

How does Social Media Affect Social Anxiety as a Disorder

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1701618

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

BA(Hons)Photography in the Arts

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10th December 2021

Word Count: 5,004

Social anxiety otherwise known as Social Anxiety Disorder (S.A.D) is an overwhelming fear of social situations with symptoms including worrying about speaking to people, dreading social

events, avoiding eye contact as well as having low confidence and self-esteem. This Thesis will explore the affect that social media has on social anxiety as a disorder. In contemporary society, representation of this disorder is limited and the role of this thesis will be to raise awareness of S.A.D as a mental health issue and look at why there should be more done in terms of representation, challenging it as a stigma and by looking at how it is represented, and how this is changing. As part of my independent project, I have decided to explore the processes to show the perception of mental health, whilst engaging with artistic materials and camera-less photographic techniques. Throughout my body of work, I include personal elements that dissent into chaotic minds that will reflect on a collection of imagery based on my work as part of my independent inquiry.

S.A.D, otherwise known as social anxiety disorder, also called social phobia, is a long-term and overwhelming fear of social situations. Usually starting within teenage years that can be very distressing and can have a big impact on your life. For some people it may not go away on its own without seeking the help and treatment for it. There are many symptoms of social anxiety that is much more than shyness. For instance, a fear that does not go away, that effects everyday activities, self-confidence, relationships, and work, as well as school life.

The symptoms may consist of:

- Worrying about everyday activities, including meeting strangers, starting conversations, speaking on the phone, working or shopping.
- Avoiding or worrying a lot about social activities, group conversations, eating with people and at parties.
- Worrying about doing something that you think might be embarrassing.
- Finding it difficult to do certain things when other people are watching.
- The fear of being criticised, avoiding eye contact, or having low self-esteem

- Having constant panic attacks, where you are having an overwhelming sense of fear as well as anxiety, but for only a few minutes.

The treatments for social anxiety can be many and varied and consist of things such as therapy and medication with the main options being one of two treatment paths:

- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) - With help from a therapist, that will help you identify the negative thought patterns and behaviors, and change them
- Anti-depressants medicines – These are types of medication that are called a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI), such as escitalopram or sertraline.

What is the difference of Social Anxiety in Adults/Teenagers compared to children?

Social anxiety in children is often visible through:

- Crying or getting upset more than usual.
- Avoiding social interaction and engagement with other children and adults
- The fear of going to school, going to class, taking part in school events and activities
- Not wanting to ask for help in school
- Being very much reliant on their parents/guardian or carer.

To help people who are going through problems with their mental health, there are several charities, support groups and online forums for people with social anxiety as well as other anxiety disorders, including:

- <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk>
- <https://healthunlocked.com/anxiety-support> - run by Anxiety support
- <http://www.mind.org.uk> and <https://www.youngminds.org.uk>
- <http://www.social-anxiety.org.uk> - which also runs an online forum

- <https://www.topuk.org> (TOP UK)

Based on my own situation when it came to dealing with social anxiety disorder (SAD) was back in 2019 when I became seriously unwell. In June 2019, I suddenly became bed bound and sick, not knowing what it was or what caused it was the scariest part of all of it. In the end I was rushed into A&E given only 24 hours to live. Before I became ill, I was forever being constantly on social media and being consumed with updates of what was going on in terms of the platforms that I was on and still am today. As soon as I became unwell that's when things started to die down in terms of logging onto social media and checking in on work.

When I went into hospital, I went without my phone for roughly seven/eight weeks, with no social media and no interaction with any of my close friends or freelance colleagues who I worked with as I didn't want anyone knowing what was going on with me in terms of me being in hospital dealing with the fact that I was nearly diagnosed with cancer. Spending roughly three weeks in hospital and a total of 9 weeks on recovery. Throughout being in hospital I had loads of different things done to me throughout the course of that time that I was there such as a neck biopsy, bone marrow, platelets, blood transfusions, blood tests, weigh-ins as well as regular outpatients hematology clinic appointments with consultants. Even on my recovery I didn't feel like touching my phone as I felt that for me it was going to be super difficult in terms of the idea of going back on the social media and telling everyone on their what I had just been through as for me I knew that it would give me so much anxiety with the thought of having to go through every massive detailed bit of my health timeline during the summer. Including everything from the procedures, what day I was rushed in, experiencing different wards, drugs/medications, body changes, side effects as well as wondering what the mental side effects would be. I felt for me when I had come out of hospital and being diagnosed with three different illnesses is the fact that I did as an adult experience many things to do with my mental health, which for me was to be expected considering how difficult and traumatic the event was.

I mainly experienced a few things such as anxiety, breakdowns, depression and of course a lot of socially distancing myself from close friends as I didn't want to deal with talking about the entire outcome of what had happened. but also experiencing PSS (Post Sepsis Syndrome) which is basically the same as PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) same symptoms as both disorders but different names. Throughout the recovery process it was very important not to isolate myself from others as deep down I knew my family would be concerned about it. Especially given the fact that getting back to somewhat some form of normality as well as trying to regain my independence back as I lost it all due to the illness. Even doing things like trying to remember certain events of the illness, making things like my breakfast and lunch was difficult but the main thing for me was when it came to going outside, that for me gave me the most anxiety as I was surrounded by massive groups of people as well as being in a normal but different environment that wasn't a hospital.

Social Media is a term that refers as a technology-based facility that shares ideas, thoughts and information through virtual networks and online communities. with well-known platforms such as Twitter, Facebook/Messenger, Instagram and WhatsApp as well as many other social networking sites. However, how does social media present its ideological narratives in terms of the unrealistic representation and 'perfection' of it all. Ideology meaning a belief system that a political or economic theory. they come from the operating principles for running a society. they include liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, theocracy, agrarianism, totalitarianism, democracy, colonialism, and globalism.

The Digital Humans, produced by Victoria McArthur, is about how Aleks Krotoski explores the social and psychological impact of life lived online, where maintaining a perfectly curated life is key and the real-life flaws are hidden. Kintsugi, a traditional Japanese method of fixing broken dishes in which flaws and imperfections have been highlighted rather than disguised. Once you

have put the pieces together you start to cover the cracks with gold dust so that we can get very beautiful piece of art with golden cracks on. the whole philosophy behind it is to value the beauty of the object, as well as the imperfections, focusing on them equally as something to celebrate not disguise.

“The lines form a landscape and each one tells a story.”

“Throughout the digital world we don’t show our flaws as easily.” - Alex Krotoski

Representations of this disorder can be seen from different perspectives in terms of representation and who has represented the disorder. Abstract cognitive models of the disorder beliefs about the social self which is a key psychological mechanism maintaining the fear of negative evaluations when it comes to social and performance situations. based on the research into the representations on SAD, 42 adults diagnosed with SAD and 27 non-psychiatric health controls (HC) of distinct social anxiety related situations with generated negative self-beliefs (NSD), had provided emotion and evidence based in the US. However, 12% of adults will have social anxiety at some point during the lives, compared to 6% for generalized anxiety disorder, 7% for those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and a further 2% for obsessive-compulsive disorder. the disorder is a repetitive fear or anxiety

The perception of social anxiety disorder is that around roughly over a quarter of people (26%) had a feeling that feeling anxious is a sign of not coping, however with almost (50%) had disagreed with it. Does being alone show signs of making social anxiety worse? Studies show that spending certain amount time with friends can help with your mental health, however some people may assume or have that assumption that to cure the fear of people and their social situations can take time out but also make the most of your own company. “People with social anxiety are not devoid of the basic desire for human connection; they just have trouble

obtaining it in certain situations or with certain people,” the study’s lead scientist Fallon Goodman says. “If we start from that assumption, then we can reduce problematic myths about social anxiety.”

The case study I have looked at into exploring the relationship of this disorder is all about an ex-serving member of the Australian Defence Force. At 28 years old he had served 10 years in the RAAF as an electronics technician. His anxiety and anxiousness started around when he was in high school. presenting with symptoms such as not being able to sleep, sweating, blushing and mouth being dry. feeling like other people would laugh at him. Finding other social situations were difficult as well as him not being able to chat to anyone or any girls he would stick to one or two close friends. Doing it the same ever since, during his training in the air force, he’d sit at the back during class hoping that no one would notice him. he would make up some excuse saying he was sick or make up an excuse. The action took during all of this was that it affected him and his career, his social life as well as trying to get a girlfriend. managed to find a GP and decided to act against it all. asking a lot of questions such as avoid doing things because of feeling embarrassed, did you worry a lot about what people thought of you.

Meeting up every 12 weeks learning about social anxiety and what can actually cause it but also learning different techniques of how to control it such as calming down physically as well as doing things such as relaxation and breathing. he discovered how much of an impact that “self-talk” has on someone. but also, him thinking how horrible this would be and how he’d look like an idiot, not knowing why he was all surprised when he got anxious as there is technically no need to be when it comes to speaking to someone professional when it comes to mental health.

Challenging the stigmas in and around mental health and of course social anxiety disorder comes with a lot of challenges as well as representations, especially in the younger generation.

Teenagers with the disorder can be at an advantage throughout all areas of their teenage life. whether that is down to performing badly in school, trouble with attending classes. they are also way less likely to make friends as well as partaking in extracurricular activities, in and out of school. However, those who have severe cases of the disorder tend to drop out of school or will refuse to leave home. It is no different than any other mental health disorder, then Schizophrenia or Borderline personality disorder (BPD), it is the same that some people are somehow made to feel in somewhat ashamed about a problems which that person doesn't have total control of. With social anxiety disorder (SAD) people can sense the negative evaluation by others that becomes their own reality, but it isn't enough to make them worry what others think, regardless.

What is a stigma? A stigma it refers to devaluing a person based on the characteristics of that person. Typically, might think of stigma being related to being a certain ethnic background or coming from a certain economic class. With mental health it is more presented in the general public mainly amongst healthcare professionals. If you know of someone with social anxiety disorder, they might face the criticism for it from friends as well as family members for not doing well in social situations. It can also be linked to the person with the illness or the act of them seeking treatment. Children as well as teenagers maybe bullied as part of the stigma which is aimed at those with social anxiety, some may choose to put other kids or teenagers down viewing it as a sign of weakness or being socially awkward. When it comes to the stigma of SAD, there are the effects of the stigma that come with it. such as Problems with self-esteem, Non-evidence-based treatments, Failure to seek treatment, Misdiagnosis, Mismanagement, Creates barriers to care, Creates an unsupportive environment and Suicidal ideation. There is always going to be a stigma in and around mental health, changing the system of representing those who are diagnosed with mental health issues is never really going to change as there is always going to be in somewhat representations of young people who suffer mentally with mental health issues, however there are many things that not just myself

but other people can do in terms of reducing the stigma in and around social anxiety disorder such as changes in the education system when it comes to mental health by talking to people from young ages up to teenagers through education and of course making the public more aware of these issues. Encouraging people to talk about their problems and issues that they may be dealing with mentally, breaking the silence, be open (which applies to everyone) not just for the public but for the mental health professionals too. Asking questions that you may want to ask when it comes to social anxiety disorder or the symptoms that they entail, or you might be experiencing yourself.

In conclusion, Social Anxiety Disorder can be a very challenging mental health disorder for people to deal with – both those that are experiencing it and those people around them. This is especially when it involves interacting with other people as well as social situations, going to school, work or even personal life and family life which can lead to being isolated and of course being depressed. It is a common as well as chronic but under-recognized condition but also the fact that it is a mental health disorder which there are effective therapies in which both are pharmacologic as well as psychotherapeutic that are available. However, it is important to be able to maintain focus on treating the disorder by itself without medication as it can result in other mental health issues such as depression, low self-esteem, negativity, anxiousness or anxiety, difficulty developing different types of relationships and it becoming out of your hands without medication or having the proper treatment that would be needed to help with social anxiety disorder. What I have learned throughout this thesis as well as diving into the research of mental health and social anxiety disorder, disorders in general within the mental health sector is how it affects all sorts of people from young children, young teenagers or adults and of course adults themselves. but also, the statistics of how many people are affected by mental health and disorders in general.

What is linked to these disorders, how people are affected by it and why people choose to seek professional help as well as people who choose not to seek professional help. Also looking into my own experiences within mental health and how it affected me over two years ago, but also how it had a massive impact on me, my personal life, my family, education, and the social side of things. In a way it has taught me that as human beings we do need to listen to ourselves and our bodies to talk about these things, especially when it involves the topic of mental health as of course in this day and age some of us do feel embarrassed or even ashamed to talk about mental health to not just close friends but also their own families. however, seeking help sooner will make things a lot easier, not just for yourself but for those who are around you and support you the most. even speaking to professionals who work in this environment are always there to listen when it comes to this topic of conversation. Throughout the UK there are lots of specialist online websites and charity organisations that work alongside existing mental health charities and specialized mental health workers who are willing to listen to you if you are in need to chat to someone.

Finding out that there are stigmas throughout people with mental health and social anxiety as well as the whole representation of people with mental health in young people and young adults that have suffered with these disorders due to coming from either broken backgrounds/ broken homes, the pressure of society and the way we should present ourselves, pressures of everyday life, doing well in school or different activities. all sorts of things have been linked to people which does see a rise in mental health cases across the UK as well as other places in the world. Especially as some people choose to see someone and seek advice as well as be treated for their disorders, while some people choose not to. all down to personal preference as I think people do feel ashamed to talk about the mental health problems as well as talking about their medication.

Overall, throughout my dissertation thesis on How does Social Media Affect Social Anxiety as a Disorder because of the research that I have touched down on because as a young adult myself it is important to talk about something so serious such as mental health and of course disorders as there is that misconception around mental health and the amount of stigmas that is raised when it comes to it all. especially when it comes to the pressure of social media, how we should look and represent ourselves on these different platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social platforms. how we should look on these different social media platforms compared to what we look in real life as us humans looking up to the pressures of looking like people who they see on Instagram such as influencers or celebrities. the way that they are represented and the added pressures that come to it but also the affect that the pressure has and how it takes a massive toll on our mental health because we all want to look like those who are living up to the high standard of how society wants us to be. when deep down we should be ourselves and not put the added pressure of trying to look good and making our own mental health suffer because of it.

It is also important that we recognise the fact that this disorder affects students as well which is something to touch base on. students who do have social anxiety often or try to avoid or don't want to participate in any group activities or projects, even lectures at university due to the feeling of being ashamed, judged and even embarrassed as well as self-consciousness. the majority of their symptoms consist of sweating or even stuttering. It also indicates and shows that socially anxious students do judge their own competence not so well when participating in group activities or even doing presentations with other students on their course. which is worrying because whether that student performed well or not the student performed well academically. Social anxiety can make the university life even harder with those dealing with the disorder or going through it. However, there are the same treatments that are out there for university students as well as what it would be for any other person going through social

anxiety disorder, or any other disorders in general in the mental health area. Students with social anxiety disorder can seek treatment which is Cognitive Behavioral therapy (CBT) and Exposure Therapy.

For me as a student I have definitely found that looking after my mental health was important and learning about self-care because being a full-time student you do have a lot going on in terms of making sure everything is done with coursework, getting the degree you want as well as the added pressures that us as students put on ourselves to be the best and to be successful. I think hence why a lot of students now a days to suffer deeply with mental health disorders because of the pressure we put on ourselves as degree students. Majority of degree students tend to either drop out or leave in terms of their mental health becoming too much for them because of all the added pressure that is put on too them.

Charities such as Mind and CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) are both the UK's student mental health charities that help students and members of the university to help look after their own mental health and to support others to create a change. It explains how you as a person can look after your own mental health as a student, by giving practical suggestions for what you can do and where you can go for support and guidance if you feel that you are struggling mentally or think that you might have a mental health disorder. During the pandemic which is also having a massive impact on all aspects of student life, they know that the usual advice that they give might not quite apply. However, for more practical tips on coping throughout the pandemic and getting the support and guidance you need for mental health support, they do offer which is on their student mental health during coronavirus.

Coronavirus hub which has even more information about how to manage your mental health during a difficult time as well as coping as a student throughout your time at university as a student. Everything from mask anxiety, face coverings and mental health, coping with going

into work during coronavirus, Coping with mental health problems during coronavirus, Accessing treatment and support during coronavirus, Young people and coronavirus, Student mental health during coronavirus, supporting your teen's wellbeing, Coronavirus useful contacts, Coronavirus and work, managing feelings about lockdown easing, Anxiety and panic attacks, Trauma and Loneliness, managing stress, trying mindfulness exercises which shows a lot of evidence that does suggest that these can be really useful and helpful, especially when it comes to managing stress, using things such as a planner which can help keep track of things such as deadlines, commitments as well as organizing your studies whilst at college or university, taking time out to relax, getting away from things, your desk even if it is for a short period of time having breaks can help you to remain and keep calm, keeping an eye on social commitments especially if it's to avoid filling up your schedule around upcoming deadlines, trying online support and apps. there are so many websites as well as apps that can help you and to help manage your stress levels, those that are offering a daily meditation or even a mindfulness practice is worth trying.

Also trying to look after your physical health has been proven to be important. For example, things like getting a good night's sleep. If you are tired then you do tend to worry which can get on top of you but getting into a regular sleep routine can help make sure that you stay on top of things as well as university life, eating a healthy diet by making sure its balanced and nutritional and exercising regularly, keeping active can help you as a person improve your mental health, even doing exercises or sports such as swimming, running, walks or yoga can help you relax and manage stress a lot easier. It also improves better self-esteem, happier moods, physical activities can release all the feel-good hormones that make you feel better in yourself as a person and can give you a lot more energy in yourself, managing stress, anxiety or the intrusive but racing thoughts, doing physical exercise releases cortisol which does help you manage stress levels. but being active does give you something to focus on and can also

be a massive but positive coping mechanism if you are going through a difficult time or suffering with mental health or mental disorders.

reducing the risk of depression and can also help you connect with other people who are wanting to improve their mental and physical health. but may not be for everyone.

Some students may suffer with alcohol or drugs culture which is often associated with student lifestyle. Alcohol can make depression worse, be careful if you're taking medication as it can be recommended not to drink or to limit the amount you do drink if you are taking drugs. having close friends around if you are out, establish a type of buddy system that can help you feel and keep safe if you are drinking or have engaged in drug use. Never accept any drinks from someone who you don't even know incase that they have been spiked with harmful drugs or alcohol. Takin illegal drugs can have a major and massive impact on your mental health.

They are there for when things get become hard both emotionally and mentally but they make sure that you are not alone. However, they are there to provide information and support. the resources show how the pandemic has had a massive impact on all of our lives, with people struggling and affecting ourselves as well as our daily lives and loved ones. with some of us already living with mental health problems who are also facing extra challenges and difficulties at this hard-hitting time. Training not just students but also higher education staff all across the UK to deliver one and one support as well as research campaigns, resources and workshops. Some things that are make a student more susceptible to mental health disorders and problems include young age, Stress and Lack of support. some maybe living with existing mental health problems and may already be receiving help or support for it already. the most common mental health problems for students in the UK shows that 1 in 5 students have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder, meaning that the following problem is the most common amongst students such as Anxiety (a feeling of unease, worry or fear that can be mild or severe), Depression (feelings of severe despondency and dejection and Suicidal feelings(the

act of intentionally taking your own life, can also mean having abstract thoughts about ending your life or feeling that everyone would be better off without you. it can also mean thinking about different methods of suicide or even making plans to take your own life). Different people may have different types of experiences when it comes suicidal feelings or that you might feel that you are unable to cope with the amount of difficult feelings that you are experiencing mentally. thinking that you may feel less like you want to not exist on living the life that you currently have. However, some of these feeling may tend to build over a period of time or might even change from time to time making it common to not understand why you are feeling the way.

You might think or feel hopeless, that you are suffering with unbearable pain, desperate, or feeling like you want to cut off people, or even feeling like everyone would be better off without you, as well as cutting off from your body as well as feeling physically numb and fascinated by the thought of death. Some may feel that they are unable to talk or tell someone that they are feeling suicidal, unsure of who to tell, concerned that they won't listen or understand, fearful of being judged. It may even be the case that someone is worried that they will upset someone about what you are going to tell them about your mental health or the suicidal thoughts that you are currently dealing and thinking of. However, it is important to always remember that you as a person do deserve and need the support not just from close family and friends but also from the online support that is on different mental health websites, apps as well as mental health care professionals that are also out there to help you with support when you need it the most. It is important to remember that as a person going through mental health, you are not alone.

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