

Examining the relationship between social appearance anxiety, self-confidence, and fitness tendency in sedentary individuals

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between social appearance anxiety and self-confidence levels among sedentary individuals participating in fitness activities and to evaluate the findings through comparative analysis. The sample of the study consisted of a total of 255 participants, including 90 males and 165 females, who attended fitness centers in different provinces during the 2024–2025 period. The study utilized a demographic information form, the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale, and the Self-Confidence Scale. The results indicated that as social appearance anxiety increased, internal self-confidence, external self-confidence, and total self-confidence decreased ($p<0.05$). No significant differences were found in internal self-confidence, external self-confidence, total self-confidence, or social appearance anxiety scores according to age and gender variables ($p>0.05$). While no significant differences were found in internal self-confidence, external self-confidence, and total self-confidence scores according to education level ($p>0.05$), a significant difference was found in social appearance anxiety scores ($p<0.05$). In addition, no significant differences were found in internal self-confidence, external self-confidence, total self-confidence, or social appearance anxiety scores according to weekly training frequency ($p>0.05$). In conclusion, this study found a moderate negative relationship between social appearance anxiety and internal, external, and total self-confidence among sedentary individuals.

KEYWORDS

Fitness; Social Appearance; Self-Confidence; Sedentary Individuals

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Moe (1999), body image is “not only about one's physical appearance, but also encompasses multifaceted psychological experiences.” In other words, it describes a personal picture of the person, which is more related to how he/she sees himself/herself. Body image is expressed in

two ways: “positive body image” and “negative body image” (Cash, 2004). The meaning attributed to appearance and evaluations related to appearance have been at the forefront in societies. Today, people have become much more interested in the appearance of themselves and others than in the past (Kılıç & Karakuş, 2016). Çınar & Keskin (2015) defined social appearance anxiety as “the reaction that people feel against the evaluation of their physical structures by others”. Social appearance anxiety is a type of social anxiety. Social appearance anxiety is defined as the anxiety and worry that individuals experience about how others evaluate their physical appearance (Hart et al., 1989). Social appearance anxiety is directly related to how one perceives one's own body, that is, body image perception (Cash & Fleming, 2002, cited in Alemdağ, 2013). Generally, people who experience social anxiety are obviously worried when they are in social relationships and social environments. People with social anxiety do not necessarily have a different type of anxiety. Social anxiety is structurally oriented towards limiting one's communication with other people.

The main structure of social anxiety is rejection anxiety and abstention. Therefore, people with social anxiety pay attention to their social appearance, adapt to their environment and prefer to remain silent (Meral, 2018). The visible part of the self is the individual's body and the body is an important part of visual perceptions of the self. For this reason, self-esteem is the determinant of an individual's perceptions about his/her appearance. Positive or negative feelings about one's self affect one's feelings about social appearance in the same way. If the feedback from the environment in which the individual is in is in a direction to support the existing perception, low social appearance anxiety or high self-esteem has a great effect on this (Hamachek, 1995, cited in Gümüş, 2000). According to Clark & Wells (1995), social appearance anxiety is the result of a person's negative impression of his or her appearance and body. Most socially anxious people have negative beliefs about their own worth and importance, as in depression. However, as in depressed individuals, these beliefs are not permanent in socially anxious individuals, and they turn into very positive thoughts about the self when they do not perceive threats from others or when they are alone.

Self-confidence is a concept that directly affects human life and has a significant impact on basic personality traits. Self-confidence makes individuals stronger and enables them to cope better with the challenges of life. An individual's self-confidence may vary throughout life and there may be ups and downs in the level of self-confidence from time to time. Self-confidence increases an individual's motivation and ability to cope with difficulties and makes him/her more optimistic about the future. Self-confidence is one of the intangible facts necessary for people to achieve success. It contributes to the individual feeling good and being brave (Kaya, 2017). In addition to the positive

effects of physical activity on our health, it is also known to have positive effects on an individual's personality traits. Young people's participation in physical activity enables them to express themselves better, strengthen their self-confidence and improve their communication skills in their social lives. It also reinforces feelings of solidarity and plays an important role in reducing mental fatigue and tension. These effects are frequently emphasized in the academic literature (Gür, 1992). The findings that doing physical activity improves individuals' physical characteristics apart from their social roles and reduces their anxiety about their own body are very important. In particular, regular physical activity can positively affect individuals' body perceptions and make them feel satisfied with their bodies. This may lead to a decrease in negative thoughts about body image and thus a decrease in body anxiety. Physical outcomes of physical activity such as physical strengthening, increased endurance, flexibility and improvement in body composition may increase individuals' confidence in their bodies.

In addition, with the effect of endorphins and other happiness hormones released during physical activity, the improvement of individuals' general mood and reduction of stress may also contribute to the reduction of body anxiety. Therefore, physical activity may have positive effects not only on physical health but also on body image and emotional well-being (Dishman et al., 2006). While being dissatisfied with physical appearance is a positive factor that increases participation in physical activity, not receiving negative evaluations due to physical appearance can also be a reason to participate in physical activity. Therefore, in recent years, anxiety about physical appearance has been a new research topic in the field of sport and exercise psychology. Research on this subject has shown that people with high social appearance anxiety tend to participate in physical activity alone rather than in a crowd. In some similar studies, it was observed that people with high social appearance anxiety had low rates of continuing physical activity, while those with low social appearance anxiety had high rates of continuing physical activity (Yaman et al., 2008).

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between social appearance anxiety and self-confidence levels among sedentary individuals participating in fitness activities and to evaluate the findings through comparative analysis.

2. METHODS

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study was designed as a descriptive and correlational study to examine the relationship between social appearance anxiety and self-confidence levels in the fitness orientation of sedentary

individuals. The sample of the study consisted of a total of 255 participants, including 90 males and 165 females, who attended fitness centers in different provinces during the 2024–2025 period.

2.2. Instruments and Procedures

Firstly, the existing literature related to the purpose of the study was systematically reviewed in order to establish a theoretical framework for the research. To achieve the aim of the study, a demographic information Form, the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale, and the Self-Confidence Scale were used as data collection tools. The Social Appearance Anxiety Scale was developed by Hart et al. (1989) and adapted into Turkish by Doğan (2010). The scale consists of 16 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Not at all appropriate”) to 5 (“Completely appropriate”). The first item of the scale was reverse-coded because it contains a positive statement related to comfort rather than negative expressions such as anxiety, worry, or nervousness. The minimum possible score on the scale is 16, while the maximum possible score is 80. Higher scores indicate higher levels of social appearance anxiety.

The Self-Confidence Scale was originally developed by Akın (2007). The internal consistency coefficient for the overall scale was reported as .83, while the reliability coefficients for the internal self-confidence and external self-confidence sub-dimensions were reported as .83 and .85, respectively. The scale consists of two sub-dimensions: internal self-confidence and external self-confidence. Items 4, 25, 32, 17, 10, 30, 12, 3, 19, 5, 21, 27, 9, 23, 1, 7, and 15 constitute the internal self-confidence sub-dimension, whereas items 6, 31, 20, 29, 16, 14, 22, 11, 18, 33, 2, 28, 26, 13, 8, and 24 constitute the external self-confidence sub-dimension. These two sub-dimensions explain 43.6% of the total variance. Responses to the scale are evaluated using a 5-point Likert-type rating system (Akın, 2007).

2.3. Statistical Analyses

The data collected in the study were analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0 software package. Prior to the analyses, the normality of the data distribution was tested, and the results indicated that the data were normally distributed (Table 1). Descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Pearson correlation analysis were employed to analyze the data and determine the relationships between the scales. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 shows the distribution shape of the study variables by reporting their skewness and kurtosis values (with standard errors)

Table 1. Skewness and kurtosis values of the study variables

	N	Skewness		Kurtosis	
		Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Inner self-confidence	255	-.139	.153	.077	.304
External self-confidence	255	-.238	.153	.638	.304
Self-confidence Scale	255	-.183	.153	.641	.304
Total Score					
Social Outlook	255	1.310	.153	1.354	.304
Anxiety Scale					

The skewness and kurtosis coefficients ranged between -0.238 and 1.354 , remaining within the acceptable limits of ± 1.5 suggested by Tabachnick & Fidell (2013). These findings indicate that the data did not significantly deviate from normal distribution ($p > 0.05$). In addition, the examination of normality plots supported the assumption of normality; therefore, parametric statistical tests were employed in the analyses. Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Men	90	35.3
	Women	165	64.7
Age	18-20	37	14.5
	21-25	48	18.8
	26-30	59	23.1
	31 and above	111	43.5
Height (cm)	150-160	56	22.0
	161-170	112	43.9
	171-180	56	22.0
	181-190	31	12.2
Weight (kg)	50-60	65	25.0
	61-70	74	29.0
	71-80	60	23.5
	81-90	38	14.9
	91 and above	18	7.1
Education	High School	93	36.5
	Associate degree	40	15.7
	License	101	39.6
	Master's degree	21	8.2
Weekly Training Frequency	1-2	38	14.9

2-3	111	43.5
3-4	40	15.7
4-5	62	24.3
6 and above	4	1.6
Total	255	100.0

Of the 255 sedentary individuals, 35.3% were male and 64.7% were female. Most participants were aged 31 years or older (43.5%). The largest proportion were 161–170 cm in height (43.9%) and weighed 61–70 kg (29.0%). In terms of education, most held a bachelor’s degree (39.6%). Regarding training frequency, the most common was 2–3 sessions per week (43.5%), while 6 or more sessions per week was the least common (1.6%). Table 3 shows the relationships between social appearance anxiety and self-confidence levels.

Table 3. Relationships between social appearance anxiety and self-confidence levels

		Inner Self-Confidence	External Self-Confidence	Self-confidence Scale Total Score	Social Appearance Anxiety Scale
Inner Self-Confidence	Pearson Correlation	1	.841**	.964**	-.425**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N		255	255	255
External Self-Confidence	Pearson Correlation		1	.955**	-.359**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000
	N			255	255
Self-confidence Scale Total Score	Pearson Correlation			1	-.410**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000
	N				255
Social Appearance Anxiety Scale	Pearson Correlation				1
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N				

A moderate negative correlation was found between social appearance anxiety and internal self-confidence ($r = -.425, p < 0.001$), external self-confidence ($r = -.359, p < 0.001$), and total self-confidence ($r = -.410, p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that as social appearance anxiety increases, levels of internal, external, and overall self-confidence decrease. Table 4 shows whether there are gender differences (men vs. women) in self-confidence and social appearance anxiety

Table 4. Social appearance anxiety and self-confidence levels according to gender

Scales	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Inner self-confidence	Men	90	3,7915	,70191	,441	,660
	Women	165	3,7537	,62832		
External self-confidence	Men	90	3,7319	,68229	-,183	,855
	Women	165	3,7470	,59384		
Self-Confidence Scale Total Score	Men	90	3,7626	,67784	,151	,880
	Women	165	3,7504	,57859		
Social Appearance Anxiety Scale	Men	90	1,8708	,88873	-,717	,474
	Women	165	1,9496	,81079		

As shown in Table 4, no statistically significant differences were found in internal self-confidence, external self-confidence, total self-confidence, or social appearance anxiety scores according to gender ($p > 0.05$). Table 5 shows whether there are differences in self-confidence and social appearance anxiety across different age groups.

Table 5. Social appearance anxiety and self-confidence levels according to age

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Inner self-confidence	Between Groups	2.783	3	.928	2.199	.089
	Within Groups	105.894	251	.422		
	Total	108.677	254			
External self-confidence	Between Groups	1.629	3	.543	1.396	.245
	Within Groups	97.650	251	.389		
	Total	99.279	254			
Self-Confidence Scale Total Score	Between Groups	2.128	3	.709	1.901	.130
	Within Groups	93.675	251	.373		
	Total	95.803	254			
Social Appearance Anxiety Scale	Between Groups	1.633	3	.544	.773	.510
	Within Groups	176.835	251	.705		
	Total	178.469	254			

Table 5 above indicates that no statistically significant differences were found in internal self-confidence, external self-confidence, total self-confidence, or social appearance anxiety scores according to participants' age groups ($p > 0.05$).

As presents Table 6 below, no statistically significant differences were observed in internal self-confidence, external self-confidence, or total self-confidence scores according to educational level ($p>0.05$). However, a statistically significant difference was found in social appearance anxiety scores ($p<0.05$). Post hoc analysis using the Tukey HSD test revealed that participants with a bachelor's degree had higher social appearance anxiety scores than those with associate degrees and high school diplomas.

Table 6. Social appearance anxiety and self-confidence levels according to educational level

Scales		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Inner self-confidence	Between Groups	1.761	3	.587	1.378	.250
	Within Groups	106.915	251	.426		
	Total	108.677	254			
External self-confidence	Between Groups	1.490	3	.497	1.274	.284
	Within Groups	97.790	251	.390		
	Total	99.279	254			
Self-Confidence Scale Total Score	Between Groups	1.611	3	.537	1.431	.234
	Within Groups	94.192	251	.375		
	Total	95.803	254			
Social Appearance Anxiety Scale	Between Groups	8.904	3	2.968	4.393	.005
	Within Groups	169.565	251	.676		
	Total	178.469	254			

Below, Table 7 shows whether weekly training frequency has an effect on self-confidence and social appearance anxiety.

Table 7. Social appearance anxiety and self-confidence levels according to weekly training frequency

Scales		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Inner self-confidence	Between Groups	2.199	4	.550	1.291	.274
	Within Groups	106.478	250	.426		
	Total	108.677	254			
External self-confidence	Between Groups	3.326	4	.832	2.167	.073
	Within Groups	95.953	250	.384		
	Total	99.279	254			
Self-confidence Scale Total Score	Between Groups	2.579	4	.645	1.729	.144
	Within Groups	93.224	250	.373		
	Total	95.803	254			

Social Appearance Anxiety Scale	Between Groups	1.699	4	.425	.601	.662
	Within Groups	176.769	250	.707		
	Total	178.469	254			

The table above demonstrates that no statistically significant differences were found in internal self-confidence, external self-confidence, total self-confidence, or social appearance anxiety scores according to participants' weekly training frequency ($p > 0.05$).

4. DISCUSSION

A moderate negative relationship was found between social appearance anxiety and internal self-confidence ($r = -0.425$; $p < 0.001$), external self-confidence ($r = -0.359$; $p < 0.001$), and total self-confidence ($r = -0.410$; $p < 0.001$). As social appearance anxiety increases, internal self-confidence, external self-confidence, and total self-confidence decrease. There was no significant difference in internal self-confidence, external self-confidence, total self-confidence, and social appearance anxiety scores according to the gender variable ($p > 0.05$). No significant difference was found in internal self-confidence, external self-confidence, total self-confidence, and social appearance anxiety scores according to the age of the participants ($p > 0.05$). According to the education level of the participants in the study, no significant difference was found in internal self-confidence, external self-confidence, and total self-confidence scores ($p > 0.05$), while a significant difference was found in social appearance anxiety scores ($p < 0.05$). According to the weekly training frequency of the participants, no significant difference was found in internal self-confidence, external self-confidence, total self-confidence, and social appearance anxiety scores ($p > 0.05$).

When the studies conducted within the scope of this topic are examined, the findings are generally consistent with the results of the present study. In the study conducted by Alemdağ & Öncü (2015), it was observed that social appearance anxiety decreased as the level of participation in physical activity increased. In another study conducted by Dilbaz & Güz (2002), it was concluded that the anxiety level of women was lower than that of men. In the study conducted by Gökkaya & Biçer (2017), no significant relationship was found between the education levels of female leader candidates and their self-confidence levels. Türker et al. (2018), in their research examining social appearance anxiety and self-esteem among individuals who engage in sports, did not find a significant difference in total social appearance anxiety and self-esteem scores according to age, gender, years of sports participation, or whether there was a family history of sports participation. In

the study by Göksel et al. (2018) on social appearance anxiety and subjective happiness among individuals receiving sports services, social appearance anxiety and happiness scores did not show a significant difference in terms of gender. In research on social appearance anxiety, Carleton (2007) emphasized that social appearance anxiety is primarily driven by individuals' concerns about being humiliated or negatively evaluated by others (Aşçı, 2004; Mülazımoğlu et al., 2002). No research or results were found that directly investigated the effect of sports branch on the level of social appearance anxiety. According to cognitive theorists, the core of social appearance anxiety is the fear of being evaluated (Weeks et al., 2008). Aksoy (2019); Yalçın (2018) conducted studies on self-confidence and obtained similar results. This suggests that there are no gender-based differences in anxiety levels among male and female individuals. It was determined that individuals who participated in the study and attended fitness centers generally had low social appearance anxiety and high self-confidence. As social appearance anxiety decreases in individuals who attend fitness centers, their self-confidence increases.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study found a moderate negative relationship between social appearance anxiety and internal, external, and total self-confidence among sedentary individuals. As social appearance anxiety increases, self-confidence levels tend to decrease. The results also indicated that social appearance anxiety and self-confidence do not significantly differ according to gender, age, or weekly training frequency, while a significant difference was observed in social appearance anxiety according to education level.

Overall, individuals attending fitness centers were found to have relatively low levels of social appearance anxiety and relatively high levels of self-confidence. These findings suggest that participation in fitness-related activities may be associated with improved psychological well-being in terms of reduced social appearance anxiety and increased self-confidence.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

FUNDING

This research received no external funding.

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