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Research Paper

Self-Consciousness and Psychological Distress among Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

Stress, anxiety, and depression are common psychological issues that accompany the transition to college life, a crucial developmental stage. This study investigates how self-consciousness, which includes both private and public aspects, can predict psychological distress in college students. In particular, it looks at how public self-consciousness mediates the link between distress and private self-consciousness, taking gender into account as a moderating factor. The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) and the Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS) were filled out by 121 Indian undergraduate students. The findings show that psychological distress and public self-consciousness are positively correlated more strongly than private self-consciousness. The gendered nature of these experiences is highlighted by the fact that female students reported much higher levels of distress and self-consciousness than male students. These results highlight the value of focused interventions, such as mindfulness-based practices and cognitive-behavioral techniques, to reduce excessive self-consciousness and encourage adaptive self-reflection.

Keywords: *Self-Consciousness, Psychological Distress, Undergraduate Students*

The transition to undergraduate life is a significant developmental stage characterized by newfound independence, academic pressures, and social adjustments. Social adjustments, academic pressures, and a newfound sense of independence are all hallmarks of the transition to undergraduate life, a significant developmental stage. An increase in psychological distress among undergraduate students, which shows up as elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (DASS), has been reported in more and more studies. This distress is caused by a number of things, such as identity struggles, social expectations, and the amount of work required for school. Self-consciousness, a psychological concept that may be very important in determining students' distress levels, is one possible but little-researched factor.

Self-consciousness and psychological distress are increasingly prevalent among undergraduate students, particularly due to academic pressure, social comparison, and identity formation during early adulthood (Smith & White, 2020). Because of early adult identity formation, social comparison, and academic pressure, undergraduate students are

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more likely to experience psychological distress and self-consciousness (Smith & White, 2020). Studies show that mental health issues like stress, anxiety, and depression are closely associated with high levels of self-consciousness (Fenigstein et al., 1975; Mor & Winquist, 2002).

According to research conducted worldwide, between 30 and 50 percent of college students suffer from clinically significant psychological distress, with self-conscious people more likely to struggle with these issues (Auerbach et al., 2018). In the Indian context, approximately 45% of undergraduate students report symptoms of depression, anxiety, or stress, often exacerbated by societal expectations and academic competition (Kumar & Singhal, 2021).

Gender differences in self-consciousness and psychological distress have also been widely reported.There have also been numerous reports of gender differences in psychological distress and self-consciousness. While males tend to experience distress differently, frequently due to societal expectations surrounding emotional expression and self-presentation, females tend to display higher levels of internalized distress and public self-consciousness (Rahman et al., 2019; Gao et al., 2021). According to these gendered patterns, gender might mediate the relationship between self-consciousness and psychological distress.

Relevance of the Current Study

This study aims to explore gender as a mediator between private self-consciousness and psychological distress, thereby addressing a key gap in existing research.This study aims to close a large research gap by examining gender as a mediator between psychological distress and private self-consciousness. Although it is well known that private self-consciousness—such as excessive self-reflection or self-criticism—contributes to distress, little is known about how gender shapes this relationship (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999).

Interestingly, not all aspects of psychological distress—stress, anxiety, and depression—have been thoroughly examined in connection to self-consciousness in India. Existing research has mostly ignored how self-consciousness may contribute to more general forms of distress, instead concentrating on how it relates to social anxiety or self-esteem (Kumar & Sharma, 2022). This study aims to fill this gap by examining the distinct roles of private and public self-consciousness in depression, anxiety, and stress, while also determining how gender influences these relationships.

Understanding this mediation is crucial because self-consciousness manifests differently across genders due to socialization, cultural expectations, and coping mechanisms. Because socialization, cultural expectations, and coping strategies cause self-consciousness to manifest differently in each gender, it is imperative to comprehend this mediation. For example, women may be more psychologically distressed due to their higher levels of public self-consciousness, while men may experience psychological distress in less obvious but no less significant ways (Leary & Kowalski, 1995; Gu et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the majority of research on psychological distress and self-consciousness has been done in Western societies, where gender norms can vary greatly. Given India's distinct sociocultural setting, where gender roles are more strictly defined, it is imperative to look into how gender affects the relationship between Indian undergraduate students' psychological distress and private self-consciousness.

This study could theoretically and practically advance the field of clinical psychology by identifying gender-specific vulnerabilities that could guide mental health interventions catered to the needs of male and female students.

Variables

Self-Consciousness

Self-consciousness is conceptualized as a stable personality trait involving heightened self-awareness and self-evaluation. Self-consciousness refers to an individual's awareness of themselves as an object of attention, encompassing both internal and external self-evaluation. Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975) introduced a multidimensional model of self-consciousness, dividing it into three key components:

- **Private Self-Consciousness: The propensity to reflect on one's own feelings, ideas, and experiences.** Excessive self-focus can lead to increased self-criticism, rumination, and emotional distress, but moderate levels of private self-consciousness can encourage introspection and personal development.
- **Public Self-Consciousness:** The understanding of one's appearance to others and the anxiety associated with social evaluation**.** A chronic fear of being judged negatively and social anxiety can result from a high level of public self-consciousness.
- **Social Anxiety:** Characterized by an increased fear of rejection, embarrassment, or scrutiny in social settings. People with high levels of social anxiety frequently feel distressed in social situations, which makes them avoid situations.

The Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS) developed by Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975) measures these three dimensions.These three dimensions are measured by the Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS), which was created by Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss in 1975. A person's propensity to examine and contemplate their inner states, including their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, is referred to as private self-consciousness. When overdone, this inward focus frequently leads to rumination and increased susceptibility to anxiety and depression, but it can also result in adaptive self-awareness. On the other hand, public self-consciousness entails a keen understanding of one's own perception by others. Individuals high in public self-consciousness are often preoccupied with their appearance and behavior in social settings, making them more susceptible to social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

Several psychological theories have explored how individuals become aware of themselves, how they perceive social evaluation, and how this affects their behavior in interpersonal settings. The ways in which people learn about themselves, interpret social evaluation, and use this knowledge to shape their behavior in social settings have all been the subject of numerous psychological theories. In particular, the following theories treat social anxiety, public self-consciousness, and private self-consciousness as separate concepts.

Private Self-Consciousness: Self-Focus and Introspection

- **Self-Awareness Theory (Duval & Wicklund, 1972):** According to this theory, people can focus their attention inward, toward the self, or outward, toward the surroundings. People evaluate themselves when they focus their attention inward, which makes them more conscious of their own feelings, ideas, and actions. Individuals with high levels of private self-consciousness are more likely to engage

in in-depth introspection and concentrate more on their inner experiences. If people see a discrepancy between their ideal and real selves, this self-centeredness may lead to more self-criticism even though it can encourage self-improvement.

- **Self-Perception Theory (Bem, 1972):** According to this theory, people's perceptions of themselves and their attitudes are shaped by their observations of their own actions. High levels of private self-consciousness make people more inclined to extrapolate their emotions and personality traits from their past actions. They are more self-aware due to their propensity for introspection, but they are also more vulnerable to identity exploration and internal conflicts.
- **Rumination-Reflection Model (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999):** The two subtypes of private self-consciousness are reflection (constructive self-exploration) and rumination (maladaptive, self-critical thought). While reflection encourages greater self-awareness and personal development, rumination is associated with an overemphasis on one's own shortcomings or failures. People with high levels of private self-consciousness may either become more self-aware (through introspection) or become mired in pessimistic thought patterns (through rumination).

Public Self-Consciousness: Awareness of Social Evaluation

- **Symbolic Interactionism (Mead, 1934):** This sociological theory holds that people's interactions with other people help them develop their sense of self. Public self-consciousness arises when people realize that other people are watching and evaluating what they do. This is in line with the "Looking-Glass Self" theory (Cooley, 1902), which postulates that people create their perception of themselves by considering how they think other people see them.
- **Impression Management Theory (Goffman, 1959):** According to this theory, people use self-presentation techniques to affect how other people see them. People who are highly self-conscious in public are more likely to modify their behavior to conform to social norms and stay out of trouble. They might strategically monitor themselves to make sure they are viewed positively in various social contexts.
- **Evaluation Apprehension Theory (Cottrell, 1972):** According to this theory, the fear of being judged by others is what motivates public self-consciousness. Publicly self-conscious people are more likely to be socially conscious and sensitive to criticism from others. This can lead to increased self-monitoring in public settings, as well as concerns about reputation and conformity.

Social Anxiety: Fear of Negative Social Evaluation

- **Cognitive Model of Social Anxiety (Clark & Wells, 1995):** According to this model, people who suffer from social anxiety pay more attention to themselves during social situations, which makes them more conscious of their perceived shortcomings. They tend to overestimate the chance of receiving unfavorable feedback because they believe that people are always judging them. Social anxiety is reinforced by the cycle of self-monitoring and pessimistic predictions, which heighten avoidance behaviors.
- **Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory (Gray, 1987):** According to this theory, people who suffer from social anxiety are more susceptible to social rejection or punishment because they have a higher Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS). They are more prone to withdraw or avoid social situations because of their heightened fear response.
- **Self-Presentation Theory of Social Anxiety (Schlenker & Leary, 1982):** People who are socially anxious get anxious when they think they cannot show themselves

in a way that is acceptable to others. They avoid, hesitate, and over-prepare in social situations because they are afraid of saying or doing something embarrassing. High public self-consciousness and this are related because both involve worries about being judged by others.

Psychological Distress: Stress, Anxiety, and Depression

- The term psychological distress describes emotional suffering that is typified by signs of depression, anxiety, and stress.
- Stress is the body's response to perceived challenges or threats. Prolonged exposure to stressors without effective coping mechanisms can lead to chronic stress, negatively impacting both mental and physical health.
- Excessive worry, trepidation, and fear are hallmarks of anxiety, which is frequently brought on by stressful or unclear circumstances. When severe, anxiety can disrupt daily functioning and lead to avoidance behaviors.
- Cognitive abnormalities, loss of interest in activities, and ongoing sadness are characteristics of depression. It is often linked to negative self-perception, feelings of hopelessness, and impaired social functioning.
- These theories shed light on how people perceive, analyze, and react to upsetting feelings and circumstances.

Theories of Stress

General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) – Selye (1936, 1956)

Hans Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) describes the body's physiological response to stress in three stages:

- Alarm Stage: When the body senses a stressor, the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) is triggered, which causes the release of stress chemicals like cortisol and adrenaline.
- Resistance Stage: If stress persists, the body continues to be hypervigilant, releasing energy to meet the challenge.
- Stage of Exhaustion: Extended stress exhausts resources, resulting in low immunity, burnout, and heightened susceptibility to diseases.
- Chronic stress can have a detrimental effect on one's physical and mental well-being, leading to anxiety and depression, as explained by GAS.

Transactional Model of Stress and Coping – Lazarus & Folkman (1984)

According to this cognitive appraisal model, stress is influenced by how people view and assess stressors rather than being solely a physiological response.

- Primary Appraisal: The individual determines if an event poses a threat, presents a challenge, or is unimportant.
- Secondary Appraisal: They assess their ability to handle the stressor by looking at their financial, social, and emotional resources.
- Coping Strategies:
- Problem-Focused Coping- Addressing the stressor head-on (e.g., studying more for an exam)
- Emotion-Focused Coping- Controlling emotional responses (for example, by using relaxation methods).

This model emphasizes that stress is a personal experience; what one person finds stressful may not be stressful to another.

Allostatic Load Theory (McEwen, 1998)
According to this theory, the body's stress-response system becomes dysregulated after repeated stress exposure, which can have long-term negative effects on health. Chronic stress causes an allostatic overload, which increases the risk of mental health issues like anxiety and depression.

Theories of Anxiety
Two-Factor Theory of Anxiety – Mowrer (1947)
This behavioral model describes the onset and persistence of anxiety:

- Classical conditioning is the process by which a neutral stimulus is linked to fear (for example, if someone feels panicked in a crowded environment, they will grow anxious around crowds).
- Operant Conditioning (Avoidance Learning): Short-term distress is decreased and the behavior is reinforced by avoiding anxiety-inducing situations. This explains social anxiety and phobias.

Cognitive Model of Anxiety – Beck & Emery (1985)
This theory suggests that anxiety stems from negative thought patterns and cognitive distortions:

- Overestimation of Threat: Believing a situation is more dangerous than it actually is.
- Catastrophic Thinking: Assuming the worst will happen (e.g., "If I embarrass myself in public, everyone will hate me forever").
- Hypervigilance: Constantly scanning for danger, leading to heightened anxiety responses.

This model is the basis for Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which aims to challenge irrational fears and replace them with rational thoughts.

Intolerance of Uncertainty Theory (Dugas et al., 1998)
Uncertainty and ambiguity are difficult for people with high anxiety. They feel upset when confronted with uncertain results. Excessive worrying is a way to feel in control. Steer clear of unclear situations, which will make them feel more anxious. With regard to generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), this theory is especially pertinent.

Theories of Depression
Learned Helplessness Theory – Seligman (1975)
This theory explains how depression develops when individuals feel powerless to change negative outcomes. According to this theory, depression arises when people believe they have no control over unfavorable outcomes. According to Seligman's findings from animal experiments, people cease attempting to flee when faced with unmanageable stress, even if there are ways to do so.

This is relevant to depression, which is characterized by passivity, hopelessness, and low motivation as a result of the belief that there is nothing, they can do to improve their unfavorable circumstances.

Cognitive Model of Depression – Beck (1967)
Beck proposed that depression results from negative thinking patterns called the Cognitive Triad:

- Negative view of the self ("I am worthless").

- Negative view of the world ("The world is unfair").
- Negative view of the future ("Things will never get better").
- Depressed individuals also exhibit cognitive distortions, such as:
- Overgeneralization – Assuming one negative event applies to all situations.
- Personalization – Taking excessive blame for negative events.
- Black-and-White Thinking – Seeing situations as either completely good or bad.
- Cognitive therapy helps patients identify and challenge these thought patterns to improve mood and resilience.

Hopelessness Theory – Abramson et al. (1989)
According to this theory, which builds on learned helplessness, depression develops when people assign negative occurrences to internal (self-blame), global (affecting everything), and stable (unchanging) causes or feel that they have no control over the future and that their circumstances are irreversible.

For instance, students are more likely to experience depression if they fail an exam and believe that they are stupid (internal), that they will fail consistently (stable), and that they will never succeed in life (global).

Neurobiological Theories of Depression

- Monoamine Hypothesis: Low serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine levels are associated with depression.
- HPA Axis Dysfunction: Excessive cortisol production brought on by prolonged stress can interfere with mood regulation.

We can examine two psychological distress models to see how self-consciousness affects mental health outcomes. By proposing that people have underlying vulnerabilities (diatheses) that combine with environmental stressors to cause mental health problems, the Diathesis-Stress Model offers a framework for comprehending the onset of psychological distress. Increased self-awareness functions as a diathesis in the context of self-consciousness, with stress reactions, anxiety, and depression being exacerbated by social evaluation and life stressors.

Frameworks relevant to the study
The development of psychological distress is linked to maladaptive cognitive styles, according to the Cognitive Vulnerability Model. People with high levels of self-consciousness are more prone to emotional distress because they frequently think negatively about themselves and engage in self-critical thought patterns. This model describes how self-consciousness shapes cognitive interpretations of stressors and feedback, which in turn contributes to the severity and persistence of mental health issues.

The psychosocial development theory of Erik Erikson offers a useful framework for comprehending undergraduate students' self-consciousness. Erikson asserts that adolescence and early adulthood entail negotiating the identity vs. role confusion crisis, in which people attempt to forge a sense of self while also looking for social group acceptance. At this crucial point, undergraduate students frequently feel more self-conscious as they attempt to strike a balance between their individuality and their desire to blend in. This increased self-awareness is a relevant research topic since it can worsen emotional distress and social anxiety.

According to the gender socialization theory, gender-specific behaviors and self-concepts are shaped by cultural expectations and societal norms. Women are frequently socialized from a young age to place a higher value on relationships and appearance, which makes them more self-conscious in public and more susceptible to social evaluation issues. Contrarily, men might feel pressured to exhibit emotional stoicism, which could conceal their distress and prevent them from engaging in self-reflective activities. These socialization patterns highlight the significance of taking gender into account as a moderating factor in mental health research by contributing to gender differences in psychological distress and self-consciousness.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In recent psychological research, the connection between psychological distress and self-consciousness has drawn more attention. Examining the effects of self-consciousness on students' mental health is essential given the transitional and frequently stressful nature of undergraduate life.

The goal of this review is to gather the literature on the relationship between psychological distress and self-consciousness in undergraduate students, with a focus on the moderating role of gender. Through an analysis of this interaction, the review seeks to offer insights that can guide focused interventions and support academic mental health.

The majority of research focuses on homogeneous groups, frequently ignoring the distinctive experiences of diverse populations, including students who identify as LGBTQ+ and people from different cultural backgrounds. For example, teens who identify as LGBTQ+ experience higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts, frequently as a result of perceived discrimination *(Almeida et al., 2009)*. According to *Taylor (2018)*, LGBTQ+ youth also commonly experience indirect homophobia and transphobia, which can have detrimental effects on their self-esteem and increase psychological distress. Nevertheless, little is known about the precise relationship between self-consciousness and psychological distress in these populations.

Most existing studies employ cross-sectional designs, limiting the ability to infer causal relationships between self-consciousness and psychological distress. The majority of current research uses cross-sectional designs, which restricts the capacity to draw conclusions about the causal relationships between psychological distress and self-consciousness. To comprehend how these variables interact over time, longitudinal studies are crucial. For instance, studies have linked psychological distress to changes in brain volume, indicating that developmental factors may play a role in this association (*Whittle et al., 2014*). Longitudinal research explicitly looking at self-consciousness and its long-term effects on psychological distress is, however, limited. Deeper understanding of the temporal dynamics and possible causality of this relationship would be possible through the use of such research designs.

While it has been suggested that females may exhibit higher levels of self-consciousness than males, but there are mixed evidences as well. There is conflicting evidence, despite the hypothesis that women may be more self-conscious than men. To measure self-consciousness in male and female undergraduate students, *Shukla (2015)* created a standardized self-consciousness test. The null hypothesis was accepted after statistical analysis using a t-test revealed no significant gender differences in self-consciousness at the

0.01 and 0.05 significance levels ($p = 0.006$). These results imply that there may not be a consistent gender difference in self-consciousness as a construct.

Particularly since the cognitive revolution of the 1950s, cognitive factors have become increasingly important in psychological distress (*Vîslă, Flückiger, Holtforth, & David, 2015*). In their meta-analysis, *Vîslă et al. (2015)* looked at 83 primary studies and 100 independent samples and found a moderate positive association ($r = 0.38$) between irrational beliefs and distress, including anxiety, depression, anger, and guilt. Even after adjusting for moderators like age, educational attainment, and the type of stressful events, this relationship persisted. These results emphasize the significance of cognitive processes in self-consciousness and the part maladaptive cognitions play in psychological distress. The association between irrational beliefs and distress may help explain how self-conscious thought patterns contribute to mental health issues, as people with high levels of self-consciousness often engage in excessive self-evaluation.

Different elements of self-consciosuness can lead to different kinds of psychological distress. Different types of psychological distress can result from different aspects of self-consciousness. For instance, in socially anxious people, negative self-perception is predicted by private self-consciousness rather than public self-consciousness. According to research by *Nordahl, Plummer, and Wells (2017)*, people who are highly self-conscious about their private lives tend to overestimate how poorly they perform in social situations, which exacerbates psychological distress. This emphasizes the necessity of self-focused attention-focused interventions for the management of social anxiety and associated distress.

The majority of research focuses on homogeneous groups, frequently ignoring the distinctive experiences of diverse populations, including students who identify as LGBTQ+ and people from different cultural backgrounds. For example, teens who identify as LGBTQ+ experience higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts, frequently as a result of perceived discrimination. According to *Taylor (2018)*, LGBTQ+ youth also commonly experience indirect homophobia and transphobia, which can have detrimental effects on their self-esteem and increase psychological distress. Nevertheless, little is known about the precise relationship between self-consciousness and psychological distress in these populations.

Psychological distress among university students has been widely recognized as a significant concern, impacting both academic performance and overall well-being. A review of the last 30 years of research has found that stress is associated with poor academic performance, unhealthy habits, and other challenges in student life (*Sharp and Theiler, 2018*). While university stressors are unavoidable, not everyone finds them to be distressing, as this review highlights by identifying sociodemographic, situational, and academic factors as contributing to distress. It has been proposed that psychological traits like self-consciousness, self-esteem, and coping strategies are important intervention points to give students better stress management abilities. In light of these results, the current study intends to investigate whether psychological distress in undergraduates is influenced by self-consciousness and whether gender modifies this relationship.

The increasing awareness of gender disparities in college students' psychological distress is reinforced by more research. When *Knapstad et al. (2019)* examined patterns in Norwegian students' self-reported psychological distress from 2010 to 2018, they discovered a notable rise over time, with female students continuously reporting higher levels of distress than

their male counterparts. Their results are consistent with other research showing how susceptible female students are to mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and self-conscious feelings like guilt and shame. The study highlights the need for focused interventions to support students' mental health by pointing to a number of contributing factors, such as shifts in response styles and real increases in distress levels.

Beyond psychological distress, high self-consciousness may also influence behavior, particularly in social settings. High levels of self-consciousness can also affect behavior, especially in social situations, in addition to psychological distress. Public and private self-consciousness did not directly predict hazardous drinking, but social anxiety and public self-consciousness did contribute to alcohol-related harms, according to a study on alcohol pre-loading among UK students. Interestingly, the association between pre-loading and harm was mediated by public self-consciousness, especially for high-risk drinkers *(Davies & Paltoglou, 2019*). This implies that people who are more self-conscious in public might be more prone to using dangerous coping strategies in social settings, which would exacerbate psychological distress. These results highlight the importance of taking into account both behavioral and cognitive pathways when figuring out how self-consciousness affects mental health outcomes.

In another *2019* study of 257 dental students, *Radeef and Faisal* discovered a significant negative correlation between psychological distress and self-esteem ($r = -0.5$, $p < 0.00$). Students in psychological distress scored lower on self-esteem than their peers who were not in distress, and female students reported much lower self-esteem than male students. The relationship between self-consciousness, self-evaluation, and mental health is further supported by these findings, which also support the notion that self-esteem acts as a buffer against distress. People with lower self-esteem may be more susceptible to psychological distress as a result of excessive self-evaluation and negative self-perception, since public self-consciousness frequently entails heightened sensitivity to external evaluation.

Pride, guilt, and shame function as social adaptations: pride boosts status, guilt motivates repair, and shame prevents rejection. These self-conscious feelings may be neurocognitive adaptations that aid in navigating social valuation, according to research (*Sznycer, 2019).* According to this adaptationist model, psychological distress may be exacerbated by public self-consciousness that is linked to social evaluation. Social anxiety and depression are exacerbated by negative emotions such as guilt and shame, which heighten self-evaluative concerns. This perspective on self-consciousness provides insights into how it affects mental health.

Self-conscious emotions, such as shame and guilt, are crucial for mental well-being. The effect of these emotions on distress and life satisfaction in adolescents who are francophone was studied by *Sullivan, Green-Demers, and Lauzon (2020)*. According to their research, dispositional shame had a negative correlation with life satisfaction and a positive correlation with psychological distress, including symptoms of anxiety and depression. On the other hand, guilt was not connected with psychological distress but did exhibit a positive correlation with life satisfaction. These results demonstrate the different impacts of guilt and shame, indicating that guilt may have an adaptive function in psychological health while shame may lead to increased distress. The necessity of investigating self-conscious emotions in various sociocultural contexts and their consequences for mental health interventions is reaffirmed by this study.

The impact of social media use on teenage psychological distress, anxiety, and depression was investigated in a systematic review that synthesized data from 13 studies (Keles, McCrae, and Grealish, 2020). The review classified social media engagement into four domains: time spent, activity, investment, and addiction, all of which were correlated with higher levels of psychological distress. These results are consistent with worries about public self-consciousness because people who are extremely sensitive to their online persona may feel more distressed.

Research continuously shows that while depression rates seem to be more evenly distributed between the sexes, female students report higher levels of stress and anxiety than their male counterparts. According to a Chinese longitudinal study with 1,892 undergraduate students, mild anxiety was experienced by both male and female students during their first three years of study. Interestingly, during their first and second years, female students showed noticeably higher anxiety levels than male students. However, average levels of stress and depression did not differ significantly by gender. Furthermore, more female students had anxiety levels above the typical range, while more male students suffered from depression in various degrees (*Gao, Ping, & Liu, 2020*).

According to additional research, which evaluated 1,074 undergraduate students, women reported higher levels of stress and anxiety than men, and 23.6% of them had anxiety symptoms that were above the normal range. On the other hand, male and female participants experienced depression symptoms equally (*Ramón-Arbués et al., 2020*). Comprehending these gender-specific variations can facilitate the development of customized support networks that promote resilience and well-being in educational environments.

In a different study, social anxiety was a strong positive predictor of self-consciousness ($p<0.05$) among 300 female university students in Lahore, Pakistan. In particular, all social anxiety domains, including evaluation and interaction anxiety, showed a positive correlation with public self-consciousness ($p<0.01$), indicating that people who are afraid of social scrutiny are more likely to become self-aware and self-critical (*Ejaz and Muazzam, 2021*). These results support the hypothesis that increased self-consciousness, especially in public situations, may intensify distress by making one more susceptible to criticism from others.

Nogueira, Sequeira, and Sampaio (Journal of Gender Studies, 2021) investigated gender disparities in psychological vulnerability, academic life satisfaction, and mental health among first-year college students in Lisbon, Portugal, using a cross-sectional study design. The study, which used online surveys, discovered that although there were no significant differences on the Psychological Vulnerability Scale (PVS), female freshmen reported lower mental health scores and a higher self-perception of vulnerability than their male peers.

These results are consistent with those of *Graves et al. (2021)*, who found that female students used emotion-focused coping strategies more frequently and had higher stress levels. Collectively, these studies highlight how crucial it is to take gender-specific mental health interventions into account. particularly during the transition to college, when students may be more susceptible to psychological distress.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the gender gap in mental health outcomes even more pronounced. It is possible that the increased reliance on social media and virtual communication during times of isolation has increased public self-consciousness,

particularly in women, making them more susceptible to perceived judgment and social evaluation. This intensified self-awareness likely contributed to the greater stress, anxiety, and academic difficulties reported by female students, as they navigated both the pressures of performance and the scrutiny of digital interactions. A 2021 study examined how undergraduate students' coping strategies and mental health were impacted by the pandemic. Women may be more prone to internalizing the stressors associated with major disruptions, which could result in increased psychological distress, according to the findings, which showed that female students had more noticeable negative effects on academics, social isolation, stress, and mental health than their male counterparts *(Prowse et al., 2021).*

Studies have repeatedly emphasized the connection between social anxiety and self-consciousness. *Mundad (2022)* looked at how college students' social anxiety was impacted by their sense of self-worth and self-consciousness. Using a sample of 170 students aged 18-25, they employed the Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS-R), Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS), and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. According to their research, social anxiety and public self-consciousness were positively connected, suggesting that people who are very conscious of how other people see them may be more socially anxious. On the other hand, social anxiety and self-esteem had a negative correlation, indicating that having a higher sense of self-worth protects against social anxiety. It is interesting to note that social anxiety and private self-consciousness did not significantly correlate, casting doubt on the notion that social distress is directly caused by internal self-awareness. These results reinforce the idea that social anxiety is better predicted by public self-consciousness than by private self-consciousness, highlighting the importance of taking into account various facets of self-consciousness when analyzing psychological distress.

Psychological outcomes are also significantly shaped by gender-specific coping strategies. A study conducted in 2022 examined the connection between situational coping and coping styles in both genders. According to the study, men may employ disengagement techniques more frequently than women, who are more likely to employ active stress coping mechanisms like positive reframing and seeking emotional support. These variations highlight how crucial it is to take gender-specific strategies into account when creating interventions meant to lessen psychological distress *(Rourke et al., 2022).*

Additionally, a 2023 study investigated how college students' perceptions of stress and coping strategies differed by gender. The findings showed that women are more likely to use verbal expressions to express themselves or others as coping mechanisms, such as rumination and seeking emotional support. Men, on the other hand, were observed to employ distinct coping strategies that might not entail as much verbal communication. These results emphasize the need for gender-sensitive mental health care that takes into account each gender's particular coping mechanisms *(ResearchGate, 2023).*

Cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping self-perception and mental health. For example, LGBTQ+ students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) often navigate complex intersections of racial and sexual identities, facing unique challenges that can exacerbate psychological distress (*Teen Vogue, 202*3). The scarcity of studies examining how self-consciousness affects psychological distress across different cultural contexts and among LGBTQ+ students highlights a critical area for future research.

Wang and Chen (2023) looked at the moderating effects of dispositional mindful observation and gender on the association between psychological distress and nature contact.

Although nature contact was linked to less psychological distress, the study's findings showed that gender's moderating effects varied across all measures, suggesting that other factors might be at play in this relationship. These disparities underscore the need for additional investigation to elucidate the function of gender in moderating the association between psychological distress and self-consciousness.

Depression has been found to be significantly influenced by self-consciousness. *Ye Yuan et al. (2024)* looked into this relationship among college students and discovered that self-efficacy and life meaning served as partial mediators between depression and self-consciousness. Additionally, their research showed that the association between depression and self-efficacy was moderated by social support, indicating that students who had less social support were more susceptible to depressive symptoms. These results emphasize how crucial it is to cultivate a sense of life meaning and self-efficacy to mitigate the negative effects of self-consciousness on mental health. Furthermore, because people with higher perceived support may be better able to handle the distress associated with self-consciousness, the moderating role of social support highlights the necessity of interventions that fortify social ties.

Existing Gaps in Literature

Longitudinal research has examined changes in students' psychological distress throughout their transition to university and beyond, indicating that the university experience itself significantly contributes to students' distress. The university experience itself has a significant influence on students' psychological distress, according to longitudinal studies that have examined how students' distress evolves as they progress through college and beyond. For example, when Fisher and Hood compared the psychological symptoms of students before and after they started college, they discovered a marked rise in symptoms of obsession and depression. Furthermore, chronic and persistent distress levels show that stressors at university can cause students to develop new mental health problems as well as aggravate pre-existing psychological vulnerabilities.

The internal psychological factors that cause distress are not well understood, despite the fact that a great deal of research has been done on external stressors like social pressure, financial strain, and academic pressure. Being self-conscious entails heightened awareness of oneself, may be a key psychological factor that influences distress levels. However, the relationship between self-consciousness and psychological distress in undergraduate male and female students has not been adequately examined in prior research. It is essential to comprehend this relationship because self-consciousness may not only exacerbate mental health issues but also guide the development of specialized interventions for distressed students.

Despite extensive research on self-consciousness and psychological distress, several gaps remain:

1. Little is known about how private and public self-consciousness interact in psychological distress. Instead of investigating the ways in which private and public self-consciousness interact to affect psychological distress, the majority of research concentrates on self-consciousness as a unidimensional construct. Whether public self-consciousness mediates the association between psychological distress and private self-consciousness, especially in young adults, is not well supported by empirical data.

2. Inadequate Study in the Indian Setting: There are not many studies on Indian undergraduate students, who might face particular cultural and social pressures that affect self-consciousness and distress, because the majority of the literature currently in publication is centered on Western populations.
3. Need for a Theoretical Model: To explain the relationship between variables, a theoretical model is required. Prior research has examined the relationship between psychological distress and self-consciousness, but it has not offered a systematic framework for understanding how the two interact. There is a need to differentiate between self-consciousness and self-reflection, exploring how self-consciousness can be transformed into a healthier, more adaptive form of self-awareness. Differentiating between self-consciousness and self-reflection is necessary, as is investigating ways to change self-consciousness into a more adaptive, healthy kind of self-awareness.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

To examine the relationship between self-consciousness and psychological distress among male and female undergraduate students, with a specific focus on how public self-consciousness mediates the relationship between private self-consciousness and Psychological distress.

Objectives

1. To assess the levels of private and public self-consciousness in male and female undergraduates.
2. To evaluate the levels of psychological distress (depression, anxiety, and stress) in the sample.
3. To investigate the relationship between private self-consciousness and psychological distress.
4. To explore whether public self-consciousness mediates the relationship between private self-consciousness and psychological distress.
5. To examine gender differences in self-consciousness and psychological distress.

Hypotheses of the Study

- **H1:** There will be a significant positive relationship between private self-consciousness and psychological distress among undergraduate students.
- **H2:** Public self-consciousness will mediate the relationship between private self-consciousness and psychological distress among undergraduate students.
- **H3:** There will be significant difference on the level of Psychological distress (among male and female undergraduate students.
- **H4:** There will be significant difference on the level of dimensions of self-consciousness (public, private, social anxiety) among male and female undergraduate students.

Research Design

This study uses a cross-sectional, correlational research design to investigate the relationship between psychological distress and self-consciousness in undergraduate students. In particular, the study investigates whether gender influences the relationship between psychological distress and self-consciousness. This design is appropriate for assessing the

variables at a specific point in time and determining correlations and potential moderating effects between them.

The study collects quantitative data using primary data from self-reported measures in order to achieve this goal. This descriptive data was gathered through observations using standardized questionnaires.

Sample

Undergraduate students from several Indian universities are taking part in the study. A total of 121 undergraduate students (76 female students and 45 male students) were chosen using a convenience sample. To be eligible, participants had to be enrolled in an undergraduate program, be between the ages of 17 and 24 years, and be willing to provide informed consent. People who had a history of serious mental illnesses or who did not speak English well were excluded because the tools used are in the English language. No history of serious mental illness or those who do not speak English well, since the instruments are in English.

Measures

- **Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS):** Both private and public self-consciousness were measured using the Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). The SCS is composed of three subscales: social anxiety, public self-consciousness, and private self-consciousness. Responses are recorded on a Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater self-consciousness.
- **Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21):** Psychological distress was measured using the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). It has three subscales that measure stress, anxiety, and depression. Its three subscales measure depression, anxiety, and stress. Participants rate their experiences from the previous week on a four-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater distress.

Procedure

A Google Forms-created online survey was used to collect data. Social media platforms and university networks disseminated the survey link. Participants provided their informed consent after being briefed on the purpose of the study. The two scales (SCS and DASS-21) and demographic information, including gender, were then completed by them. The Likert-scale questions on the questionnaire were designed to gauge both self-consciousness and psychological distress. Because the responses were gathered virtually, and accessibility and participation were increased. In order to ensure accessibility and broader participation, responses were gathered virtually. In order to preserve confidentiality, responses were anonymous.

Ethical Considerations

The institutional ethics committee gave this study its ethical approval. After being made aware of their right to withdraw from the activity at any time without incurring any fees, each participant provided their informed consent. To preserve the confidentiality and privacy of the participants, the data were anonymized.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

For the three main variables in this study—private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, and psychological distress—descriptive statistics were computed.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the three primary variables in this study: psychological distress, public self-consciousness, and private self-consciousness.

Table 1 displays each variable's means, ranges, and standard deviations (SD).

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Private Self-Consciousness	2.98	0.64	1.33	4.00
Public Self-Consciousness	3.04	0.65	1.33	4.00
Psychological Distress	1.21	0.71	0.00	3.00

Participants appear to be moderately self-conscious, according to the means for Private Self-Consciousness (M = 2.98, SD = 0.64) and Public Self-Consciousness (M = 3.04, SD = 0.65). According to the means for Private Self-Consciousness (M = 2.98, SD = 0.64) and Public Self-Consciousness (M = 3.04, SD = 0.65), participants seem to be moderately self-conscious. The psychological distress scale had a range of 0 to 3, with relatively low average scores (M = 1.21, SD = 0.71).

The data analysis aimed to investigate the relationships between social anxiety (SA), private and public self-consciousness (PrSC and PuSC), and psychological distress, including stress, anxiety, and depression, among Indian undergraduate students. To investigate these relationships and look at gender differences in self-consciousness and distress levels, correlation analysis and t-tests were used.

Correlation Analysis

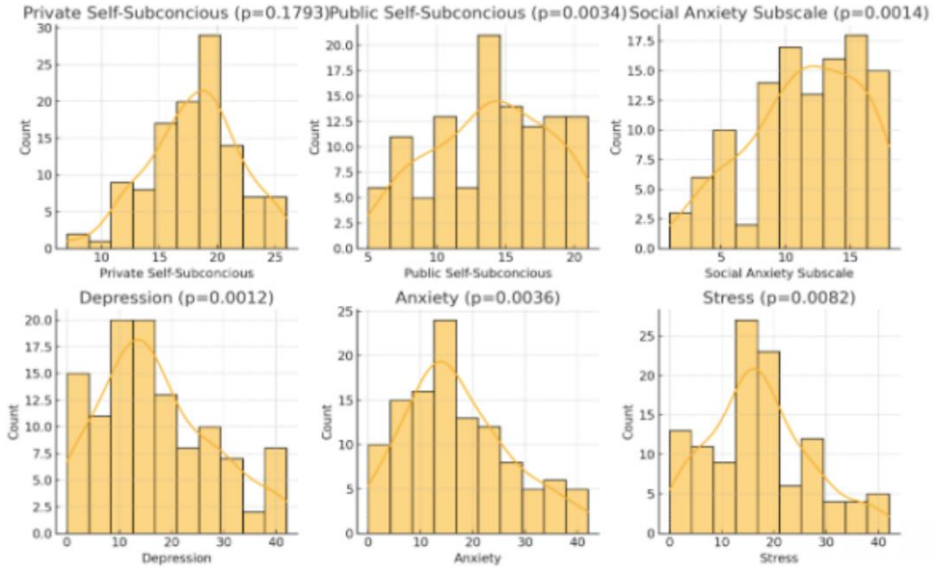
Significantly positive associations between psychological distress and self-consciousness dimensions were found by Pearson's correlation coefficients:

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Variable	Pr Sc	Pu Sc	Social Anxiety	Depression	Anxiety	Stress
Pr Sc	1.00	0.57	0.23	0.21	0.30	0.32
Pu Sc	0.57	1.00	0.52	0.39	0.43	0.40
Social Anxiety	0.23	0.52	1.00	0.52	0.29	0.41
Depression	0.21	0.39	0.52	1.00	0.68	0.77
Anxiety	0.30	0.43	0.29	0.68	1.00	0.75
Stress	0.32	0.40	0.41	0.77	0.75	1.00

The correlation matrix shows a significant ($p < 0.05$) relationship between social anxiety, depression, anxiety, stress, and private self-consciousness (Pr Sc) and public self-consciousness (Pu Sc). Pu Sc shows stronger associations with psychological distress variables (r = 0.39 to 0.52) than Pr Sc (r = 0.21 to 0.32), and there is a significant correlation between the two (r = 0.57). A similar variance in emotional distress is shared by stress, anxiety, and depression, as evidenced by the strong correlation between these three conditions (r = 0.68 to 0.77).

Figure 1: Histogram Plots with Density Curves for Self-Consciousness, Social Anxiety, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scores



Gender Differences

Table 3: Independent Samples t-Test for Gender Differences in Self-Consciousness and Psychological Distress

Variable	Gender	M	SD	t	p
Self-Consciousness	Male	2.88	0.61		
	Female	3.17	0.67	3.45	<0.01
Psychological Distress	Male	1.00	0.65		
	Female	1.45	0.72	4.02	<0.01

- Self-Consciousness: Compared to male students, female students reported considerably higher levels of general self-consciousness ($t = 3.45$, $p < 0.01$).
- Psychological Distress: Compared to their male peers, female students also reported noticeably higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression ($t = 4.02$, $p < 0.01$).

Description

The importance of considering gender differences in the analysis of self-consciousness and its impact on psychological health is highlighted by these findings. The study highlights how crucial self-consciousness is in assessing students' psychological health, especially in relation to its social and public dimensions. These insights form the foundation for developing targeted interventions aimed at transforming excessive self-focus into constructive self-reflection, fostering emotional resilience among undergraduate students.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings

The present study examined the relationships among Indian undergraduate students between public self-consciousness (PuSC), private self-consciousness (PrSC), and psychological distress (such as stress, anxiety, and depression). The results demonstrated strong positive correlations between psychological distress and self-consciousness dimensions, highlighting the role that self-consciousness plays in determining emotional well-being.

Compared to private self-consciousness, there was a stronger correlation between psychological distress and public self-consciousness. Specifically, PuSC was moderately correlated with depression ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.05$), anxiety ($r = 0.43$, $p < 0.05$), stress ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.05$), and social anxiety ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.05$). These findings are in line with Mundad's (2022) research, which found a positive relationship between public self-consciousness and social anxiety in college students. By showing that those who are acutely aware of how others see them are more likely to experience anxiety in social situations, this supports the theory that sensitivity to outside judgment exacerbates emotional distress.

Although the associations between psychological distress and private self-consciousness were weaker, they were still significantly correlated ($r = 0.30$, $p < 0.05$), with anxiety showing the strongest correlation. The distinction between PrSC and PuSC supports the notion that self-awareness can foster introspection and personal development, whereas excessive self-monitoring driven by external evaluation may lead to increased psychological vulnerability (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). The strong intercorrelations between stress, anxiety, and depression (ranging from 0.68 to 0.77, $p < 0.05$) demonstrate how intertwined these emotional states are, which is consistent with the tripartite model of emotional distress proposed by Clark and Watson (1991).

These findings are corroborated by a study by Ejaz and Muazzam in 2021 in Lahore, Pakistan, which found that public self-consciousness was positively connected with all social anxiety domains, including evaluation and interaction anxiety, and that social anxiety was a strong predictor of self-consciousness. It is implied that people who are afraid of other people's opinions about them often become more self-conscious and critical of themselves, which increases psychological distress.

Gender Differences in Self-Consciousness and Psychological Distress

The study examined the relationship between gender and psychological distress and self-consciousness and discovered that female students reported significantly higher levels of both PrSC and PuSC than male students ($t = 3.45$, $p < 0001$). Female participants also had significantly higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression ($t = 4.02$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that women are more vulnerable to the negative emotional effects of elevated self-consciousness.

These findings align with a study conducted in Lisbon, Portugal, in 2021 by Nogueira, Sequeira, and Sampaio on first-year college students. The study discovered that female students had higher self-perceptions of vulnerability and lower mental health scores than their male counterparts. In line with the current study's findings on gendered differences in emotional distress, female students showed higher sensitivity to stressors despite the fact that there were no significant differences in psychological vulnerability measures.

Furthermore, in line with the gender differences in psychological distress that have been noted, a Chinese longitudinal study by Gao, Ping, and Liu (2020) discovered that female students in their first and second years of college had significantly higher anxiety levels. This pattern is consistent with more general worldwide trends that show women are more likely to suffer from stress and anxiety in educational environments, possibly as a result of social pressures to perform well and present oneself as well as increased self-consciousness (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

The interaction between social support and self-consciousness may also be responsible for the higher psychological distress seen in female participants..The higher psychological distress observed in female participants may also be due to the interaction between self-consciousness and social support. According to the study by Ye Yuan et al. (2024), depression and self-consciousness were partially mediated by life meaning and self-efficacy. By showing that students with lower levels of social support were more prone to depressive symptoms, their findings illustrated the protective role of social resources in mitigating the adverse effects of increased self-awareness.

Theoretical Implications

The results of the study add to theoretical debates about psychological distress and self-consciousness. In accordance with the self-awareness theory, the results show that excessive self-focus, particularly in the form of public self-consciousness, can exacerbate emotional distress by increasing sensitivity to social scrutiny and external evaluation (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). This increased self-monitoring often leads to increased social anxiety and fear of negative judgment, which in turn makes one more psychologically vulnerable.

The study's findings also align with the social evaluation theory (Leary, 1983), which maintains that individuals who are preoccupied with the opinions of others are more prone to experience social anxiety and distress. The study's finding that social anxiety and PuSC are positively correlated lends support to this framework, indicating that concerns about other people's opinions have a big impact on emotional well-being.

Additionally, the results provide empirical support for distinguishing between self-consciousness and self-reflection. Although private self-consciousness includes both maladaptive rumination and adaptive self-awareness, it seems to have a weaker correlation with psychological distress than public self-consciousness..Private self-consciousness seems to be less linked to psychological distress than public self-consciousness, even though it encompasses both adaptive self-awareness and maladaptive rumination. When considering mental health outcomes, this distinction highlights how important it is to distinguish between excessive self-monitoring and constructive introspection.

Hypotheses Testing

The current study sought to determine how undergraduate students' psychological distress, public self-consciousness, and private self-consciousness relate to one another as well as how these variables varied by gender. The results are examined in the context of the suggested theories in the section that follows.

Hypothesis 1:

There will be a significant positive relationship between private self-consciousness and psychological distress.

This theory was validated. According to correlational analysis, all three aspects of psychological distress—stress ($r = 0.32$), anxiety ($r = 0.30$), and depression ($r = 0.21$), were positively correlated with private self-consciousness. According to these moderate correlations, people who are more inwardly self-focused and self-evaluative are more likely to be distressed. This result is consistent with earlier studies that found rumination and increased susceptibility to negative emotional states can result from excessive private self-attention.

Hypothesis 2:
Public self-consciousness will mediate the relationship between private self-consciousness and psychological distress.

The correlational patterns found provided tentative support for this hypothesis. Public self-consciousness showed stronger associations with all aspects of psychological distress, including social anxiety ($r = 0.52$), depression ($r = 0.39$), anxiety ($r = 0.43$), and stress ($r = 0.40$), while private self-consciousness was significantly correlated with public self-consciousness ($r = 0.57$). These results imply that people with high levels of private self-consciousness might become more sensitive to how others see them, which would make them more vulnerable to public self-consciousness, which would then increase their psychological distress. It is recognized that formal mediation analysis (e.g., using regression or structural equation modeling) would be necessary to confirm this relationship, even though the pattern is consistent with a mediational pathway. As a result, even though the data is encouraging, this hypothesis is cautiously accepted.

Hypothesis 3:
There will be significant difference on the level of Psychological distress (among male and female undergraduate students.

The findings provided strong support for this hypothesis. A significant gender difference in psychological distress was found using the independent samples t-test, with female students reporting significantly higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression ($t = 4.02$, $p < 0.01$). This is consistent with previous research showing that internalizing symptoms are more common in women, possibly as a result of a confluence of sociocultural, psychological, and biological factors.

Hypothesis 4:
There will be significant difference on the level of dimensions of self-consciousness (public, private, social anxiety) among male and female undergraduate students.

Additionally, this theory was validated. The general self-consciousness of female students was significantly higher than that of male students ($t = 3.45$, $p < 0.01$). Given that public self-consciousness is a fundamental aspect of general self-consciousness, this finding implies that female students are more sensitive to social comparison and external evaluation based on their gender. These results are in line with earlier studies suggesting that women might be more susceptible to criticism from others, which could exacerbate their discomfort in situations where social evaluation is taking place.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated the connection between psychological distress and both public and private self-consciousness in undergraduate male and female students. The results advance our knowledge of how emerging adults' mental health may be impacted by internal and external self-focused attention.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the levels of private and public self-consciousness in undergraduate students.
2. To examine the levels of psychological distress (depression, anxiety, stress) in the sample.

3. To explore the relationship between private self-consciousness and psychological distress.
   To investigate whether public self-consciousness mediates the relationship between private self-consciousness and psychological distress.
4. To examine gender differences in self-consciousness and psychological distress.

Hypotheses

- **H1**: There will be a significant positive relationship between private self-consciousness and psychological distress among undergraduate students.
- **H2**: Public self-consciousness will mediate the relationship between private self-consciousness and psychological distress.
- **H3**: There will be significant difference on the level of Psychological distress (among male and female undergraduate students).
- **H4**: There will be significant difference on the level of dimensions of self-consciousness (public, private, social anxiety) among male and female undergraduate students.

Findings

H1: Accepted

A moderate positive correlation was found between private self-consciousness and psychological distress, particularly with stress ($r = 0.32$) and anxiety ($r = 0.30$), supporting the hypothesis.

H2: Accepted

Public self-consciousness was strongly correlated with both private self-consciousness ($r = 0.57$) and psychological distress variables (e.g., depression $r = 0.39$, anxiety $r = 0.43$, stress $r = 0.40$), suggesting it may serve as a mediator. However, formal mediation analysis is required to confirm this.

H3: Accepted

Female undergraduates reported significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress compared to male students ($t = 4.02, p < .01$), indicating greater psychological distress.

H4: Accepted

Female students scored significantly higher on general self-consciousness ($t = 3.45, p < .01$), supporting the hypothesis.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Conduct longitudinal studies to better understand causal relationships over time.
2. Include a more diverse and representative sample across age groups, educational backgrounds, and geographic regions.
3. Utilize formal statistical mediation models (e.g., bootstrapping techniques) to test indirect effects more rigorously.
4. Investigate potential moderating factors such as self-esteem, coping styles, or personality traits.
5. Explore practical interventions aimed at transforming maladaptive self-consciousness into healthy self-reflection.

Practical Implications

The results of the study highlight the necessity of focused interventions meant to lessen the detrimental effects of self-consciousness on psychological distress..The study's findings emphasize the need for targeted treatments aimed at reducing the negative effects of self-consciousness on psychological suffering. Therapy modalities like cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) may be especially useful in lowering excessive self-focus and promoting a more positive self-perception because of the stronger correlation between PuSC and emotional distress..Therapy modalities like mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) may be especially beneficial in lowering excessive self-focus and promoting a more positive self-perception because of the stronger correlation between PuSC and emotional distress..Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques can help people reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression by challenging negative automatic thoughts related to social evaluation (Hofmann et al., 2012). Similar to this, MBIs like acceptance-based approaches and mindfulness meditation may help reduce rumination and increase self-acceptance, which in turn may lessen the distress associated with increased self-awareness (Keng et al., 2011).
Self-awareness training could be incorporated into university mental health programs to assist students in distinguishing between maladaptive self-monitoring and adaptive self-reflection. Psychoeducational workshops that discourage excessive public self-consciousness and encourage constructive self-awareness may help students become more emotionally resilient and feel better overall.

Targeted interventions that address the particular stressors faced by female students are especially crucial in light of the gender differences that have been observed. By offering resilience-building initiatives and encouraging peer networks, it may be possible to lessen the detrimental effects of women's high levels of self-consciousness and encourage a more balanced approach to self-awareness and self-compassion.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has a number of shortcomings in spite of its contributions. First, the findings' generalizability may be constrained by the sample's homogeneity and relative smallness. Larger and more varied sample sizes should be used in future studies to confirm these findings in various demographic and cultural contexts.

Second, it is impossible to draw conclusions about the causal relationship between psychological distress and self-consciousness due to the cross-sectional design. Deeper understanding of whether elevated self-consciousness causes distress over time or whether distress exacerbates self-conscious tendencies may be possible through longitudinal research.

Third, this study ignored possible moderating factors like personality traits, coping strategies, or cultural influences in favor of concentrating on self-consciousness as a broad construct. Future studies could examine the ways in which self-consciousness interacts with resilience, self-compassion, or social support to affect psychological well-being.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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