Research Article

Breaking The Chains: Fear of Social Judgement and Its Impact on Individual Autonomy in Nepal

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Abstract

The fear of negative evaluation, a psychological phenomenon rooted in social anxiety, significantly impacts individuals' autonomy, self-expression, and decision-making. This paper explores the intricate relationship between the fear of social judgment and personal autonomy, focusing on the cultural and social contexts of Nepal. The methodology is based on subjective analysis and interprets preexisting ideas and concepts using the researcher's critical judgment and comprehension. Drawing on existing literature and a reflective methodology, the study examines how societal norms, cultural expectations, and modern influences, such as social media, exacerbate this fear. In collectivist societies like Nepal, where social conformity and "saving face" hold high value, individuals often suppress personal goals and desires to meet societal standards. This compromises their ability to make autonomous decisions and leads to a loss of true self-expression. The findings reveal that traditional family systems, intergenerational expectations, and digital platforms contribute to heightened social anxiety, further limiting personal freedom. By shedding light on these dynamics, this study underscores the importance of fostering environments that promote individuality and inclusivity.

Introduction

Background of the Study

The "fear of negative evaluation," also known as the dread of social judgment, is a serious psychological disorder that is prevalent in a variety of social settings. An excessive concern about being judged or viewed negatively by others is the basis of this fear, which has its roots in the larger spectrum of social anxiety. Avoiding social situations or changing one's conduct and look to get others' approval are just a few examples of how it can show up. The fundamental idea behind this anxiety is that one's social value is dependent on the opinions of others, which makes one more vulnerable to criticism, disapproval, and perceived

rejection. This illogical anxiety has significant effects on people's independence and personal growth. The ability to make decisions on one's own without outside pressure, influence, or social expectations is what is meant by autonomy in its purest form. Nonetheless, fear of being judged brings in an outside influence that molds choices and actions, frequently leading people to put social acceptance ahead of their own interests. Therefore, it becomes not only a psychological problem but also a limitation on the ability to express oneself, causing people to repress their true selves in order to fit in with what they believe to be social norms (Leary, 2005). This paper aims to investigate the intricate connection between personal autonomy and the fear of social rejection. The study attempts to comprehend how fear of judgment limits personal freedom and hinders decision-making and true self-expression by looking at the cognitive and social factors at work. The importance of this research is that it may help guide treatments meant to lessen the negative impacts of social anxiety, especially in situations where people's autonomy is crucial, such interpersonal interactions, professional situations, and educational environments. Given the growing importance of social image in today's globalized society, the fear of receiving a poor rating is not only a therapeutic problem but also a societal one. As a result, overcoming this fear involves more than just reducing anxiety it also entails creating an atmosphere in which people can recover their independence and lead genuine lives.

Problem Statement

People who are afraid of being judged by others experience severe psychological anguish, which makes them hide who they really are, avoid social situations, and make decisions based on what they think other people will think. People emphasize outside approval over their own internal values and preferences, which leads to a decreased sense of autonomy. Even though psychologists are becoming more aware of this problem, little research has been done on how this anxiety impacts people's capacity to make free, genuine decisions. The purpose of this paper is to examine the connection between individual liberty and the fear of social criticism, with an emphasis on the social and cognitive mechanisms that underlie this link.

Objectives

- To examine the psychological foundations of social anxiety and the fear of social judgment.
- To investigate how self-expression and personal autonomy are hampered by the fear of being judged.
- To investigate how societal and cultural elements influence the emergence of social judgment anxiety

Significance of the Study

This study is very valuable in both academic and real-world settings. By filling up a knowledge vacuum about the precise effects of the fear of social judgment on decision-making and self-expression, it advances the academic literature on social anxiety and autonomy. Practically speaking, the results of this study can guide interventions in educational, clinical psychological, and occupational contexts where social judgment anxiety frequently appears. Knowing the causes underlying this fear can also aid in the development of programs and therapies that assist people in taking back their independence and choosing choices that are consistent with their beliefs rather than those of society.

Literature Review

Many studies have examined social anxiety disorder (SAD) in relation to the fear of social judgment. An extreme dread of being poorly assessed, condemned, or humiliated in social settings is a hallmark of social anxiety disorder (Arumugam *et al.,* 2015). The thoughts of people with SAD are frequently dominated by cognitive distortions, such as presuming severe criticism from others or catastrophizing outcomes. Social contacts are avoided as a result of these skewed beliefs, which are usually based on prior experiences of rejection or mockery (Williams Jr *et al.,* 2021). According to a cognitive model of social anxiety put out by Wells, (1995) people constantly check themselves in social settings as if they are being watched. This constant self-centeredness feeds the dread of social rejection and makes emotions of inadequacy worse. In a similar vein, Leary (2005), proposed the idea of the "sociometer," arguing that rejection anxiety is an evolutionary defense mechanism intended to preserve social ties. But in the present day, this mechanism frequently shows up as crippling social anxiety.

According to Ryan and Deci, (2000) the fear of social judgment seriously impairs autonomy, which is the capacity to make choices based on one's own internal reasons. This dread prevents people from exercising their right to self-determination by forcing them to put the approval of others before their own principles. Researchers noted that people who live in socially conformist settings are more prone to sacrifice their autonomy by repressing their goals and wants in order to gain acceptance. This repression shows up in a variety of life decisions, including those related to personal expression, marital preferences, and job choices. For example, in order to win acceptance from family or society, people may choose socially acceptable professions like engineering or medicine over artistic endeavors. Over time, this loss of autonomy leads to a sense of alienation from one's true self in addition to having an effect on personal fulfillment. The dread of being judged by others is further exacerbated by cultural values and society standards. Individual liberty is frequently subordinated to preserving

social peace in collectivist countries like Nepal. Collectivist societies place a strong emphasis on interdependence, traditionalism, and conformity, all of which increase sensitivity to social judgment. Social exclusion and stigmatization result when people view deviations from

social standards as risks to group cohesiveness. In collectivist societies, people internalize these cultural expectations from an early age, influencing their behavior and choices to conform to social norms. In gender norms, when women are severely criticized for displaying independence or putting their professional goals ahead of conventional responsibilities, this internalization is particularly noticeable. Similar to this, the combination of caste-based discrimination and social expectations causes marginalized groups, like the Dalits in Nepal, to be more fearful of being judged (Bennett, 2008). The dread of social rejection has taken on new dimensions in the digital era. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have made it possible for people's behaviors, viewpoints, and looks to be scrutinized by the general public. People's sensitivity to social assessment has increased as a result of the validation-seeking behavior that social media promotes, which is gauged by likes, comments, and shares. The internalization of social criticism in digital settings is reflected in the phenomena known as "performative self-presentation," in which people curate idealized versions of themselves online (Tufekci, 2008). As decisions are increasingly influenced by the desire for online approval, this performative culture not only makes people feel more anxious but also warps their sense of autonomy. Given social media's increasing use in Nepal, young people there particularly those living in cities are more vulnerable to these influences. The effects of social judgment anxiety go beyond personal freedom and impact relationships with others, mental health, and the advancement of society. According to studies, those who worry too much about being judged are more likely to suffer from melancholy, social isolation, and low self-esteem (Williams Jr *et al.,* 2021). In conservative civilizations, where strict norms limit diversity of thought and conduct, these impacts are most noticeable. Additionally, honest communication and teamwork are hampered by the fear of being judged. For instance, in order to prevent confrontation, people may suppress dissenting views or creative ideas in the workplace, which eventually impedes organizational progress. Research has revealed a number of methods for overcoming the fear of social rejection and regaining personal freedom. Social anxiety disorder can be effectively treated with cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). People who receive cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) are less sensitive to social judgment because they are able to recognize and confront cognitive distortions (Wells, 1995). Researcher highlighted

the significance of creating a safe space where people may express themselves without worrying about criticism. In Nepal, this might entail projects like mental health awareness campaigns, educational efforts that encourage inclusivity, and community support groups. By spreading uplifting stories that value honesty and diversity, social media platforms can also contribute.

Research Methodology

This study examines the fear of social criticism and how it affects personal autonomy, especially in the cultural setting of Nepal, using an interpretive and reflective methodology. The methodology is based on subjective analysis and interprets preexisting ideas and concepts using the researcher's critical judgment and comprehension. Rather than employing a traditional qualitative or quantitative research methodology, the study mixes the researcher's thoughts on Nepali socioeconomic and cultural practices with insights from the literature. To comprehend the theoretical frameworks pertaining to social judgment, autonomy, and social anxiety, the procedure entails reading pertinent literature from the fields of psychology, sociology, and cultural studies. The researcher's own observations and life experiences are then used to situate these ideas within Nepal's cultural framework and analyze how these processes appear in Nepali society.

This methodology's reflective nature enables a thorough analysis of the customs, cultural practices, and social forces that fuel Nepalese people's fear of social rejection. It also makes it possible to critically assess the ways in which these forces obstruct personal freedom and expression. Although the results cannot be applied widely due to the absence of empirical data, the study provides a highly contextual and interpretive viewpoint that aims to shed light on a complicated social issue.

Findings and Discussion

I found that there are important cultural and socioeconomic elements in Nepalese society that influence how people perceive and react to social evaluation when I looked at the fear of social judgment and its implications on personal autonomy. The dread of being judged is frequently made worse by Nepal's deeply ingrained collectivist traditions, which place a high importance on family and community approval. There is a lot of pressure to fit in in such a setting, particularly for younger generations. In Nepali culture, the idea of "saving face" is especially significant, and not living up to social norms can result in embarrassment or exclusion from society. Because of their fear of receiving a poor evaluation, people frequently repress their own goals and aspirations in favor of social conformity.

Furthermore, a fear of being judged is also exacerbated by Nepal's traditional family system, which views elders as authoritative individuals. Internal conflict may arise from

the pressure to maintain reputation, adhere to family customs, and raise the family's social status. I discovered from my introspection that a lot of people struggled to balance their own aspirations with their families' expectations. The ability to make independent decisions, which is essential to autonomy, is weakened by this struggle, which also stunts personal development. The function of social media in modern Nepalese society is another noteworthy discovery. Even if it's not as common as in nations with more developed technology, social media is growing in importance, particularly in cities. Social media sites like Facebook and Instagram are used to display one's accomplishments and way of life, setting new benchmarks for beauty and success. The dread of being judged is made worse by the continual comparison to others and the need for likes and approval on these platforms, which causes people to change their behavior and look in an effort to fit in with idealized social images. The way that younger Nepalis make decisions has also been impacted by this digital pressure, frequently giving more weight to what is "socially acceptable" than to what is in line with their own ideals.

In Nepalese society, the fear of social rejection is a complicated psychological phenomenon that has a wide range of effects on personal freedom. It has been noted that social and cultural conventions, especially in rural regions, have a big influence on how people react to criticism. There is an implicit expectation to fit in in the conventional setting, where group ideals are frequently valued more highly than individual expression. Since the need to fit in frequently results in self-suppression and the inability to follow one's own goals, this can be harmful to one's feeling of autonomy. Nonetheless, things are gradually improving in Nepal's cities as the value of individual liberty is more acknowledged. Traditional standards are being questioned more and more by young people, particularly in Kathmandu and other large cities. Individualistic endeavors, including choosing a career based on own interests rather than family expectations, are also becoming more popular. However, there is still friction since people are still finding it difficult to escape the limitations of social appraisal. This conflict between individual autonomy and social expectations is most noticeable when it comes to job and educational decisions. For instance, the pressure to seek a career or degree that is highly valued in society frequently results in discontent since it may not be in line with a person's actual passions.

The findings' discussion of social media's involvement reflects an increasing concern in the digital era. Social media is becoming a double-edged sword in Nepal although, it gives people a platform to express themselves, it also makes them feel more in need of approval from others. The younger generation is particularly vulnerable to

the pressures of online judgment, where anxiety and self-doubt can rise as a result of the worry of falling short of idealized norms. However, in the era of digital interconnectedness, this phenomenon is not specific to Nepal rather, it reflects a global trend.In the end, this fear of being judged and the resulting repression of genuine self-expression are significant obstacles to real autonomy. People who internalize social norms are unable to resist outside influences, which keeps them from living true to themselves and from making choices that are consistent with their own values and preferences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, individual autonomy in Nepalese society is greatly impacted by the fear of social criticism. This concern is made worse by deeply rooted cultural beliefs, such as the value placed on social conformity and family reputation, which cause people to put society's approval ahead of their own goals. This problem is made worse by social media's increasing popularity, particularly among younger generations, who place a premium on online reinforcement of their value.

According to this study, Nepalese society urgently needs measures that encourage self-expression and lessen the fear of being judged. Social standards that impede personal development and promote conformity must be challenged if people are to regain their independence. To help people make decisions that are true to themselves rather than just following social norms, there is an urgent need for societal awareness, particularly in educational and professional settings in order to develop a more real and independent society, educators, mental health specialists, and community leaders must work together to establish settings where people feel empowered to make decisions based on their own values. People can regain their personal independence and escape social restraints by confronting this fear.

Conflict of Interest

Author declares there is no conflict of interest with the present publication.

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