

Preference for Zoom vs. In-Person Social Situations among those with Social Anxiety Disorder

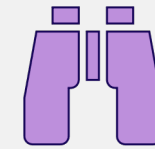
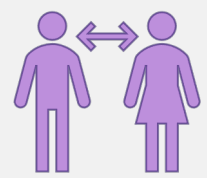
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Introduction

- **Social anxiety disorder (SAD)** stems from a fear of judgement from others and is present in three types of situations (APA, 2013):

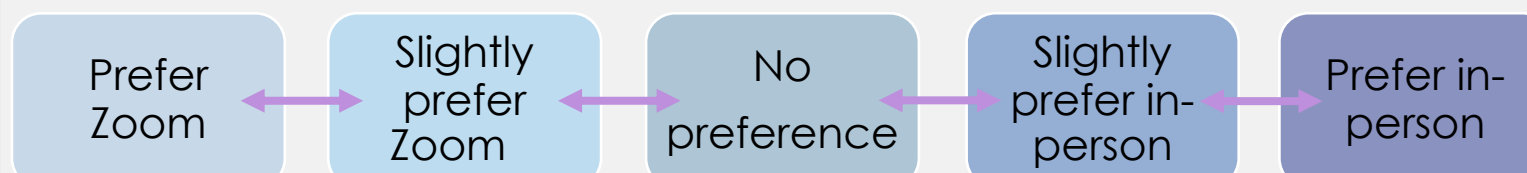


Conversations Presentations Being observed by others

- Since the onset of the pandemic, many social situations have moved to **virtual platforms**.
- Individuals with SAD may prefer online communication, due to a decrease in perceived threat. In a non-clinical sample, communication format (in-person or virtual) was not related to levels of social anxiety (Doorley et al., 2020).
- There is limited research showing whether individuals with SAD prefer online or in-person social interactions.
- **Hypothesis:** Individuals with SAD would prefer in-person formats for social interactions (i.e., conversations), and online formats for non-social interactions (i.e., presentations and being observed by others).

Participants and Methods

- N = 19 individuals with SAD; 73.7% female; 26.3% male; age: 36.37(12.02)
- Those who completed group ACT via Zoom were asked their preference of zoom vs. in-person for nine social situations (see Table 1), on the following scale:



- Three situations were taken from the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (Liebowitz, 1987).

Results

Online vs. In-Person Preferences

Situation	Mean	SD
Talking with people you don't know very well	3.05	1.31
Being looked at while talking	2.95	1.39
Looking at other people's faces	2.84	1.39
Participating in small groups	2.79	1.36
Being observed while in a group	2.37	1.17
Giving a talk	2.21	1.44
Talking to people in authority	2.16	1.21
Using notes while interacting with others	2.16	1.12
Entering a meeting while others are present	1.68	1.00

Table 1. A mean below 3 reflects a preference of zoom, a mean above 3 reflects a preference of in-person, and a mean of 3 reflects no preference.

- For most situations, on average, a virtual format was preferred.

Comparing Situation Types

- A zoom format was significantly preferred for 'Giving a talk' and 'Entering a meeting while others are present,' compared to 'Talking with people you don't know very well,' $F(2,36) = 7.78, p = .002$.
- A zoom format was significantly less preferred for social interactions, compared to non-social interactions.

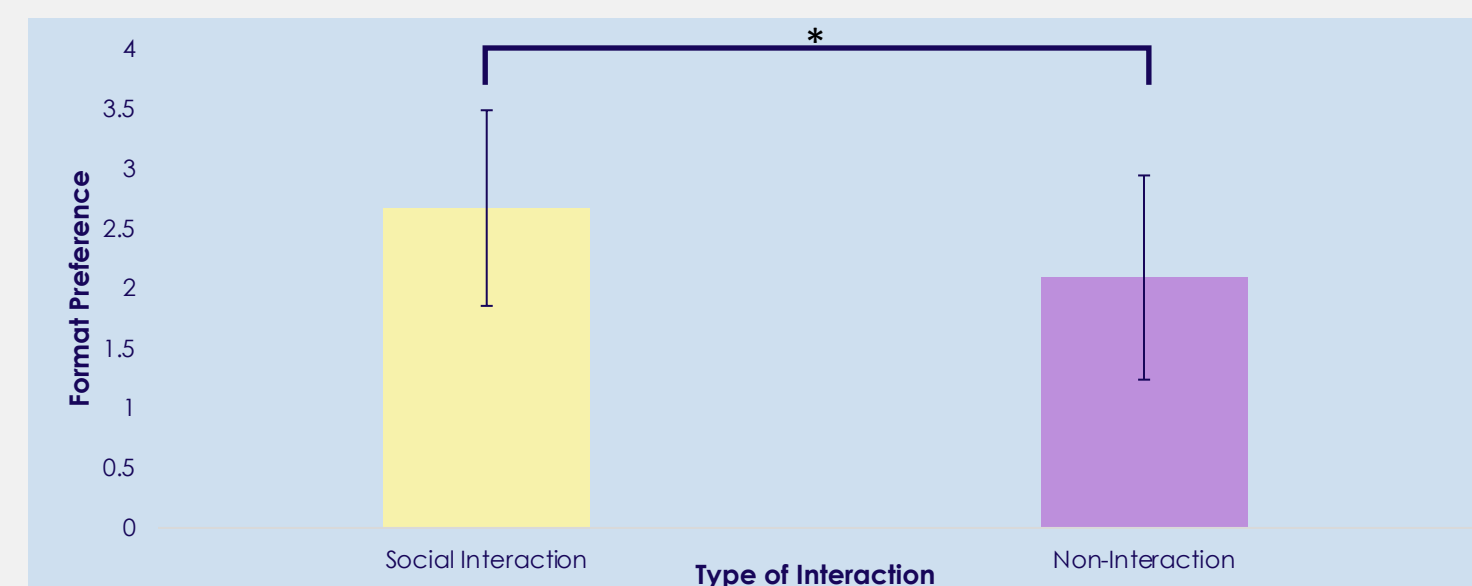


Figure 1. The lower the score, the higher the preference for zoom; *: $p = .016$; Social interaction = 'Talking with people you don't know very well,' 'Participating in small groups,' and 'Talking to people in authority'; Non-interaction = 'Being observed while in a group,' 'Giving a talk,' and 'Entering a meeting while others are present'

Results Continued

Correlation Between Avoidance and Preference

- Greater avoidance of social situations, via the LSAS, was non-significantly correlated with preferring a virtual format, $r = -.33, p = .17$.
- The three items taken from the LSAS were significantly correlated with avoidance:

Situation	r	p
Talking with people you don't know very well	-.48	.04
Talking to people in authority	-.46	.05
Participating in small groups	-.54	.02

Table 2. Higher levels of zoom preference were related to greater avoidance for these situations.

Discussion

- On average, zoom was the preferred method of communication for most situations.
- The preference of virtual versus in-person interactions varies depending on the type of social situation.
- Those with a higher level of avoidance may prefer virtual communications, possibly due to enhanced emotional safety (Doorley et al., 2020).
- **Limitations:** i) small sample size, ii) some questions were ambiguous; could not group all items based on type of social situation (i.e., conversation, presentation, and being observed by others)
- **Future Directions:** i) person-centered analyses; a subset of individuals preferred an in-person format for most social situations, others preferred an online format for most situations, ii) further investigate whether preferences of zoom are avoidance-driven

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