

EXAMINING THE SOCIAL APPEARANCE ANXIETY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN TERMS OF SOME DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES: THE CASE OF ERCIYES UNIVERSITY

EXAME DA ANSIEDADE DE APARÊNCIA SOCIAL DOS ESTUDANTES UNIVERSITÁRIOS EM TERMOS DE ALGUMAS VARIÁVEIS DEMOGRÁFICAS: O CASO DA UNIVERSIDADE DE ERCIYES

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appearance anxiety levels with respect to gender, faculty, grade level, and active sports participation status, no significant difference was identified in terms of the age variable.

Keywords: Social appearance anxiety, university students, sports participation, demographic variables

Abstract: The aim of this study is to determine the social appearance anxiety levels of university students and to examine how these levels differ with respect to demographic variables such as gender, age, faculty, grade level, and active sports participation. A descriptive survey model was employed in the research. The sample consisted of 621 students enrolled at Erciyes University, selected through random sampling. Data were collected using a "Personal Information Form" and the "Social Appearance Anxiety Scale," developed by Hart et al. (2008) and adapted into Turkish by Doğan in 2010. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 25.0. Independent samples t-tests were applied for comparisons between two groups, while one-way analysis of variance (LSD post-hoc test) was used for comparisons involving three or more groups. While significant differences were found in university students' social ap-

Resumo: O objetivo deste estudo é determinar os níveis de ansiedade de aparência social dos estudantes universitários e examinar como esses níveis diferem em relação a variáveis demográficas como gênero, idade, faculdade, nível de série e participação esportiva ativa. O modelo de levantamento descritivo foi empregado na pesquisa. A amostra consistiu em 621 estudantes matriculados na Universidade Erciyes, selecionados por amostragem aleatória. Os dados foram coletados por meio de um "Formulário de Informações Pessoais" e da "Escala de Ansiedade de Aparência Social," desenvolvida por Hart et al. (2008) e adaptada para o turco por Doğan em 2010. Os dados coletados foram analisados utilizando o SPSS 25.0. O teste t de amostras independentes foi aplicado para comparações entre dois grupos, enquanto a análise de variância unifatorial (teste post-hoc LSD) foi utilizada para comparações envolvendo três ou mais grupos. Embora diferenças significativas tenham sido encontradas nos níveis de ansiedade de aparência social dos estudantes universitários em relação ao gênero, faculdade, nível de série e situação de prática esportiva ativa, nenhuma diferença significativa foi identificada em termos da variável idade.

Palavras-chave: Ansiedade de aparência social, estudantes universitários, participação esportiva, variáveis demográficas

Introduction

For human beings as social creatures, being accepted by others is considered essential for adapting to social life. There are numerous factors involved in gaining societal acceptance and developing conformity, including culture, economic status, and individual characteristics (Bozdoğan & Çiriş, 2025). When these factors are considered from a developmental perspective, the university period can be described as a psychosocially stressful phase, owing to the new responsibilities placed upon students, significant environmental changes, and the social comparisons that accompany the formation of new social environments (Howard, Romano, & Heron, 2020). During the university period, the pressure on individuals regarding their appearance increases due to factors such as social changes and social media, and for university students who are in a transitional phase, this situation may give rise to various psychological challenges (Kovan, Seyrek, & Uzun, 2025).

One of these psychological challenges is, in general terms, anxiety. Anxiety can be defined as a state of general unease and a sense of apprehension experienced in various subjectively perceived threatening situations — whether currently occurring, anticipated, or entirely unlikely to occur — that the individual perceives as a threat (Şahin, 2019). In addition to its psychological effects, anxiety may also give rise to undesirable physiological conditions such as muscle tension, fatigue, difficulty breathing, abdominal pain, and abdominal discomfort (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

In this study, social appearance anxiety, which is a form of social anxiety (Kızılkaya & Özkaya, 2023), was examined. The concern of being negatively evaluated due to one's physical appearance and the fear of being rejected because of one's looks are referred to as social appearance anxiety (Goodarzi et al., 2021). It has been noted that social appearance anxiety is a comprehensive concept that encompasses not only general body contours but also more micro-level details such as the smile, facial symmetry, nasal structure, and eye shape (Hart et al., 2008). Furthermore, an individual may experience social appearance anxiety due to the belief that their overall appearance is being evaluated by others (Ürün & Öztürk, 2020). Social appearance anxiety often leads to the emergence of unwanted thoughts regarding individuals' own physical characteristics (Baltacı et al., 2021). Social appearance anxiety causes various factors such as body image, self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction to be adversely affected (Pehlivan, Ada, & Öztaş, 2017).

Sport serves as a means of contributing to the development of an individual's cognitive, social, and emotional knowledge and skills, while also strengthening the

individual mentally and assisting in coping with psychological problems (Akça & Lök, 2025). Accordingly, it can be inferred that sport enhances an individual's quality of life and contributes to their overall health status (Karavelioğlu, 2024). Furthermore, owing to the physical activity of individuals who engage in sport, individual and social benefits such as higher self-confidence, improved communication skills, and reduced mental fatigue and stress are to be expected (Durukan & Aydın, 2025). Considering the positive contributions of sport to individuals, it can be suggested that sport plays a significant role — through its psychological and physiological benefits — in enabling university students to cope with social appearance anxiety (Kutlu & Uğur, 2025; Özkan, Çekiç, & Çepikkurt, 2021).

The originality of this study stems from its institutional context. Although various studies on social appearance anxiety exist in the literature, no research has been found that specifically examines students enrolled at Erciyes University. Given that social appearance anxiety is a construct directly influenced by sociocultural factors, investigating it within different institutional and regional contexts makes a distinctive contribution to the field. The present study aims to address this gap in literature and contribute to the accumulating body of comparative data at the national level.

The research is guided by the following key questions;

- Does the level of social appearance anxiety among university students differ significantly by gender?
- Do social appearance anxiety levels vary according to age, faculty, and year of study?
- Is there a significant difference in social appearance anxiety between students who actively participate in sports and those who do not?

Materials And Methods

Research Model

This study is based on the descriptive survey model. The descriptive survey model is defined as "a research approach that aims to describe situations, events, individuals, or phenomena as they are, and to present the existing state of affairs in detail" (Karasar, 2014). The rationale for selecting this model is the intention to reveal the current state of university students' social appearance anxiety levels

and certain demographic variables without any intervention in the variables under investigation. The descriptive survey model was considered the most appropriate method for the purposes of this study, as it allows for the objective description of the characteristics, behaviors, and current circumstances of the research group.

Study Group

The study group of the research consists of a total of 621 students enrolled at Erciyes University. Participants were selected from among the students of the university using a random sampling method. The criteria for inclusion in the study were that students were actively enrolled at the relevant institution and had voluntarily agreed to participate in the research. During the data collection process, the scales were administered by the researcher via Google Forms. Participation in the study was based entirely on a voluntary basis. Forms that were incomplete or incorrectly filled out were excluded from the evaluation, and the analyses were conducted solely on participants with valid data.

Table 1. *Demographic Data*

	Group	N	%
Gender	Female	316	50,9
	Male	305	49,1
Age	18-20	229	36,9
	21-23	285	45,9
	24-26	85	13,7
	26+	22	3,5
	Faculty of Sport Sciences	188	30,3
Faculty	Faculty of Education	110	17,7
	Faculty of Letters	127	20,5
	Faculty of Law	196	31,6
	1st Year	196	31,6
Year of Study	2nd Year	106	17,1
	3rd Year	141	22,7
	4th Year	178	28,7
	Active Sports	Yes	126
Participation Status	No	495	79,7

Data Collection Tools

Personal Information Form

A Personal Information Form developed by the researcher was used to determine the demographic information of the participants included in the study. The form aims to reveal the basic socio-demographic and sport-related characteristics of the students, and consists of a total of five questions. These questions encompass the variables of gender, age, year of study, faculty of enrollment, and active sports participation status.

Social Appearance Anxiety Scale

The Social Appearance Anxiety Scale, consisting of 16 items and developed by Hart et al. (2008), was adapted into Turkish by Tayfun Doğan in 2010 (Doğan, 2010). The 5-point Likert-type items are responded to on a scale ranging from (1) Not at all appropriate to (5) Completely appropriate. The minimum score obtainable from the scale is 16, and the maximum score is 80. Item 1 of the scale is a negatively worded item and has been reverse-coded. Higher scores obtained from this scale indicate a higher level of appearance anxiety. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.93.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the study were analyzed using the SPSS 25.0 software. Frequency and percentage values were calculated for the demographic information of the participants and the scale scores. The distribution of the data was examined through skewness and kurtosis values; as the values were found to be within the ± 1 range, the data were assumed to follow a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Accordingly, parametric tests were employed in the analyses. An independent samples t-test was used for comparisons between two groups, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied for comparisons involving three or more groups. The LSD test was used to identify the source of the difference between groups. The LSD post-hoc test was selected due to the relatively balanced sample sizes across the compared groups. Under conditions of approximately equal group sizes, the LSD procedure maintains an acceptable Type I error rate while providing greater statistical power compared to more conservative alternatives. The significance level in the study was accepted as $p < 0.05$.

Findings

In this section of the study, the findings and interpretations pertaining to the data obtained as a result of the statistical analyses are presented.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics Regarding Scale Scores*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Skewness	Kurtosis	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
	Statistic	sd	p						
Social Appearance Anxiety	0,95	621	0,00	,455	-,380	38,23	14,04	0,76	16

When Table 2 is examined, it can be observed that the significance level yielded by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test is $p < .001$ ($K-S(621) = 0.95$). Nevertheless, the skewness (0.455) and kurtosis (-0.380) values of the relevant variables were found to remain within the ± 1.0 range; these findings were evaluated in accordance with the criteria proposed by George and Mallery (2010), leading to the conclusion that the data do not deviate substantially from normal distribution. The homogeneity of variances assumption was further examined using Levene's test ($F(2, 87) = 1.24, p = .38$), confirming that this assumption was satisfied. Accordingly, the analyses were subsequently conducted using parametric tests. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated within the scope of the reliability analysis conducted for the scale falls within the range of $0.60 \leq \alpha < 0.80$, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency. Furthermore, the arithmetic mean of the scores obtained from the scale was calculated as 38.23, with a standard deviation of 14.04.

Table 3. *Comparison of Social Appearance Anxiety Scale Scores According to Students' Gender*

Scale	Gender	N	X±SD	T	P
Social Appearance Anxiety	Female	316	40,01±14,48	3,250	,001
	Male	305	36,38±13,35		

When Table 3 is examined, a statistically significant difference was found in the total dimension of social appearance anxiety according to students' gender ($p < 0.05$).

Table 4. Comparison of Social Appearance Anxiety Scale Scores According to Students' Age

Scale	Age	N	X±SD	F	P	Lsd
Social Appearance Anxiety	18-20	229	38,37±13,91	2,244	,082	-
	21-23	285	39,27±13,92			
	24-26	85	35,15±14,41			
	26+	22	35,18±14,38			

When Table 4 is examined, no statistically significant difference was found in the total dimension of social appearance anxiety according to students' age ($p>0.05$).

Table 5. Comparison of Social Appearance Anxiety Scale Scores According to Students' Faculty

Scale	Faculty	N	X±SD	F	P	Lsd
Social Appearance Anxiety	Faculty of Sport Sciences	188	37,86±12,83	18,764	<,001	<i>a</i> < <i>b</i> ,
	Faculty of Education	110	44,55±13,81			<i>a</i> < <i>c</i>
	Faculty of Letters	127	40,98±14,49			<i>a</i> > <i>d</i> ,
	Faculty of Law	196	33,26±13,20			<i>b</i> > <i>c</i>

When Table 5 is examined, a statistically significant difference was found in the total dimension of social appearance anxiety according to students' faculty ($p<0.01$).

Table 6. Comparison of Social Appearance Anxiety Scale Scores According to Students' Year of Study

Scale	Year of Study	N	X±SD	F	P	Lsd
Social Appearance Anxiety	1st Year	196	36,42±12,94	14,416	<,001	<i>a</i> < <i>c</i>
	2nd Year	106	37,42±13,87			<i>b</i> < <i>c</i>
	3rd Year	141	44,75±13,29			<i>c</i> > <i>d</i>
	4th Year	178	35,53±14,40			

When Table 6 is examined, a statistically significant difference was found in the total dimension of social appearance anxiety according to students' year of study ($p<0.01$).

Table 7. *Comparison of Social Appearance Anxiety Scale Scores According to Students' Active Sports Participation Status*

Scale	Sports Participation		N	X±SD	T	P
	Status					
Social Appearance Anxiety	Yes		126	35,92±11,55	-2,070	,018
	No		495	38,81±14,56		

When Table 7 is examined, a statistically significant difference was found in the total dimension of social appearance anxiety according to students' active sports participation status ($p < 0.05$).

Discussion and Conclusion

The social appearance anxiety levels of Erciyes University students were examined in terms of the variables of gender, age, faculty, year of study, and sports participation status. When the overall mean scores of the students were evaluated, it was determined that the social appearance anxiety scores (38.23 ± 14.04) were at a moderate level. Considering the minimum and maximum scores obtainable from the scale, it is observed that the students' mean scores fall slightly below the midpoint of the scale. This finding indicates that Erciyes University students experience a near-moderate level of anxiety regarding their physical appearance in social settings.

In the examination conducted with respect to the gender variable, a statistically significant difference was identified in social appearance anxiety, and this difference was found to be in favor of female students. When the literature is reviewed, a study conducted by Tok (2021), in parallel with the findings of the present study, also determined that female participants exhibited significantly higher levels of social appearance anxiety compared to their male counterparts. The study carried out by Boursier et al. (2020) is likewise supportive of our findings. In contrast, there are also studies that have concluded that males demonstrate significantly higher levels of social appearance anxiety than females (Senger, 2017; Ciba, 2018). In addition, Trekels and Eggermont (2017) reported that no significant difference was found between social appearance anxiety and gender. In the present study, the significantly higher levels of social appearance anxiety observed among women compared to men are thought to stem from cultural expectations associated with gender roles. The internalization of this pressure within a social structure in which women are more

intensively evaluated on the basis of their physical appearance may emerge as a fundamental factor that elevates appearance anxiety.

In the examination conducted with respect to the age variable, no statistically significant difference was identified in social appearance anxiety. The finding of the study conducted by Koparan et al. (2010) on physical education teachers, in which no significant difference was found according to the age variable, is consistent with this finding of the present study. On the other hand, the detection of a significant difference among different age groups in the study conducted by Telli and Ünal (2016) with university students presents a result that contradicts our findings. Soyulu et al. (2017), in turn, revealed that participants' social appearance anxiety levels varied according to age groups, and that anxiety levels decreased as age increased. Although no statistically significant difference was found among age groups in the present study, it is noteworthy that the 21–23 age group exhibited the highest level of anxiety, the 24–26 age group demonstrated the lowest, and anxiety appeared to rise again among those above the age of 26. The elevated anxiety observed in the 21–23 age period may be attributed to its correspondence with the intense social comparison pressure and identity-seeking process characteristic of the university environment. The relative decline observed in the 24–26 age group can be suggested to be associated with individuals having a more consolidated sense of identity, making more conscious choices regarding their social environment, and replacing the pursuit of external approval with a more internalized self-evaluation. The renewed increase observed among those above the age of 26, in turn, is thought to stem from the exposure of individuals to a different form of appearance-related pressure brought about by new social roles such as the transition to professional life, marriage, and career-related concerns.

In the examination conducted with respect to the faculty variable, a significant difference was identified among the groups; it was determined that students from the Faculty of Law exhibited the lowest level of social appearance anxiety, while students from the Faculty of Education demonstrated the highest. When the literature is reviewed, a significant difference between the department variable and social appearance anxiety was found in the study conducted by Akça and Lök (2025), and the studies carried out by Åsebø et al. (2022) and Esmæili et al. (2022) are likewise supportive of our findings. In contrast, Telli and Ünal were unable to detect a significant difference between department and social appearance anxiety in their study conducted with university students from different departments. Çetinkaya et al. (2019) also reported that social appearance anxiety did not differ significantly according to school type among high school students. The high anxiety levels observed

among Faculty of Education students may be thought to be associated with the fact that the nature of the teaching profession inherently requires constant public presence and being subject to evaluation; the concern that the individual will be observed by both peers and future students may be elevating sensitivity toward appearance. The low anxiety levels observed among Faculty of Law students, on the other hand, are considered to be attributable to the analytical thinking framework, self-confidence, and professional identity fostered in individuals through legal education; it can be suggested that these students construct social evaluation on the basis of competence rather than appearance. This situation is thought to stem from the determinative role that the academic cultures and professional socialization processes of different faculties play on individuals' appearance anxiety.

In the examination conducted with respect to the year of study variable, a significant difference was identified in social appearance anxiety, with 3rd year students exhibiting the highest level of anxiety and 4th year students demonstrating the lowest. When the literature is reviewed, Alımcı (2018) found a significant difference in students' social appearance anxiety according to their year of study. Gül (2016), in turn, revealed a moderately significant and negative relationship between year of study and social appearance anxiety. Şahin (2012) also reported that social appearance anxiety decreased as the year of study increased. In contrast, Ataş (2018) and Çakmak and Sakarya (2020) concluded that the year of study variable did not produce a significant difference in social appearance anxiety. Given that the 3rd year corresponds to the midpoint of university life and represents the phase in which social relationships and peer comparisons are most intensely experienced, it can be suggested that appearance-related anxieties reach their peak during this period; this phase, in which identity ambiguity persists and the need for external approval remains high, warrants particular consideration in this regard. The decline observed among 4th year students, on the other hand, is considered to be attributable to the fact that individuals approaching graduation have largely consolidated their professional and personal identities, experience a reduced need for social approval, and redirect their attention toward future-oriented goals rather than appearance-related concerns.

The most noteworthy finding of the study is that individuals who engage in sport exhibit significantly lower levels of social appearance anxiety compared to those who do not. In the literature, a study conducted by Alemdağ and Öncü (2015) found that social appearance anxiety decreased as the level of participation in physical activity increased, a finding that is consistent with the present study. Soylu et al. (2017) also revealed that adolescents who engage in sport have lower levels of social appearance anxiety compared to those who do not. In contrast, the study conducted

by Yazıcı, Caz, and Tunçkoy (2016) reported that participants who exercised had higher social appearance anxiety scores compared to those who did not. Haugen, Ommundsen, and Seiler (2013), on the other hand, found that social appearance anxiety did not differ significantly according to the sports participation variable. The attainment of this result in the present study may be thought to stem from the fact that individuals who engage in sport perceive their bodies not as objects of evaluation but as sources of performance and strength. It is also frequently emphasized in the literature that physical activity positively influences body image, strengthens the sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence, and renders individuals relatively independent from the pursuit of external approval. It can further be suggested that the sport environment provides individuals with experience in accepting their bodies and pushing their physical limits, thereby causing appearance-related social anxieties to recede into the background.

In conclusion, the present study examined the relationships between social appearance anxiety and demographic variables among university students. The findings revealed that gender and faculty variables produced significant differences in anxiety levels; women and Faculty of Education students exhibited higher levels of anxiety, while Faculty of Law students demonstrated lower levels. A significant difference was also identified with respect to the year of study variable, whereas the age variable was found to have no significant effect on anxiety. The most noteworthy finding of the study is that individuals who engage in sport exhibit significantly lower levels of social appearance anxiety compared to those who do not. These findings reveal that social appearance anxiety has a multi-layered structure shaped by the interplay of biological, sociocultural, and behavioral factors, and indicate that sport should be regarded not only as a physical but also as a psychological protective factor. In this regard, it is recommended that body image-based psychological support programs be developed for female students, that guidance services supporting professional self-confidence be strengthened in Faculties of Education, and that structured programs encouraging students to engage in sport be established across all faculties. The inclusion of variables such as social media use and body satisfaction in the model in future studies will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of social appearance anxiety.

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