

# Relationship of Social Dominance Orientation to Social Anxiety: Gender Differences and Personality Variables

Julia K. Langer & Thomas L. Rodebaugh, Washington University in St. Louis

## Abstract

We investigated the relationship between social dominance orientation (SDO) and social anxiety. We measured SDO-self (one's own belief in SDO) and SDO-other (belief that others have an SDO). We hypothesized that SDO-other would relate positively to social anxiety. We also predicted that men would be more likely to endorse an SDO. Contrary to expectation, we found that SDO-self was positively related to social anxiety. This finding was only significant for women. As expected, men reported more SDO than women. We further investigated the relationship between SDO and personality variables within each gender.

## Introduction

- Social dominance orientation (SDO) is defined as “the extent to which one desires that one’s in-group dominate and be superior to out-groups” (Pratto et al., 1994, p.742).
- SDO may relate to social anxiety because people with higher social anxiety tend to believe that there are true social hierarchies within which they have lower status (Gilbert, 2001).
- We hypothesized that social anxiety might not be related to personal SDO (SDO-self), but might lead to beliefs that other people have an SDO (SDO-other).
- This explanation of social anxiety may be particularly relevant for men, who are more likely to hold views that reinforce hierarchies (Sidanius & Ekehrammar, 1980).

## Method

Participants completed a packet of self-report questionnaires (see Measures section).

### Sample

- 143 undergraduates from a Midwestern metropolitan university
- Characteristics:
  - Age:  $M = 19.07$ ,  $SD = 1.12$
  - Gender: 69.2% female
  - Ethnicity: White (57.3%), Black (9.8%), Multiracial (4.9%), Asian/Pacific Islander (26.6%)

## Measures

- Social Dominance Orientation Measure (SDO; Pratto et al., 1994)*
  - 4-item measure of one's own SDO (SDO-self) to which we added an additional 4 items regarding whether other people have an SDO (SDO-other)
  - Example items: **Inferior groups should stay in their place; Winning is more important than how the game is played.**
- Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS; Mattick & Clarke, 1998)*
  - 20-item measure of anxiety experienced across a variety of social situations. Only the straightforward items are used in the current study.
- Fear of Positive Evaluation (FPE; Weeks, Heimberg, & Rodebaugh, 2008)*
  - 10-item measure regarding fears associated with positive evaluation
- Mini-International Personality Item Pool Inventory and selected facets (MINI-IPIP; Donnellan et al., 2006)*
  - 20-item short form of five basic factors of personality: extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness.
  - Based on 120 item International Personality Item Pool (Goldberg, 1999).
  - Also included seven personality facets from this pool.

Table 1  
*Intercorrelations Between SDO-self, SDO-other, and SIAS*

	Mean	S.D.	SDO-self	SDO-other	SIAS
SDO-self	9.27	4.17	.71		
SDO-other	15.38	4.50	.07	.76	
SIAS	21.37	11.41	.23**	.13	.88

Note. Internal consistencies for each scale are recorded on the diagonal.  
SDO-self= Social Dominance Orientation Self; SDO-other= Social Dominance Orientation Other; SIAS= Social Interaction Anxiety Scale.

\*\* $p < .01$

Table 2  
*Intercorrelations Between SDO and Personality Variables for Women*

	Agree	Symp	Extra	Consc
SDO-self	-.34**	-.47**	-.21*	.05
SDO-other	.02	-.14	-.05	.23*

Note. Agree= Agreeableness factor; Symp= Sympathy facet; Extra= Extraversion factor; Consc= Conscientiousness factor.  
\*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$

## Results

- Against hypothesis, SDO-self, but not SDO-other, related to social anxiety. See Table 1.
- We investigated correlations with social anxiety-related variables within each gender.
  - SDO-self related to social anxiety for women ( $r = .25$ ,  $p = .011$ ).
  - FPE related to SDO-other for men ( $r = .41$ ,  $p = .006$ ).
- As expected, men reported more SDO than women ( $d = .72$ ,  $p < .01$ ).
- SDO-self positively correlated with SDO-other for women ( $r = .21$ ,  $p = .04$ ), whereas not significant and in opposite direction for men ( $r = -.18$ ,  $p = .24$ ).
- We investigated gender differences in correlations between SDO and personality variables.
  - For women, SDO-self was associated with agreeableness, sympathy, and extraversion. SDO-other was associated with conscientiousness. See Table 2.
  - For men, SDO-self was associated with sympathy and agreeableness. SDO-other was associated with anger, sympathy, and neuroticism. See Table 3.

Table 3

*Intercorrelations Between SDO and Personality Variables for Men*

	Anger	Symp	Neur	Agree
SDO-self	.03	-.58**	.01	-.45**
SDO-other	.48**	.34*	.40**	.22

Note. Anger= Anger facet; Symp= Sympathy facet; Neur= Neuroticism factor, Agree= Agreeableness factor.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$

## Discussion

- Women who report more SDO may feel at odds with expected gender roles, leading to more social anxiety.
- For men, SDO may be more socially acceptable.
- Men who feel others have this orientation may be less likely to have it themselves, resulting in fear of moving up in a competitive hierarchy (FPE) and anger over the perceived injustice of the hierarchy.
- Future research should go beyond self-report to test whether being at odds with expected SDO gender norms can lead to social anxiety.