self-attributes into broad themes that fall across four nonorthogonal dimensions: (a) concerns about social skills and behaviors; (b) concerns about visible signs of anxiety; (c) concerns about physical appearance; and (d) concerns about personality. While research on SAD has historically focused on socially anxious individuals' concerns about social skills/behaviors and signs of anxiety (see Moscovitch, 2009, for a review of this literature), investigators have only recently begun to examine the link between social anxiety and heightened concerns about physical appearance (Hart, Flora, Palyo, Fresco, Holle, & Heimberg, 2008; Izgiç, Akyüz, Dogan, & Kugu, 2004; Rapee & Abbott, 2006) and personality characteristics (Mansell & Clark, 1999; Wilson & Rapee, 2006).

Moscovitch's (2009) model offers a potentially useful, theory-guided heuristic for conceptualizing symptom variations and individual differences in social anxiety. Socially anxious people are heterogeneous with respect to the kinds of social situations they fear and avoid (see Hofmann, Heinrichs, & Moscovitch, 2004 for a review of this literature), as well as the types of subtle avoidance or safety behaviors they tend to use (e.g., McManus, Sacadura, & Clark, 2008). According to Moscovitch (2009), variations in social fears and safety behaviors are functionally related to underlying differences in self-attribute concerns across the proposed dimensions. Specifically, social situations that are endorsed as being anxiety-provoking are those which individuals perceive as having the capacity to expose their

perceived self-deficiencies for public consumption. In the same vein, subtle avoidance and safety behaviors represent attempts to conceal or prevent the public exposure of those self-attributes. Thus, core concerns about self-attribute flaws are proposed to drive the constellation of social anxiety symptoms—subjective distress, avoidance, and self-concealment—that are associated with high levels of functional impairment in the emotional, vocational, and interpersonal lives of individuals with SAD (Ledley & Heimberg, 2005).

Although numerous psychometrically validated measures of social anxiety are now widely available, none specifically assesses self-portrayal concerns across the proposed dimensions. Most of the excellent social anxiety self-report measures currently in circulation (e.g., LSAS-SR, SIAS, SPS, SPIN, SPAI, etc.; see Antony, Orsillo, & Roemer, 2001) assess the level or type of social anxiety symptoms that individuals may experience across a variety of social performance and interaction situations. Our objective in designing the Negative Self-Portrayal Scale (NSPS) was not to add another questionnaire to this list. Rather, we wished to create a novel measure that directly assessed the specific types of self-attributes that Moscovitch (2009) proposed would elicit concerns about self-presentation for socially anxious individuals in anxiety-provoking social situations. Being able to identify and measure such concerns might conceivably both enhance our understanding of symptom heterogeneity in social anxiety and guide case conceptualization of SAD in clinical practice. This may, in turn, help facilitate the delivery of CBT for SAD in a more individually customized manner, thereby having the potential to enhance SAD treatment outcomes.

Here, we examine the factor structure and psychometric properties of the NSPS in two large samples of individuals with social anxiety symptoms distributed across the normal spectrum and begin to investigate some of the central, but previously untested, theoretical claims of Moscovitch's (2009) model. Despite our theoretical hypotheses about the factor structure of the NSPS across the proposed dimensions, no previous studies have tested these predictions empirically. Thus, we first present an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the NSPS in participant Sample 1, as recommended in the early stages of scale development (e.g., Hurley et al., 1997). Next, based on the results from Sample 1, we follow up the EFA in Sample 2 with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the derived model and plausible competing models (Brown, 2006).

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