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The Impact of Internet Experiences on Embarrassment

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The Impact of Internet Experiences on Embarrassment

by

Joseph J. Tucciarone Jr.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

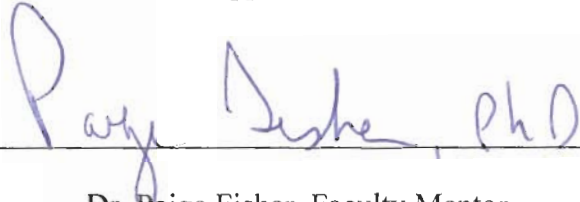
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Department of Psychology Seton Hall University

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Approval Page

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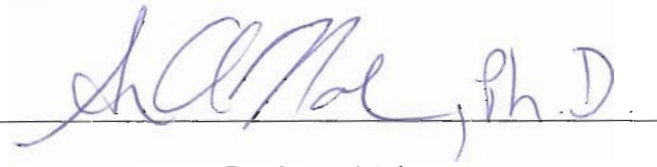
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Abstract

Media technology (e.g., Internet via social networking, email, and texting) has changed the way we interact with one another. For instance, the more time college students spend communicating on Facebook, the less time they spend socializing in face-to-face settings. Although studies have predominantly examined Internet experiences of college students in general, specific attention has also been paid to Internet experiences of shy and socially anxious individuals. Prior research suggests that individuals who fear social rejection prefer the anonymous nature of the Internet (Shepherd & Edelman, 2005). Additionally, shy and socially anxious individuals seem to prefer online relationships to in-person relationships, although they have fewer Facebook friends than those without impairment (Orr et al., 2009). It is possible that the anonymity of the Internet might lessen fears of embarrassment typically experienced by shy individuals. To date, no research has explored the impact of technology on embarrassment for any population. The current study investigated differences in levels of embarrassment during face-to-face interactions compared to online interactions. Participants responded to either hypothetical in-person or Internet scenarios that described an embarrassing situation. The impact on both shy and non-shy individuals was investigated. Results indicated that face-to-face social mistakes were more embarrassing than online interactions in general. Socially anxious individuals found awkward and uncomfortable situations more embarrassing than did those without anxiety.

The Impact of Internet Experiences of Embarrassment on College Students

Throughout the first decade of the new millennium the Internet has become a popular vessel for online communication and interaction. The Internet could be described as a network of networks that link a variety of information across the world. As of 2007, 220 million Americans used the Internet (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2008). The Internet and other media technologies have transformed how individuals develop and maintain relationships. With text messaging and e-mail, no longer does one have to rely on face-to-face communication. With the advent of social networking venues such as Facebook or Twitter, individuals have access to the personal lives of each of their Internet and real life friends. Personal information is often spread throughout a network for everyone to see, creating a combination of increased visibility with less intimacy.

While there is a relatively small amount of research that describes the social implications of Internet interactions, it is important to understand how Internet interactions differ from normal face-to-face conversations. The current study investigated social implications of the Internet, focusing on the experiences of online embarrassment. Internet embarrassment may be particularly relevant for certain subgroups such as those who are shy and socially anxious. One primary hypothesis was investigated: 1) whether non-anxious and anxious participants react to embarrassment differently based on setting (in-person, online).

To examine this question, the implications for Internet interactions were assessed with specific attention placed on shy and socially anxious college students. Internet usage and implications for college students will be discussed along with its effects on shy and socially anxious individuals. Past research on embarrassment will be discussed to distinguish embarrassment experienced online by those who are socially anxious and those who are not.

Social Implications of the Internet for College Students

Increased use of the Internet via computers, mobile phones, and other portable technology has ramifications for face-to-face social interactions. Nie and Hillygus (2002) asked participants to keep an online diary to explain how time is spent socially. They found increased Internet use was negatively correlated with time spent with family and friends. This study suggests that Internet users tend to spend less time being social and therefore interact with people less than non-internet users (Nie & Hillygus, 2002).

For college students, the Internet is often a primary means of social interaction. Eighty-six percent of college students use the Internet, in contrast to 59% of the general population (Hoffman, Novak & Venkatesh, 2004). Eighty-five percent of college students own personal computers while 72% check their email daily (Jones, 2002). This constant connection to the Internet may allow students to always feel part of a network that may not be present in the real world.

The first ten years of the new century saw a boom in social networking websites, which might contribute to increased time being spent on the Internet. Social networking websites (e.g., MySpace, Facebook, Flickr, and Twitter) are a relatively new phenomenon which enables users to join an online network to share information about their lives with people from all over the world. It has impacted the way people communicate and allocate their time spent on the Internet. In a study of Facebook use (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009), college students reported using the website from 10 to 30 minutes a day to communicate with friends and to establish a personal identity. They used social networking to connect with old and new friends and at the same time learn more about people with whom they may not be friends at the moment. In terms of communication behaviors, they spend more time looking at others' profiles than

communicating directly with those individuals. Additionally, rather than communicating privately, students were twice as likely to write a public message (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009).

The Internet also impacts students' academic experience. Seventy-nine percent of students reported the Internet has a positive impact on their academic success (Jones, 2002). With the creation of websites like Blackboard, students and professors are linked together so assignments, lecture notes, and grades are constantly available. Face-to-face interactions with professors are no longer the only means for students to attain class information. This new technology provides a new way for students to communicate and learn.

Shyness and Social Anxiety

Shyness has high prevalence rates among the college population. Forty percent of an 800-person undergraduate sample reported that they are shy (Hofmann, Moscovitch & Kim, 2006). Shyness is considered to be on the lower end of the social anxiety spectrum. Although shyness is a mild form of social anxiety, the presence of others can cause anxious reactions such as tension and discomfort (Orr et al., 2009). Just as shyness impacts social interactions, the same can be said for social anxiety. Social anxiety disorder, also known as social phobia, is characterized by fears of social interactions, and subsequent avoidance due to this fear (Stein & Stein, 2008). Fear of embarrassment or humiliation is one of the core clinical features of the disorder (American Psychiatric Association [*DSM-IV-TR*], 2000). This fear of embarrassment or negative evaluation can cause socially anxious individuals to hide their impairment, as they do not want to be seen as abnormal.

Research has shown that those with social anxiety think differently than do those without impairment. Psychologists believe individuals with social anxiety have a difficult time coping

and dealing with everyday situations. In a study by Wenzel and colleagues (2007), socially and non-socially anxious individuals were told to label social situations and sort them into two categories according to: 1) How they personally believe the events would occur (self) or 2) How they estimate other people believe they would occur (other). Wenzel and colleagues (2007) found that socially anxious sorting was less associated with the “self” category when compared to the non-anxious group.

Shyness, Social Anxiety and Internet Use

Shyness has an impact on how Internet users communicate and form relationships. The Internet may provide a shield for shy individuals to hide behind and may impede their social development (Scealy et al., 2002) because they have weaker social ties and interact less socially. Shy individuals may use the Internet to replace offline relationships whether they are romantic or purely platonic (Scealy et al., 2002) and may use email less because they have fewer friends to email (Madell & Muncer, 2006).

Similar interaction patterns have been demonstrated with Facebook use. Shy individuals spent more time on Facebook than did their non-shy peers. The shyer the subject was, the more time spent on the Web site (Orr et al., 2009), potentially because shy people find online interactions less anxiety-producing than face-to-face interactions. While interacting online, many verbal and nonverbal cues elicited during face-to-face communication are removed and could make shy people more comfortable because their concerns for their personal appearance and cues they give off are not visible. However, although they spend more time on Facebook, shy individuals reap fewer benefits from the Web site than do non-shy people. There was a negative correlation between shyness and the number of Facebook friends, which means that shyer people have fewer friends on Facebook than non-shy people.

Another study expanded upon the absence of verbal and nonverbal cues in shy individuals and Facebook, it found that shy individuals have more control of how they present themselves on Facebook. Therefore, there is less risk of having their cues misinterpreted by others. Researchers argued that Facebook provided a greater sense of social support for shy individuals because of the comfort level they have on the Web site (Baker & Oswald, 2010).

The Internet may have implications for individuals who suffer from social anxiety because those who do not feel comfortable talking in-person tend to use the Internet more as a communication method. Research also points to Internet communication as a way to lessen social rejection (Shepherd & Edelmann, 2005). Participants in this study were given the social phobia and social interaction anxiety scales along with an Internet questionnaire to identify whether the Internet is used to regulate social fears. Individuals with high fears of being observed were more likely to interact socially on the Internet than those without fears of being observed. Individuals who are afraid of being watched might prefer the anonymity of the Internet (Shepherd & Edelmann, 2005).

As described with non-anxious people by Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert (2009), the Internet appears to provide an environment of social observing for socially anxious individuals. Socially anxious individuals use the Internet as a method of communication when they fear face-to-face talking (Sheldon, 2008). Sheldon and colleagues (2008) administered a questionnaire and approach-avoidance scale (UCS-AA) to measure motives for using Facebook and to measure levels of anxiety and fear during interpersonal situations. Evidence shows that college students who feel anxious about face-to-face communication use Facebook more to pass time and in turn feel less lonely than non-anxious participants (Sheldon, 2008). Students who reported

unhappiness with their face-to-face experiences because of their social anxiety had fewer Facebook friends but logged into the Web site more than did others (Sheldon, 2008).

Past research has shown that a major function behind Internet usage was anxiety reduction. Participants reported that they felt less shy online than in person. These findings are particularly relevant for individuals who use online dating websites to meet new people. Those who experience social or dating anxiety may find the Internet to be a method of communication that is less threatening than are face-to-face interactions. In addition, some research also proposes that individuals with social anxiety may be more prone to seek intimate relationships over the Internet than non-anxious individuals (Knox, Daniels, Strudivant, & Zusman, 2001).

McKenna (1999) found that people with social anxiety were more likely to use the Internet to meet new people and form relationships. The results also indicated that online relationships typically form much faster than relationships that form face-to-face. These findings can be explained by “gating” features. “Gating” features are characteristics that are exclusively present during face-to-face interactions. These may include physical appearance features such as weight, height, speech patterns, or self-presentation. These features could cause extra stress and more discomfort for those with social anxiety and as a result Internet interactions may be more appealing since these “gating” features are greatly reduced over online interactions.

Embarrassment and its Triggers

Embarrassment is a brief emotional reaction to an unwanted social predicament or wrongdoing (Moore, Brodsgaard, & Rosenberg, 2004). Shyness, social anxiety, and embarrassment are closely related because they are within the same spectrum of negative evaluation (Hofmann & Kim, 2006). If one has the competence to deal with negative evaluation, the likelihood of embarrassment is lower (Withers & Sherblom, 2008). A variety of social

situations lead to embarrassment such as making a mistake in public or being observed by a large crowd.

A major component of anxiety is embarrassment as anxious people are more likely to be embarrassed than are non-anxious people. Those with social anxiety have less competence in social situations and their ability to deal with embarrassment is greatly affected. Certain social situations can be detrimental to the way a socially anxious individual handles himself or herself during an embarrassing event. Anxious individuals have what clinical psychologists call an abnormal schemata, or thought pattern (Wenzel et al., 2007). Socially anxious individuals underestimate their ability to deal with embarrassing situations but overly evaluate others' coping ability (Edelmann, 1985).

Sabini, Siepmann, Stein, and Meyerowitz (2000) theorized that individual personality differences would predict which social situations people found embarrassing. In order to categorize embarrassing situations into applicable subtypes, Sabini and colleagues asked subjects to rate levels of embarrassment for forty vignettes (Sabini et al. 2000). Through factor analysis, they identified three different subtypes: *Faux Pas*, Center of Attention, and Sticky Situations. *Faux Pas* situations involve an individual making a social blunder and failing to perform at a social act. In the Center of Attention subtype, a person is observed but no social errors occur. Lastly, the Sticky Situation involves scenarios in which individuals are placed in uncomfortable social interactions, such as asking someone to repay an overdue loan (Withers & Sherblom, 2008). For undergraduate students, *Faux Pas* situations were rated the most embarrassing, whereas Center of Attention and Sticky Situation triggers were second and third highest, respectively (Pettijohn II et al., 2008).

In addition to identifying three types of embarrassing situations in general, Sabini and colleagues (2000) investigated whether specific personality variables would differentiate between the subtypes. They used the rejection sensitivity questionnaire to evaluate the nature of embarrassing experiences and were also interested in identifying if the different subtypes have different personality correlations. When compared against the rejection sensitivity scale, the *Faux Pas* subscale had a stronger positive correlation than the Sticky Situation subscale (Sabini et al., 2000). These results indicate that individuals showed a higher sensitivity to rejection when making a social blunder than those who are not prone to rejection.

Current Study

Embarrassment is a very common social experience and social interactions via the Internet and related media technology are increasing. Although prior studies have investigated embarrassment during in-person social situations and the impact of online interactions in other contexts, no studies have looked at the experience of embarrassment during online interactions. Prior studies have looked at online experiences for shy and socially anxious individuals, but none has examined embarrassment during online interactions. The current study compared online and in-person situations to assess possible differences in levels of embarrassment in a general college sample. The impact of anxiety level on the experience of embarrassment was investigated as well.

Participants were randomly assigned to an in-person or online condition and read hypothetical scenarios in the three categories (*Faux Pas*, Center of Attention, and Sticky Situation) identified by Sabini and colleagues (2000). After reading the scenarios, they speculated how embarrassed and how likely they would be to avoid that situation in the future. The scenarios were matched as closely as possible for content with the only differences related to

setting (online or in-person). Anxiety in social situations was measured to assess differences in embarrassment and avoidance reactions. Participants also completed a personality scale used in the Sabini and colleagues (2000) study in order to identify if rejection sensitivity predicted different subtypes of embarrassment and future avoidance.

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were investigated in this study: I expected an interaction between social anxiety level (presence or absence) and setting (in-person, online) in which the potentially embarrassing interaction took place. Specifically, I expected anxious students to find in-person interactions more embarrassing than online interactions, and non-anxious students to find online situations more embarrassing. Non-anxious students might experience more embarrassment online than in-person because Internet communication could potentially reach more individuals when compared to in-person interactions. Online interactions may feel more intimidating due to their visibility and permanence on Web sites such as Facebook or YouTube. In terms of socially anxious individuals, I expected to find greater embarrassment, on average in face-to-face than online interactions because socially anxious individuals typically prefer online communication (Sheldon, 2008), and use the Internet to decrease the likelihood of social rejection (Shepherd & Edelman, 2005)

Additionally, the three embarrassment subtypes might also be experienced differently based on level of rejection sensitivity. Like the results found in the Sabini and colleagues (2000) study, I expected that 2) those who showed sensitivity to rejection would find in-person *Faux Pas* scenarios more embarrassing, on average than those who are not sensitive to rejection.

Method

Participants

A power-analysis determined that one hundred and twenty-five participants were required for this study. Participants were recruited through the online psychology research system, SONA and received course credit for their participation. The age of participants ranged from 17 to 26 years old ($M=19.01$, $SD=1.60$).

Measures

Demographic Information. Participants answered a brief demographic questionnaire (see appendix A) that included questions related to age, gender, ethnicity, year in college and academic field of study.

Embarrassment trigger type questionnaire (Sabini et al. 2000). Participants read vignettes about embarrassing scenarios with specific triggers (*Faux Pas*, Center of Attention, and Sticky Situations) derived from Sabini and colleagues (2000; see appendix B-C). Two of each trigger type were presented (6 in total). Vignettes for online and in-person embarrassment were parallel in terms of content with the only difference being the setting of the interaction.

After reading each vignette, participants indicated how embarrassed they would feel on a 7- point scale (1= Not embarrassed at all, 4= moderately embarrassed; 7= extremely embarrassed). An avoidance measure was added which asked participants how likely they would be to avoid similar situations in future. This measure was also on a 7-point scale (1= very unlikely, 4= unsure, 7=very likely).

Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ; Downey & Feldman, 1996). The RSQ measures rejection sensitivity by assessing expectations and anxiety about whether others will meet the individuals' needs for acceptance or will reject them (see appendix D). Participants

reported on their level of anxiety and expectations regarding others' responses to them during various hypothetical situations. The 18 item questionnaire asked two questions: 1) "How concerned or anxious would you be about how the other person would respond?" (1=very unconcerned, 6= very concerned), and 2) "How do you think the other person would be likely to respond?" (1= very unlikely, 6= very likely). The RSQ has previously been shown to have high internal consistency ($\alpha = .83$; Downey & Feldman, 1996) and acceptable validity (Kang & Chasteen, 2009).

Social Phobia and Anxiety Inventory (SPAI; Turner et al. 1989). The SPAI inventory measures the physiological, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of social phobia (see appendix E). It contains questions that evaluate the severity of the symptoms of anxiety and social avoidance with a 7- point scale. Thirty-two items on the scale relate to social anxiety and 13 items measured agoraphobia. The total SPAI score is calculated by subtracting the difference between the two subscales. The SPAI score has been shown to have high internal consistency ($\alpha = .96$; Turner et al. 1989). Past studies by El-Sayeg, Fattel, & Muizina (2006) and Baer & Garland (2005) have shown the SPAI to have high validity.

Design

The primary independent variables are the setting in which embarrassment is experienced (online, in-person) and a diagnostic measure of social anxiety as a continuous variable. The main dependent variables of interest were the scores on the Sabini et al. (2000) embarrassment scale and corresponding measures of social avoidance. A measure of rejection sensitivity was used as an independent variable and was collected to further identify specific anxiety-related personality characteristics.

Procedure

Participants were escorted to a classroom where the study was administered in groups of a maximum of ten individuals per session. They were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (online, in-person). Participants were verbally told that the study investigated the impact of embarrassment on college students. Additional instructions were delivered via reading the packet relevant to their condition. Participants first completed a demographics form and then the condition-appropriate embarrassment trigger questionnaire (online or in-person). The SPAI and RSQ followed the scenarios and were counterbalanced.

Data Analyses

Six hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to measure the relative impact of condition and the anxiety variables to experiences of embarrassment and avoidance. Hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted for both dependent variables (embarrassment and avoidance) within each subtype of embarrassment (*Faux Pas*, Center of Attention, Sticky Situation). The first step entered was SPAI score and RSQ to assess the contribution of level of anxiety and sensitivity to rejection. Condition was entered in the second step to measure the impact of setting (in-person, online) whereas, the third step assessed any interactions between level of anxiety and the setting in which embarrassment and avoidance took place.

Results

Sample Characteristics

The sample consisted of 25 male (20%) and 100 female (80%) respondents between 17 and 26 years of age with a mean age of 19. Participants were predominately Caucasian (60.8%; 12.8% African American; 12.0% Asian/Pacific Islander; 10.4% Hispanic; 4.0% Other). Nursing and social science majors constituted the majority of the sample (27.2% & 26.4%; 20.0% Physical & Natural Sciences; 8% Other; 6.4% Undecided; 4.8% Education; 4.0% Business; 1.6% Humanities; 0.8% Arts). Freshmen were reported at a higher frequency than those in other years of college (48%; 30.4% sophomores; 13.6% juniors; 8% seniors). Table 1 presents means for dependent variables in the whole sample and by condition (in-person, online). Independent samples *t*-test analyses were conducted to assess any significant differences in means for the variables. Results indicate a significant mean difference for average *Faux Pas* Embarrassment.

	General Sample		In-Person		Online	
	n=125		n=63		n=62	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Age	19.01	1.60	19.13	1.60	18.89	1.23
Average <i>Faux Pas</i> Embarrassment	4.75**	1.08	5.15	1.08	4.34	1.14
Average <i>Faux Pas</i> Avoidance	2.79	1.45	2.98	1.62	2.75	1.37
Average Center of Attention Embarrassment	3.11	1.24	3.13	1.30	3.09	1.20
Average Center of Attention Avoidance	2.32	1.38	2.43	1.40	2.20	1.37
Average Sticky Situation Embarrassment	5.41	1.26	5.24	1.32	5.59	1.18
Average Sticky Situation Avoidance	4.09	1.45	4.01	1.37	4.18	1.53

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables

** $p < .001$

Levels of Embarrassment

Table 2 describes the results of hierarchical regressions predicting average embarrassment. The interaction of SPAI score and condition for the *Faux Pas* ($F(4, 124) = 6.86, p = .900; R^2 = .186$), Center of Attention ($F(4, 124) = 5.47, p = .741; R^2 = .154$) and Sticky Situations ($F(4,$

124) = 6.94, $p = .474$; $R^2 = .188$) subtypes were not significant. However, there was a significant effect of SPAI score ($F(2, 124) = 3.53, p = .012$; $R^2 = .055$) and condition ($F(3, 124) = 9.22, p = .000$; $R^2 = .186$) for the *Faux Pas* subtype as participants found in-person situations, where someone makes a social mistake more embarrassing than those occurring online. In this subtype, the variance increase of .131 suggests that SPAI score significantly adds to the contribution of condition. For the Center of Attention subtype, rejection sensitivity was a significant predictor of embarrassment ($F(2, 124) = 11.00, p = .000$; $R^2 = .153$), suggesting that those who were sensitive about rejection found being the focus of attention more embarrassing than who are not concerned about rejection. Lastly, for the Sticky Situation subtype, both SPAI score ($F(2, 124) = 12.57, p = .001$; $R^2 = .171$) and rejection sensitivity ($F(2, 124) = 12.57, p = .022$; $R^2 = .171$) were significant predictors of embarrassment, suggesting that those who were sensitive to rejection and those who were socially anxious were more likely to be embarrassed by an awkward situation than those without these forms of anxiety. According to Cohen (1992), all findings are considered large effect sizes.

Level of Avoidance

Table 3 describes the results of hierarchical multiple regression assessing predictors of average levels of avoidance for each subtype of embarrassing situation. The interaction between SPAI score and condition for *Faux Pas* ($F(3, 124) = 2.69, p = .339$; $R^2 = .082$), Center of Attention ($F(4, 124) = 4.10, p = .950$; $R^2 = .120$) and Sticky Situations ($F(4, 124) = 18.10, p = .264$; $R^2 = .376$) subtypes were not significant.

There was a significant effect of rejection sensitivity for both the Center of Attention ($F(2, 124) = 7.64, p = .009$; $R^2 = .111$) and Sticky Situation ($F(2, 124) = 35.68, p = .000$; $R^2 = .369$) subtypes. These findings suggest that those who were prone to rejection were more likely than

those without this concern to avoid future instances where they might be the focus of attention or experience awkward situations. Lastly, a significant effect was found for socially anxious participants, as they were more likely to avoid Sticky Situations ($F(2,124) = 35.68, p = .000; R^2 = .369$) than those who are not anxious. All effect sizes for avoidance were considered large (Cohen, 1992).

Variables	Average <i>Faux Pas</i>			Average Center of Attention			Average Sticky Situation		
	β	R	R ²	β	R	R ²	β	R	R ²
Step 1									
SPAI Score	.240*			.057			.297**		
Total Rejection Sensitivity	-.020	.234	.055	.368**	.391	.153	.204*	.413	.171
Step 2									
Condition	-.363**	.431	.186	-.023	.392	.153	.117	.429	.184
Step 3									
SPAI Score* Condition	-.040	.431	.186	-.107	.393	.154	.227	.433	.188

Table 2: Hierarchical Multiple Regression predicting Average Embarrassment

**p < .001

*p < .05

Variables	Average <i>Faux Pas</i>			Average Center of Attention			Average Sticky Situation		
	β	R	R ²	β	R	R ²	β	R	R ²
Step 1									
SPAI Score	.169			.161			.446**		
Total Rejection Sensitivity	.147	.259	.067	.242*	.334	.111	.287**	.607	.369
Step 2									
Condition	-.091	.274	.075	-.095	.347	.120	.028	.608	.370
Step 3									
SPAI Score* Condition	.323	.287	.082	-.021	.347	.120	.311	.613	.376

Table 3: Hierarchical Multiple Regression predicting Average Avoidance

**p < .001

*p < .05

Discussion

Embarrassment

As there were no significant interactions, the primary hypothesis that anxious people would find more embarrassment face-to-face and non-anxious participants would find online interactions more severe was not supported. While anxious individuals did not experience embarrassment differently based on setting (online, in-person), they did find both Sticky Situations and *Faux Pas* scenarios more anxiety producing than their non-anxious peers.

In contrast to anticipated findings, the proposed *Faux Pas* situations might have been more embarrassing in-person to all participants because committing a social blunder in front of a cohort, in a live setting is more visible to others. For instance, the Internet may mask embarrassment for an online *Faux Pas* because physical appearance variables such as facial expression are typically non-existent during online interactions. These results are somewhat consistent with McKenna's (1999) theory on "gating features" which states that online interactions are more comfortable because physical appearance variables are removed. After the resulting *Faux Pas*, the degree of embarrassment felt seems to be dependent on the reaction of others, which is typically revealed live.

Socially anxious individuals found hypothetical *Faux Pas* and Sticky Situations more embarrassing than those who do not experience social anxiety. Edelman (1985) suggested that those with social anxiety have lower self-competence to deal with situations. These findings could attribute to why *Faux Pas* scenarios were more embarrassing to socially anxious individuals. For example, if a socially anxious individual slips, they might believe they are failing at an act that would normally not happen to a competent person. In terms of Sticky Situations, socially anxious individuals may feel more embarrassment than non-anxious

individuals during these awkward situations because they find the verbal and non-verbal cues more discomforting than non-anxious individuals (Orr et al. 2009).

Avoidance

Those who were socially anxious were more likely to avoid the hypothetical Sticky Situations. If a socially anxious individual believes a situation will be uncomfortable, they most likely would try to stay away from it in the future. These findings are somewhat consistent with Wenzel and colleagues' (2007) study on abnormal thought patterns for socially anxious individuals. They found socially anxious individuals overgeneralize situations, which negatively impacts their ability to deal with a threatening or embarrassing event. For instance, if a non-anxious student hypothetically reveals to her friends that she has a crush on a classmate, while her crush is unknowingly behind her, that student might feel slightly embarrassed at first but that feeling may quickly dissipate. In contrast, a socially anxious individual will most likely believe every future encounter with her crush will be uncomfortable and therefore try to avoid those situations.

Rejection Sensitivity

Those who scored high on rejection sensitivity reported more average embarrassment and were more likely to avoid both Center of Attention and Sticky Situation subtypes but not the *Faux Pas* subtype. If placed in a Center of Attention situation, a participant is at the focus of attention of others, and if they fear being rejected by peers their potential embarrassment can be increased. Sticky Situations on the other hand, involve a conflict (i.e., asking for a loan to be repaid) so the possibility of rejection by someone is a legitimate concern because one will either be denied or accepted.

Limitations

Internet research and more specifically embarrassment on the Internet is a relatively new research topic so there is very little with which to compare the present findings to see how they fit into a body of research. The Sabini and colleagues (2000) study only investigated in-person embarrassment so new scenarios were created for this study. It would have been preferable to pilot the scenarios to assess whether they were successful in creating the expected levels of embarrassment and to see whether the online and in-person scenarios were actually parallel. Therefore, the findings reported might be due to unintended differences in scenario content, which may have elicited different responses unrelated to setting of embarrassment. As a result, embarrassment ratings might have resulted from factors besides setting. Although individuals read about hypothetical situations in this study, participants might have responded differently to being placed in actual situations.

Future Directions

Based on this study, it would be interesting to see if studying different age groups would yield similar results. For example, using this model, I can identify whether high school teenagers experience embarrassment similarly to college students, even in the same or similar contexts. Socially anxious high school students may find in-person embarrassment more intense since high school is less anonymous than most college settings. In high school, adolescents' start forming their own identity, which could make them vulnerable to social evaluations. As a result, one could speculate that embarrassment may be more severe due to them feeling more embarrassed in awkward social situations.

Future studies might investigate the effect of social competence on embarrassment. According to Edelman (1985), socially anxious individuals express less social competence

when dealing with embarrassing situations. It may be beneficial to ask future participants to rate their self-competence and coping ability to evaluate any differences between in-person and online situations.

Conclusion

In summary, the findings in this study suggest that online or in-person settings make a difference in certain types of embarrassment. As interactions on the Internet increase, it is important to recognize that embarrassment can also occur on the Internet and is not exclusive to face-to-face interactions. Secondly, socially anxious individuals are more likely to avoid certain types of situations in the future and as a result these actions might greatly decrease their ability to enjoy a normal college experience. Overall, understanding the impact of online embarrassment can provide insight into an arena where social interactions are increasingly occurring.

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Appendix A

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Age: _____
2. Gender (please check one): Male: _____ Female: _____
3. Race/Ethnic Background (please check all that apply):
- _____ American Indian or Alaskan Native _____ Black, not of Hispanic origin
- _____ Asian or Pacific Islander _____ White, not of Hispanic origin
- _____ Hispanic
- _____ Other (please specify) _____
4. Year in college (please check one):
- _____ Freshman _____ Sophomore
- _____ Junior _____ Senior
- _____ Graduate _____ Other (please specify)
5. Academic field of study (please check the category that corresponds with your major. If you have more than one major, check each appropriate box)
- _____ Arts, Music, Performance (e.g. Music Theory, Fine Arts, Theater)
- _____ Business
- _____ Education
- _____ Diplomacy
- _____ Humanities (e.g. English, History, Foreign Language, Religious Studies)
- _____ Nursing
- _____ Physical and Natural Science/Mathematics (e.g. Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Computer Science)
- _____ Social Science (e.g. Criminal Justice, Psychology, Sociology)
- _____ Other (Please provide name of field of study _____)
- _____ Undecided

Appendix B

In-person Scenarios

Faux Pas

1) As a prospective student, I visited the dining hall of one of the schools I most wanted to attend. The person who had been escorting me around campus had a prior engagement, so I decided to eat lunch on my own. As I left the cafeteria line and walked into the large dining hall full of noisy college students, I slipped on some ketchup and fell backwards. My tray fell onto my shirt, covering it with food. The whole dining room was laughing as I left the room.

How embarrassed would you be if you were in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
Not moderately extremely
embarrassed embarrassed embarrassed
at all

How likely would you be to avoid eating in the cafeteria in the future?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
Not likely unsure extremely
at all likely

2) I was in the bookstore purchasing my books for the upcoming semester and listening to music through my iPod headphones. I walked out the door, but didn't hear the alarm system going off. I only realized something was wrong when I saw the manager was running after me as I left the store. Everyone watched as we walked back into the store. The manager checked through my bags and asked me if I had shoplifted.

How embarrassed would you be if you were in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
Not moderately extremely
embarrassed embarrassed embarrassed
at all

How likely would you be to avoid going to the bookstore in the future?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
Not likely unsure extremely
at all likely

Center of Attention

3) I took a creative writing class. We had a writing assignment each week. The first two weeks of the semester, the class handed the assignments in, and the instructor returned them with comments. But the third week of the course, he told us that the class would start critiquing each others papers. He then projected my paper on the screen and students in the class began to make suggestions and correct mistakes.

How embarrassed would you be if you were in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
Not moderately extremely
embarrassed embarrassed embarrassed
at all

How likely would you be to avoid taking a class where other students critique your writing?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
Not likely unsure extremely
at all likely

4) I went to a big campus party on Saturday night and had a lot to drink. As a result, I acted pretty wild, which was unusual for me. When I went to class on Monday morning, several classmates brought up the party and began talking about the crazy things I did.

How embarrassed would you be if you were in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
Not moderately extremely
embarrassed embarrassed embarrassed
at all

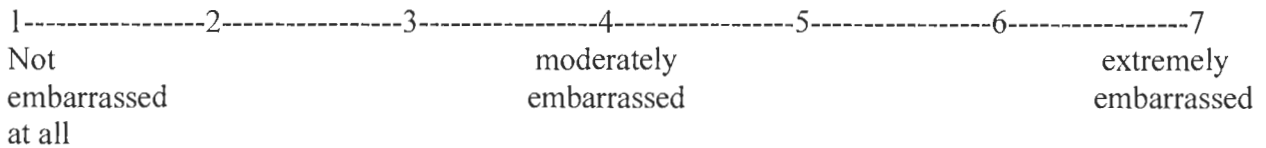
How likely would you be to avoid going to a campus party again?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
Not likely unsure extremely
at all likely

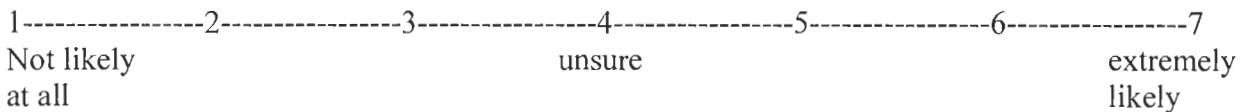
Sticky Situations

5) While on line at the campus cafeteria, I was talking to my best friend about how much I like my project partner in my lab group. As I was describing why I like this person so much, my friend pointed behind me. My crush was standing right behind me.

How embarrassed would you be if you were in this situation?

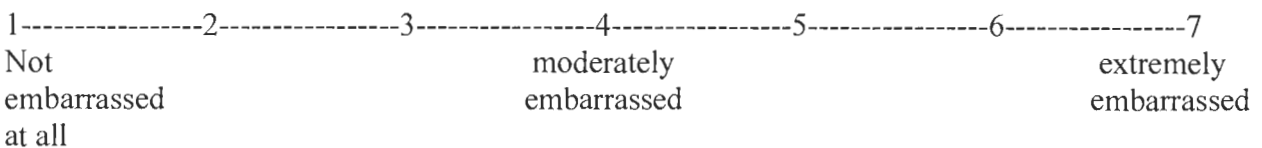


How likely would you be to avoid your crush in the future?

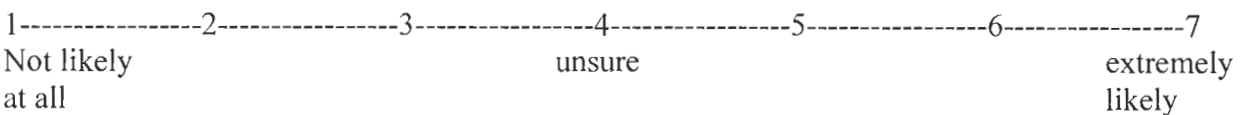


6) Before class, I was talking to one of my friend's on the phone about our plans for the weekend. As the conversation was ending, I told my friend "I have to go now before my professor shows up. I really can't wait to finish this class. It's so boring." When I hung up, I noticed the professor was in the back of the room listening to the conversation. I hadn't noticed when she came in.

How embarrassed would you be if you were in this situation?



How likely would you be to avoid talking with your professor in the future?



Appendix C

Online Scenarios

Faux Pas

1) As a prospective student, I visited the dining hall of one of the schools I most wanted to attend. The person who had been escorting me around campus had a prior engagement, so I decided to eat lunch on my own. As I left the cafeteria line and walked into a small dining hall that was mostly empty besides a few students, I slipped on some spilled ketchup and fell backwards. My tray fell onto my shirt, covering it with food. I left the room. A few days later a friend sent me a YouTube link to the video of me falling.

How embarrassed would you be if you were in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
Not moderately extremely
embarrassed embarrassed embarrassed
at all

How likely would you be to avoid eating in the cafeteria in the future?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
Not likely unsure extremely
at all likely

2) I was one of the last customers in the bookstores purchasing my books for the upcoming semester and listening to music through my iPod headphones. I walked out the door, but didn't hear the alarm system going off. I only realized something was wrong when I saw the manager was running after me as I left the store. When we got back into the store, the manager checked through my bags and asked me if I had shoplifted. There were no other customers in the store, but the next day an acquaintance of mine who works at the bookstore wrote on my Facebook wall, "I heard my manager thought you shoplifted yesterday because you left the store with a book you didn't pay for!"

How embarrassed would you be if you were in this situation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
Not moderately extremely
embarrassed embarrassed embarrassed
at all

Appendix D
Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire
Downey & Feldman, 1996

Each of the items below describes things college students sometimes ask of other people. Please imagine that you are in each situation. You will be asked to answer the following questions:

1) How concerned or anxious would you be about how the other person would respond?

2) How do you think the other person would be likely to respond?

1. You ask someone in class if you can borrow his/her notes.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not the person would want to lend you his/her notes?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
--	------------------	-------------	----------------

I would expect that the person would willingly give me his/her notes.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
---	---------------	-------------	-------------

2. You ask your boyfriend/girlfriend to move in with you.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not the person would want to move in with you?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
--	------------------	-------------	----------------

I would expect that he/she would want to move in with me.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
---	---------------	-------------	-------------

3. You ask your parents for help in deciding what programs to apply to.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your parents would want to help you?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
--	------------------	-------------	----------------

I would expect that they would want to help me.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
---	---------------	-------------	-------------

4. You ask someone you don't know well out on a date.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not the person would want to go out with you?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
---	------------------	-------------	----------------

I would expect that the person would want to go out with me.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
--	---------------	-------------	-------------

5. Your boyfriend/girlfriend has plans to go out with friends tonight, but you really want to spend the evening with him/her, and you tell him/her so.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your boyfriend/girlfriend would decide to stay in?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
--	------------------	-------------	----------------

I would expect that the person would willingly choose to stay in.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
---	---------------	-------------	-------------

6. You ask your parents for extra money to cover living expenses.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your parents would help you out?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4 5 6	very concerned
--	------------------	-------------	----------------

I would expect that my parents would not mind helping me out.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4 5 6	very likely
---	---------------	-------------	-------------

7. After class, you tell your professor that you have been having some trouble with a section of the course and ask if he/she can give you some extra help.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your professor would want to help you out?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4	5 6	very concerned
I would expect that my professor would want to help me out.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4	5 6	very likely

8. You approach a close friend to talk after doing or saying something that seriously upset him/her.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to talk with you?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4	5 6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would want to talk with me to try to work things out.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4	5 6	very likely

9. You ask someone in one of your classes to coffee.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not the person would want to go?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4	5 6	very concerned
I would expect that the person would want to go with me.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4	5 6	very likely

10. After graduation, you can't find a job and ask your parents if you can live at home for a while.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your parents would want you to come home?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4	5 6	very concerned
I would expect I would be welcome at home.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4	5 6	very likely

11. You ask your friend to go on a vacation with you over Spring Break.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to go with you?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4	5 6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would want to go with me.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4	5 6	very likely

12. You call your boyfriend/girlfriend after a bitter argument and tell him/her you want to see him/her.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your boyfriend/girlfriend would want to see you?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4	5 6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would want to see me.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4	5 6	very likely

13. You ask a friend if you can borrow something of his/hers.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to loan it to you?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4	5 6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would willingly loan me it.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4	5 6	very likely

Appendix D
Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire
Downey & Feldman, 1996

14. You ask your parents to come to an occasion important to you.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your parents would want to come?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4	5	6	very concerned
I would expect that my parents would want to come.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4	5	6	very likely

15. You ask a friend to do you a big favor.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would do this favor?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4	5	6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would willingly do this favor for me.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4	5	6	very likely

16. You ask your boyfriend/girlfriend if he/she really loves you.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your boyfriend/girlfriend would say yes?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4	5	6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would answer yes sincerely.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4	5	6	very likely

17. You go to a party and notice someone on the other side of the room and then you ask them to dance.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not the person would want to dance with you?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4	5	6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would want to dance with me.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4	5	6	very likely

18. You ask your boyfriend/girlfriend to come home to meet your parents.

How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your boyfriend/girlfriend would want to meet your parents?	very unconcerned	1 2 3 4	5	6	very concerned
I would expect that he/she would want to meet my parents.	very unlikely	1 2 3 4	5	6	very likely

Client ID: _____ Age: _____ Sex: M F Date: ____/____/____

Please use the scale listed opposite and circle the number which best reflects how frequently you experience these responses.

Very Infrequent Infrequent Sometimes Frequent Request Always

2. I feel anxious when entering social situations where there is a large group.

4. I feel anxious when I am in a social situation and I am expected to engage in some activity.

6. I feel anxious when speaking in a small informal meeting.

8. I feel so anxious in social situations that I leave the social gathering.

10. I feel anxious when in a large gathering with:

authority figures

people in general

strangers

opposite sex

12. I feel anxious and I do not know what to do when in a new situation with:

authority figures

people in general

strangers

opposite sex

14. I feel anxious and I do not know what to do when in an embarrassing situation with:

authority figures

people in general

strangers

opposite sex

16. I feel anxious when reading an opinion to:

authority figures

people in general

strangers

opposite sex

18. I feel anxious when approaching and/or initiating a conversation with:

authority figures

people in general

strangers

opposite sex

33

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Please flip form over for

PAGE 2

Please use the scale listed opposite and circle the number which best reflects how frequently you experience these responses.

	Never	Very Infrequent	Infrequent	Sometimes	Frequent	Very Frequent	Always
20. I feel anxious when drinking (any type of beverage) and/or eating in front of:							
authority figures	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
people in general	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
strangers	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
opposite sex	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. I feel anxious when speaking in front of:							
authority figures	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
people in general	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
strangers	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
opposite sex	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. I attempt to avoid social situations where there are:							
authority figures	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
people in general	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
strangers	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
opposite sex	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. Before entering a social situation I think about all the things that can go wrong.							
Will I be dressed properly?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
What will I do if no one speaks to me?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
People will notice how anxious I am	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
28. My voice leaves me or changes when I am talking in a social situation	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
30. I experience troubling thoughts when I am in a social setting. For example:							
If I mess up again I will really lose my confidence	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Whatever I say it will probably sound stupid	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sweating	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Heart palpitations	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Shaking	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Heart palpitations	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
34. I feel anxious when I am in a strange place	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
36. I feel anxious when crossing streets	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
38. Being in large open spaces makes me feel anxious	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
40. Being in high places makes me feel anxious (e.g., tall buildings)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
42. There are times when I feel like I have to hold on to things because I am afraid I will fall	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
44. I feel anxious when riding in a car	0	1	2	3	4	5	6