

Abstract

The objective of this study was to examine the associations between anxiety in non-clinical population and self-esteem discrepancy, specifically damaged self-esteem. The employment of implicit self-esteem compensation mechanism was also observed to investigate the defence mechanism against anxiety. 78 participants were recruited in this online study. The Implicit Association Test was used to measure implicit self-esteem before and after experimental manipulation which aimed to elicit anxiety. Results demonstrated no correlation between anxiety and self-esteem discrepancy, and the implicit self-esteem compensation mechanism was not observed either. However, from the pre-test results, fragile self-esteem was revealed in participants with high anxiety, which was speculated to be due to the increased explicit attempt to draw self-relevant positive qualities to compensate for loss of self-worth during anxiety.

Introduction

The topic of self-esteem received immense attention and study for the past few decades. According to Leary and Baumeister (2000), self-esteem is defined as the perception of other's evaluation and judgement to one's values and abilities. In other words, self-esteem is a subjective other-dependent self-evaluation rather than objective assessment of one's value from concrete evidence or indicators (Leary and Baumeister, 2000). Hence, self-esteem was found to be dependent on self-views, while negative self-evaluations and cognitive distortions often indicate low self-esteem, which is correlated with depressive, social anxiety symptoms (Clark et al. 2000) and anxiety (Sowislo and Orth, 2013). According to various studies in the past, cognitive failures and negative self-evaluations are also positively and significantly correlated to anxiety (e.g. Broadbent et al., 1982; Mecacci et al., 2004; Righi et al., 2009).