

Social Buffering as a Moderator of the Relationship between Anxiety and Attention

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INTRODUCTION

- Social Buffering is the reduction of stress and anxiety due to the presence of company from one or more other individuals (Bratec, 2020).
- Research has shown that stress significantly decreased when participants were around other people compared to being alone. They also found that stress levels were rated lower for more pleasant interactions (Sicorello et al, 2020).
- High anxiety has been found to be related to decreased attention control. Under high cognitive loads, there is more interference from distractors associated with higher levels of anxiety compared to lower levels of anxiety (Najmi et al, 2014).

Hypothesis:

- Social buffering will moderate the relationship between anxiety and attention span.

TABLE 1

Multiple Regression: Examining the main effects of anxiety and social buffering in relation to attention span, as well as the interaction between anxiety and social buffering.

Table 1

Multiple Regression Results

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Anxiety	-.036	.011	-.441	-3.341	.002
Social Buffering	-.014	.008	-.226	-1.702	.096
Interaction	.000	.001	.057	.441	.662

DISCUSSION

- We supported prior research and our hypothesis regarding the negative association between anxiety and attention span.
 - These results suggest that as people become more anxious, their attention span decreases.
- Conversely, we failed to support the hypothesis related to the association between social buffering and attention span, and the interaction in relation to attention span.
- The sample size for this study was relatively small. We believe that if the study was completed with a larger sample, we would have potentially observed a main effect of social buffering. Additionally, future research should re-examine the potential interaction between Social Buffering and Anxiety with adequate statistical power.
- Further studies should take into account the amount of stress students experience in different grade levels, as well as class difficulty.
- The generalizability of the results is limited by the sample comprising of predominantly 18-20 year old Caucasian female college students.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

- 47 college students recruited through psychology subject pool
- Mean Age = 19.111 ($SD = 1.48$)
- Predominantly Female (80.85%)
- Predominantly Caucasian (66%)

Procedure

- Participants were asked to complete questions related to their anxiety, social participation, and attention span.
- Conducted as a Qualtrics survey on participants' personal computers.

Measures

- **Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales** (Lovibond, 1995): Higher scores reflect higher levels of anxiety.
 - Situational anxiety
 - Autonomic arousal
 - Skeletal muscle effects
- **Social Participation Measure** (Carnegie Mellon University, n.d.): Higher scores reflect greater social buffering.
- **Mindful Attention Awareness Scale** (Brown, 2003): Higher scores reflect greater attention span.
 - Self regulation
 - Well-being constructs

RESULTS

- The relationship between participants' levels of anxiety and perceived attention span was significant (i.e., main effect).
 - Specifically, participants who had higher levels of Anxiety perceived themselves as having significantly reduced Attention Span.
- The relationship between Social Buffering and Attention was not significant (i.e., main effect).
 - Because the association approached significance (i.e., $p = 0.096$), it is possible we would have detected an effect with more statistical power (i.e., larger sample size).
- Social Buffering did not change the association between Anxiety and Attention Span (i.e., interaction).
- 29.6% of the variability in attention span was due to the main effects of and interaction between Anxiety and Social Buffering.

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