Examination of Social Appearance Anxiety through Psychological Theories

Sosyal Görünüş Kaygısının Psikolojik Kuramlar Açısından İncelenmesi

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ABSTRACT

Social appearance anxiety, which is expressed as a type of social anxiety, is defined as the state of tension and anxiety experienced by people when their physical appearance is evaluated by others. In the literature, there are studies examining the factors that increase or decrease social appearance anxiety and the negative effects of social appearance anxiety. However, it is noteworthy that psychological theories are not included in the examination of social appearance anxiety, which is a common problem experienced by almost everyone at certain periods of their lives. Addressing the concept of social appearance anxiety from a theoretical perspective will contribute to the understanding of the concept, better planning of future research, and will also fill the gap in the literature. In this context, in this review study, the concept of social appearance anxiety is explained, and then the concepts related to its analysis in terms of psychological theories are discussed.
Keywords: Social appearance, social appearance anxiety, psychological theories, anxiety

ÖZ

Sosyal kaygının bir türü olarak ifade edilen sosyal görünüş kaygısı; kişilerin fiziksel görünümlerinin başkaları tarafından değerlendirildiğinde yaşadıkları gerginlik ve kaygı hali olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Literatürde sosyal görünüş kaygısını artıran ya da azaltan faktörler ile sosyal görünüş kaygısının yol açtığı olumsuzlukların incelendiği görülmektedir. Ancak hemen hemen herkesin hayatının belirli dönemlerinde yaşadığı yaygın bir sorun olan sosyal görünüş kaygısının incelenmesinde psikolojik kuramlara yer verilmemesi dikkat çekicidir. Sosyal görünüş kaygısı kavramının kuramsal açıdan ele alınması; kavramın anlaşılmasına, ilerleyen süreçte yapılacak araştırmaların daha iyi planlanmasına katkı verebileceği gibi literatürdeki boşluğu da giderecektir. Bu bağlamda, bu derleme çalışmasında sosyal görünüş kaygısı kavramı açıklanmış, ardından psikolojik kuramlar açısından incelenmesine ilişkin kavramlar ele alınmıştır.
Anahtar sözcükler: Sosyal görünüş, sosyal görünüş kaygısı, psikolojik kuramlar, anksiyete

Introduction

Social anxiety is a situation in which the individual experiences the anxiety of being judged by others and has a clear and persistent fear of being disgraced or embarrassed in social environments (American Psychiatric Association 2013). The most obvious difference that distinguishes social anxiety from other types of anxiety is that it takes its roots from interpersonal experiences. Individuals feel social anxiety mostly due to imaginary situations rather than real events. Individuals with social anxiety describe their anxiety as fearing that they will be laughed at in front of other people (Öztürk 2014). People with social anxiety do not want to initiate mutual interaction due to the fear of being watched and evaluated by others, they talk for a short time, express their feelings and thoughts less, and tend to stay away from relationships that cause anxiety (Koç and Işıklı 2021). Another type of anxiety that affects individuals is social appearance anxiety (Arnett 2006). It is known that social appearance anxiety is a common problem and it has negative effects on people mentally, socially and academically (Kıratlı et al. 2021).

In Türkiye, with the adaptation of the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale to Turkish by Doğan in 2010, studies were carried out in many different sample groups, and the relationship between the concept of social appearance anxiety and both individual and social variables was examined in a multi-faceted manner (Alemdağ and Öncü 2015, Kara 2016, Pehlivan et al. 2017, Soylu et al. 2017, Makas and Çelik 2018, Çetinkaya et al. 2019). However, it is seen that social appearance anxiety is not addressed in terms of psychological theories in both national and international literature. For these reasons, this review is aimed to fill the gap in the literature and to guide researchers in the theoretical connection of social appearance anxiety for future studies.

Social Appearance Anxiety

Social appearance anxiety is a feeling of anxiety experienced and felt when evaluating the physical appearance of individuals from their own perspectives and aspects of others (Yorulmaz and Kurutçu 2019). Physical appearance originates from factors such as weight, height and body structure. An individual's concept of "I" is an impression of themselves and the identities they think they carry. This concept, which develops over time and causes individuals to develop cognitive perceptions and attitudes about themselves, enables individuals to define and evaluate themselves, and a positive or negative evaluation of their "self" shapes the self-esteem of the individual (Koçyiğit and Yalçın 2021). Individuals experience automatic thoughts that lead to emotional and behavioral responses to events. Automatic thoughts, also known as cognitive distortions, are thinking errors that are not functional and logical and have a content that is only based on observation but accepted as real (Türkçapar and Sargın 2012). The content of automatic thoughts is consistent with the basic beliefs of the individual and when negative automatic thoughts occur, a positive event can lead to negative effects and maladaptive behaviors (Hoşgören and Erdoğan 2021). Social appearance anxiety is a trigger of social anxiety. For this reason, individuals with social anxiety disorder mostly avoid social criticism of their appearance flaws and stay away from social environments (Levinson and Rodebaugh 2012). This situation, which is expressed as 'negative body perception', refers to the fact that individuals do not like themselves when compared to other people, because of their negative thoughts about visible parts such as the body, face, eyes, hair, nose, and that they find themselves less attractive than other people and even feel ashamed. People with negative body image are very interested in parts of their bodies that they do not like, they often look in the mirror and compare themselves with others. Excessive make-up is one of the most common behaviors among these people (Özbey and Gültekin 2021). Symptoms such as trembling, restlessness, lack of communication with the environment and fixing their clothes frequently are observed in people with social appearance anxiety (Leary 1991).

On the contrary, individuals with a positive body image have a state of being satisfied with their own body, and these individuals, who generally believe that appearance is not related to personality, do not spend a lot of time, money and power on activities related to appearance (Doğan 2010). Social appearance anxiety is based on theories about self-expression and reflection. Each person has their own evaluations about their own physical structure. Even if individuals have a positive impression of themselves, they enjoy the positive evaluation of other people, and negative feedback can cause sadness and anxiety (Çınar and Keskin 2015). Social appearance anxiety can arise for many reasons, primarily environmental factors. Increasing technological developments, the widespread use of social media, the prevalence of a standard understanding of beauty accepted by almost everyone, make it even more important to be perceived as pleasant and beautiful, especially in adolescence. Social media tools, which reflect being physically pleasant and beautiful as the most important purpose of life, negatively affect individuals who see themselves as inadequate in this sense and may cause them to experience dissatisfaction and failure in other areas where they are likely to be successful (Webb and Zimmer 2014).

Social appearance anxiety is most common in adolescence. It is known that the period with the highest physical change is adolescence. Adolescents think that their body is the most effective way to make themselves admired by their friends and the opposite sex and to establish an effective communication. From this point of view, body image is important for adolescents, and especially negative criticisms on their body image can lead to social appearance anxiety (Özcan et al. 2013).

Social Appearance Anxiety in Terms of Psychological Theories

The word "theory" comes from the Greek word "theoria" meaning "opinion". It is important to know theories as they guide researchers to identify current and priority research topics and summarize research results. "Theory" is to explain the realization process of an event with the relations between concepts (Parker 2006). The aim of the theory is to summarize the information in a systematic way, to make scientific findings generalizable and to direct new studies (Koç et al. 2017). Impression theory and objectification theory are directly related to the theoretical structure on which social appearance anxiety is based. However, it is thought that revealing the relationship between social appearance anxiety and other psychological theories will contribute to the literature.

Impression Management Theory

As social beings, humans interact with people around them in all areas of life and try to create a certain impression. The impression management behaviors that emerged during this time are a tool that provides assistance in the socialization of individuals (Bektaş and Karagöz 2018). Impression is the effect and image that any event or situation leaves on people through sense organs (Yücel 2013). Erving Goffman, the famous

sociologist, was the first to use the concept of impression management. Goffman defined impression management as the behaviors that an individual performs to influence their perceptions of themselves. Although there are multiple definitions, it is generally defined as the process in which people try to direct the impressions they create on other people (Tuncel and Bahçecik 2019). The main purpose of impression management is to enable individuals to achieve certain goals and to manage environmental impressions by directing information about impressions based on these goals (Çetin and Basım 2010). In this context, it is said that people should use impression management well in order to effectively manage the environmental factors surrounding them. The impression management process is a purposeful, dynamic and strategic process. Individuals direct this process in line with their goals. They convey messages in a way that reveals certain characteristics of their personalities to some people and different aspects of their personalities to others (Basım and Tatar 2008). In fact, the reason why individuals behave this way is to avoid negative feedback that may be directed at them, and therefore to preserve their self-integrity. When individuals realize that they cannot make a positive impression on other people, they begin to feel anxious and disappointed about their appearance (Mulazımoğlu et al. 2014). The impression management process takes place in three steps. These are:

1. Examining the impressions

2. Motivation to create impression

3. Creating impression

Examining the impressions; This process starts with the feedback that other people direct to the individual. Impression management can take many forms, both verbal and nonverbal such as facial expressions and clothes. Individuals who examine the feedback and perception directed at them investigate whether there is any difference between the image they want to reveal and the perceived image. This process is important in terms of collecting information about the impressions of the individual and determining whether they will realize the desired impression (Işık 2020).

Motivation to create impression; Motivation is a prerequisite for this process to take place. Individuals must be motivated to manage their impressions in order to achieve the results they want and to meet their needs. For example, while positive feedbacks increase the individual's self-esteem and confidence, negative feedback on the contrary may cause the individual's self-esteem and motivation to decrease (Turan 2018).

Creating impression; It is the stage of action where individuals who know other people's impressions about themselves begin to manage their impressions (Yücel 2013). Social appearance, which is most effective in adolescence and young adulthood, affects body perception with the idea that individuals are constantly watched. It is stated that while social appearance anxiety is less in young people who receive positive feedback about themselves, it reaches to high levels in young people who receive negative feedback from their environment (Leary et al. 1988, Varol 2020, Kıratlı et al. 2021). Research on impression formation has shown that most people are very willing to make inferences about the personal characteristics of others based on limited information. Sometimes these inferences can be based on skin color, age, or even hair color and length. Individuals can take various actions such as plastic surgery, weight loss/gain or bodybuilding in order to create the impression that society wants and to receive positive feedback (Kavut and Ertürk 2021). According to the researches, the first of the variables that affect the formation of people's impressions is the individual's self-perception. People's own beliefs and opinions affect the impressions they want to create. The other variable is personality traits. There are some personality traits that individuals want and do not want to have. While people try to form their impressions according to the characteristics they want to have, they avoid the personality traits they do not want. Social roles are another variable that influences impression formation. The social role is adopted by the society and they reveal how people should behave. For example; mother, father and child have different roles in a nuclear family. All of them have different duties, responsibilities, positions and functions. These differences define the place where the person is, their duties in the family, and their behavior patterns (Tuncel and Bahçecik 2019). Under the efforts of individuals to have a positive impression by other people, there is a desire to feel safe. Otherwise, individuals with social appearance anxiety may experience eating disorders (Levinson et al. 2013), obsessive and compulsive symptoms (Çilesiz 2020), depression and anxiety symptoms (Polat and Çiftçi 2021).

Objectification Theory

Objectification Theory has been proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) as a theory that takes its foundation from the feminist view. According to feminism, the current social order is male-dominated and women need to gain the equality they deserve by rebelling against the order. Objectification Theory aims to

explain how sexual objectification, a form of sexism that women constantly encounter in their daily lives, affects women's lives and what consequences it has. Based on the feminist view, sexual objectification is the view of the individual as consisting of only one body or the sum of body parts (Şahin 2020). In objectification, attention is paid to the physical characteristics, body size, weight and sexual attractiveness of individuals rather than their physical coordination, vitality, strength, health and energy level. In the theory, social status, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, physical and individual characteristics are the factors that determine objectification (Karakaş and Balamir 2021).

Calogero (2013) lists the behaviors that constitute sexual objectification as focusing on the woman's body, making sexual compliments, verbal abuse or whistling while walking on the street, taking photos without permission, presenting the female body in movies, music videos, magazines by highlighting the sexuality, and sexual violence. Women are exposed to sexual objectification themselves, by seeing other women's sexual objectification through mass media. When women internalize a viewer/observer perspective towards their physical selves, they begin to evaluate themselves from an external rather than an internal perspective. This means perceiving their body as an object that is looked at, evaluated and used to please others by internalizing the objectifying gaze directed at their own bodies. Society pushes women to be "beautiful", "attractive" and "weak" and directs them to be preoccupied with their appearance. When women meet the set standards, they experience things like finding a job easier, encountering more positive behaviors, and being socially and economically empowered. Beauty turns into a power for women to achieve what they want in every part of life, and they try to deal with their appearance and have an idealized female body in order to achieve this power (Aubrey 2006). One of the negative consequences of objectification is anxiety. Social appearance anxiety arises as a psychological result of individuals being constantly preoccupied with their bodies. Eating disorders, dysmorphic disorders and depression can be seen in individuals who objectify themselves due to social appearance anxiety (Tiggeman and Kuring 2004).

Psychoanalytic Theory

Psychoanalytic theory developed from the ideas and work of Sigmund Freud. It is stated that the source of negative situations that affect the life of the individual arises from the connections between mental processes and unconscious factors (Güleç 2016). Freud explains the underlying causes of behavior as conscious, preconscious and unconscious in topographic theory. He states that individuals' innate motives and psychosexual developmental stages contribute to the formation of behavior and personality (Gençtan 2020). Freud tried to construct a new model, which he called the Structural Model, because he thought that although the topographic model was sufficient to understand the cause of some psychiatric disorders, it was not sufficient to explain the behavior of the individual. This model consists of the id, ego, and superego. The id is constantly seeking to be satisfied with desires and desires, trying to achieve pleasure. The superego tries to suppress the id's impulses with social rules and norms. The function of the ego is to maintain the balance between the id and the superego. The ego should perform cause-effect analysis, make a preliminary assessment of possible post-behavioral situations, and determine alternative directions and methods when necessary (Freud 2002). According to the psychoanalytic theory, the main reason for the formation of anxiety stems from the incompatibilities between the id, ego and superego. When balance is not achieved, pathologies occur. In social anxiety, superego creates a pressure mechanism for the importance of the environment and the excessive criticism. Social anxiety disorder occurs when this anxiety is integrated with a situation or object (Atkinson and Hilgard 2014). According to another explanation, social appearance anxiety, which is a type of social anxiety, is based on individuals' unconscious desire to attract attention. People have an unconscious motivation to receive positive feedback from other people, to have a good place in society and to be appreciated. For these reasons, individuals who cannot achieve the desired goals seem likely to have social anxiety and therefore to experience subconscious confusion (Eldoğan 2012).

Cognitive Behavioral Theory

The meaning that individuals attribute to events determines their feelings and thoughts (Çelebi and Odacı 2018). Cognitive theory conceptualizes the individual's mental processes with automatic thoughts. Defined automatic thoughts are thoughts that appear suddenly in the flow of the mind (Özcan and Çelik 2017), and under these thoughts there are beliefs and rules. While cognitive distortions created by unrealistic automatic thoughts are rearranged with logical, functional and realistic thoughts, emotions and behaviors are expected to change positively (Yazar and Tolan 2021). According to the cognitive-behavioral theory, the meaning attributed to positive evaluation by people is the determinant of anxiety, and people who are faced with a social situation evaluate themselves in this context by forming a mental norm for the expectation of the potential audience

(Özer and Yalçın 2020). According to the cognitive-behavioral theory, Türkçapar (1999) mentions that social anxiety is a learned behavior with conditioning and reinforcement, and treats conditioning in three different ways. The first of these is conditioning. As the effect on the person who experiences the behavior and its consequences is repeated, this behavior is learned. The high social appearance anxiety of individuals who are not at peace with their physical appearance and who receive negative feedback on this subject can be explained as direct conditioning. The second of these conditioning is the method of observation. An individual acquires a behavior by observing the actions and results of others. Observing a person who is mocked and humiliated because of their physical appearance can increase the social appearance anxiety of individuals. The third of these conditioning is knowledge transfer. After a conversation about appearance, the individual may develop anxiety about it. As in this matter, learning can take place through acquired knowledge and attitude (Türkçapar 1999).

Social Learning Theory

Bandura's studies have made an important contribution to the acquisition of a scientific framework for the tendency of people to learn through observation. The theory is based on the premise that learning is a process that takes place through interaction, observation and imitation in a social context. Social learning takes place through two learning processes: "operant conditioning", "modeling and imitation." It is stated that the probability of repeating behaviors that are reinforced and rewarded in operant conditioning will increase. Especially in gender studies, it has been observed that children who behave in accordance with their own gender repeat the behavior when rewarded, and suppress that behavior in their minds when punished. A similar situation is also valid for aggressive behavior (Dökmen 2009). Modeling and imitation refer to modeling and imitating behaviors learned through observation (Bandura 1999, Bandura 2006, Dökmen 2009). Bandura evaluates all phenomena within the framework of imitation, acquisition and internalization under the title of "modelling" (Varol 2014). Bandura stated that the status of the model has effects on learning. If the model has a higher status than the observer, there is a high level of imitative behavior, while if it has a lower status, imitation behavior may not be observed. If the statuses are equal, imitation behavior occurs or does not occur depending on whether the result of the behavior is positive or negative (Yavuz 2014). It is emphasized that the stages of interest, attention, keeping in mind, imitation and motivation in the social learning process are effective in the emergence of behavior (Şener and Gökkaya 2017). According to social learning theory, the main factor in the formation of social anxiety is imitating others and emphasizing the importance of their appearance. Today, with the influence of the media, physical appearance has gained a lot of importance, and the problem of social anxiety has become common, especially in adolescents and young adults (Akarsu and Demirpençe 2022). It is observed that when individuals start to compare their body shapes with others through media figures, their thoughts and attitudes towards their body change. Peers and role models in the media act as a source for body image standards, and then individuals tend to engage in behaviors such as gaining weight or exercising to lose weight in order to implement exemplary behavior (Eisend and Moller 2007, VanVonderen and Kinnally 2012).

Existential Theory

Existential theory covers the meaning of human existence and all possibilities of self-realization (Gül 2014). According to the existential approach, anxiety is one of the basic concepts of human existence. The conflict that arises as a result of individuals realizing that their existence is temporary and encountering the possibility of nothingness leads to anxiety (Deurzen and Baker 2017). Existential concerns are universal (Yalom 2018); however, when intense anxiety is experienced, many psychological disorders can occur. Considering that personality traits are related to existential anxiety, it should be considered that social appearance anxiety may be more intense in individuals with low self-esteem (Gençöz and Öncül 2012). Being satisfied with one's physical appearance is a protective factor against existential anxiety, while at the same time it helps to be strong and peaceful in the face of death and other negative life facts. This benefit of self-esteem in making existential anxiety more bearable also helps to explain why self-esteem is so important for people (Pyszczynski and Kesebir 2013).

Conclusion

Social appearance anxiety is a variant of the concept of social anxiety and affects individuals not only psychologically but also socially and academically. When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that social appearance anxiety is a subject that has attracted the attention of researchers in recent years. It is understood that the researches are mostly aimed at determining the factors that cause social appearance anxiety and revealing the negative results caused by social appearance anxiety. However, in the literature, it has been

determined that social appearance anxiety is not addressed in terms of psychological theories. Theories help the researchers to understand the concepts more easily, contribute to the creation of research to be carried out in the future, and contribute to the visualization of the real relationship observed between the concepts and the definition of the cause-effect relationship between the variables (Bryman 2008, Yener 2018). Considering that all individuals, especially adolescents, have high social appearance anxiety in recent years, it is thought that trying to explain and understand this concept with theories will contribute to the literature and the use of theory in future studies. For this reason, in this review study, what social appearance anxiety means in terms of psychological theories has been examined. For all these reasons, it is recommended that researchers include psychological theories in qualitative and quantitative research and mixed method research, in which they deal with the concept of social appearance anxiety.

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