

# The Relationship Between Anxiety and Social Support in College Students

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## Background

- Anxiety is one of the most prevalent issues affecting college students today (Beiter et al., 2015). Students who endorse higher levels of anxiety often have increased difficulty adjusting to college, reduced self-esteem, and feel less hopeful about their academic performance (Nordstrom, Goguen, & Hiester, 2014).
- Providing guidance to students improves their academic performance and increases their future aspirations and goals (Fruith & Chan, 2018) because students who feel confident and motivated in their studies perform better than students who do not (Linnenbrink-Garcia, Wormington, Snyder, Riggsbee, & Perez, 2018).
- Supporting students' self-efficacy also boosts their academic performance and therefore future aspirations and goals (Barbaranelli, Paciello, Biagioli, Fida, & Tramontano, 2018).
- This study seeks to understand in greater detail how anxiety relates to students' future aspirations and goals, perception of university support, life satisfaction, and university guidance.
- We hypothesized that future aspirations and goals, university environment, and life satisfaction would negatively relate to anxiety. We also hypothesized that university environment would be positively related to life satisfaction, guidance, and future aspirations and goals. Last future aspirations and goals would negatively relate to guidance.

## Method

- One hundred and twenty-five undergraduate students (Female = 56) took part in an online survey as part of a credit requirement for an introductory level psychology course.
- Environmental Support: The University Environment Scale, 14 items ( $\alpha = .829$ ), rated on a 7-point Likert scale of "0, not at all" to "7, very true." Items are summed together to give continuous measure of university support (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996).
- Guidance: The Social Provisions Scale- Guidance Subscale, 4 items ( $\alpha = .747$ ), rated on a 4-point Likert scale from "1, strongly disagree" to "4, strongly agree." Items are summed together to give a continuous measure of guidance (Cutrona & Russell, 1987).
- Life Satisfaction: The Satisfaction with Life Scale. 5 items ( $\alpha = .833$ ), rated on a 7-point Likert scale of "1, strongly disagree" to "7, strongly agree." Items are summed together to give a continuous measure of an individual's life satisfaction (Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985).
- Future Aspirations and Goals: The Student Engagement Scale, 5 items ( $\alpha = .657$ ), rated on a 5-point Likert scale from "1, strongly disagree" to "5, strongly agree." Items are summed to give a continuous measure of student future aspirations and goals (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2014).
- Anxiety: The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale- Anxiety Subscale, 7 items ( $\alpha = .866$ ), rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "0, did not apply to me at all" to "3, applied to me very much". Items are summed together to give a continuous measure of anxiety (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

## Figures

Table 1

Summary of means, standard deviations, and inter-item correlations for Anxiety, Future Aspirations and Goals, University Environment, Life Satisfaction, Gender, and Guidance.

Measure	M	SD	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Anxiety	4.832	4.887	0-20	**					
2. Future Aspirations and Goals	2.984	.50200	1-4	-.313**	—				
3. University Environment	71.800	12.915	43-98	-.306**	.272**	—			
4. Life Satisfaction	22.456	7.422	5-35	-.262**	.123	.266**	—		
5. Gender	.552	.499	0-1	-.034	-.042	-.068	.080	—	
6. Guidance	10.920	1.969	6-16	-.069	-.323**	.191*	.047	.037	—

\* $p = .05$ , \*\* $p = .01$

## Results

- All data were analyzed using the SPSS version 21. Means, standard deviations, ranges, and bivariate correlations were computed using the descriptive statistics and correlation packages.
- Anxiety was negatively related to future aspirations and goals ( $r = -.313, p = .01$ ), university environment ( $r = -.306, p = .01$ ), and life satisfaction ( $r = -.262, p = .01$ ). In other words, higher levels of future aspirations and goals, university support, and life satisfaction were associated with lower levels of anxiety.
- University Environment was positively related to life satisfaction ( $r = .266, p = .01$ ) and guidance ( $r = .191, p = .05$ ). The more university support a student endorses, the more satisfied they are with their life and comfortable with seeking guidance.
- Future aspirations and goals was positively related to perceptions of the university environment ( $r = .272, p = .01$ ) and negatively related to guidance ( $r = -.323, p = .01$ ). The higher a student scores on future aspirations and goals, the more university support they receive. However, if a student identifies as having higher levels of future aspirations and goals, the less likely they are to seek guidance.

## Conclusion

- The results of this study supported our hypotheses: future aspirations and goals, university support, and life satisfaction, were negatively related to anxiety. This suggests that students with higher levels of anxiety may benefit from increased university support, greater engagement in activities they value, and further elaboration of their goals and aspirations.
- Also, students who felt supported at their university reported higher levels of life satisfaction and social support in the form of guidance. However, in this cross-sectional study, it is not possible to make causal attributions about these relationships.
- Students who felt more confident about their future aspirations and goals were more likely to also report that they belonged at their university, but were less likely to seek guidance. Of course, this might be due to students who are clear on what they hope to achieve and have less need of advising. Future studies should explore these relationships across a student's academic career to better understand when students can benefit the most from having supportive guidance.
- Faculty need to realize that they play a pivotal role in reducing anxiety and increasing overall student success in terms of accomplishing future aspirations and goals (McDonald, Brown, & Knihnitski, 2018).
- The results of this study indicate that student's emotional state, social connections, and assessment of their life satisfaction and goals are related in complex ways. To insure that students succeed, universities and faculty members need to spend more time evaluating these relationships and developing programs to provide students the support they need, when they need it.

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