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Icebreakers and Anxiety

by Sara Jurkiewicz

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Introduction

I am studying the impact of being shy and/or social on the levels of anxiety in social situations, such as icebreakers because I want to understand a possible cause of anxiety so that I can shed light on how different situations can impact the mental and/or physical health of different students. I argue that a relationship will merge between shyness and sociability and anxiety, as exemplified from symptoms during icebreakers. While this study is no means an official diagnosis of anxiety in individuals, it is more of a general observation of anxious feelings in individuals in certain situations.

While there is research connecting shyness and sociability to social anxiety disorder as done so by Poole (2017), it does not relate these to the willingness to share, or the level of anxiety when sharing, specifically ice breakers. The research reports there is a relationship between being shy and social to showing symptoms of social anxiety disorder and being shy does not automatically lead to the disorder. That research does not look at icebreakers, a more specific topic that this research will focus on. Furthermore, the amount of research there is regarding anxiety and icebreakers is minimal, therefore, it lacks the specificities to relate the elements of shyness, sociability, anxiety and anxiety during icebreakers. This study will the bridge in knowledge to connect the previously mentioned topics.

Methodology

To study shyness and sociability and anxiety, I created a survey. This survey was taken by Bowling Green State University students. These students were members of the Facebook groups for the Bowling Green State University Class of 2022 or the Bowling Green Chapter of Sigma Kappa. The results of the survey were recorded on a connect spreadsheet, which is given on the last pages preceding the References. The questions used for the survey to test for shyness and sociability were adapted from a similar survey from Jonathan M. Cheek and Arnold H. Buss from the University of Texas at Austin. This source also defines “shyness” and “sociability” for the purpose of this study and are as follows: “one’s reaction to being with strangers or casual acquaintances: tension, concern, feelings of awkwardness and discomfort” (1981, p. 330) and “a tendency to affiliate with others and to prefer being with others to remaining alone” (1981, p. 330). These two words, while related do not mean the same; for example, it is possible to be shy and social without the two conflicting. The questions for Anxiety and Anxiety During Icebreakers were based on symptoms of general anxiety as described by the Anxiety and Depression Association of America and from personal experience with anxious feelings (Symptoms).

Below are the questions used to evaluate Shyness. These were answered on a 1 to 5 scale, with 5 being Strongly Agree and 1 being Strongly Disagree. The higher the score, the more shy the respondent is.

1. I am socially somewhat awkward.
2. I find it hard to talk to strangers.
3. I feel tense when I'm with people I don't know well.
4. When conversing, I worry about saying something dumb.
5. I feel nervous when speaking to someone in authority.
6. I am often uncomfortable at parties and other social functions.
7. I feel inhibited in social situations.
8. I have trouble looking someone in the eyes.
9. I am more shy with members of my preferred gender/sexuality.

Below are the questions for evaluating Sociability. The participants had the same scale as above, with the higher score meaning more social the respondent.

1. I like to be with people.
2. I welcome the opportunity to mix socially with people.
3. I prefer working with others rather than alone.
4. I find people more stimulating than anything else.
5. I would not be happy if I were prevented from making many social contacts. (Cheek and Buss, 1981, p. 332).

The following are the questions to evaluate Anxiety. The scale is 1 to 5, with 5 being Max Anxiety and 1 being No Anxiety. The higher the score, the more anxious the respondent is.

1. You talk to someone new.
2. You talk to someone you know.
3. You share surface level information with a group of new people (favorites, home town, etc.).
4. You share surface level information with a group of new and familiar people.
5. You share surface level information with a group of familiar people.
6. You share under the surface information with a group of new people (family life, struggles, feelings, etc.).
7. You share under the surface information with a group of new and familiar people.
8. You share under the surface information with a group of familiar people.
9. You participate in icebreakers.

The following are the questions to evaluate Anxiety during Icebreakers. The scale is the same as above.

1. Practice what I am going to say before I say it.
2. Count how many people are talking before I do.
3. Having your body warm up and/or sweat.
4. Feel relieved when your turn is over.

5. Play with a hair (tie)/watch/bracelet/etc.
6. Feel like the others will judge your response(s).
7. Start to shake.

Based on the numerical results of each section, an identity was given to each respondent. For the Shyness section, if the average of the results was 3 or more, then they were given “Shy” and if it was less than 3, “Not Shy.” Similarly, for the Sociability section, an average of 3 or higher was given “Social” and less than 3, “Not Social.” For the Anxiety and Anxiety during Icebreakers, the average was taken, and with average of 3 or greater, the respondents were given “Yes” and for less than three, “No.”

These answers were then combined to see how many of each variation of Shy and Social were labeled as “Yes” for Anxiety and Anxiety during Icebreakers. These results will be displayed in the pages preceding the references.

Analysis of Results

The given identity of each respondent was given as described above. “Shy & Social,” “Not Shy & Social,” and “Shy & Not Social” were about even in quantity, with “Not Shy & Not Social” having the least (Chart 1).

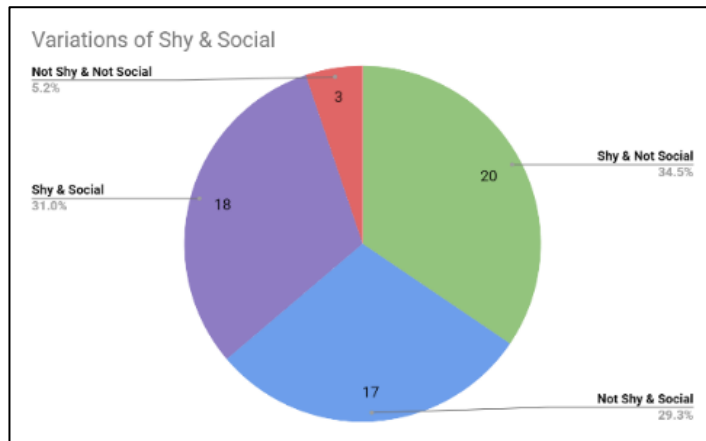


Chart 1

From the overall results, the majority of students do not feel anxious in general but do have anxiety during icebreakers (Charts 2 & 3).

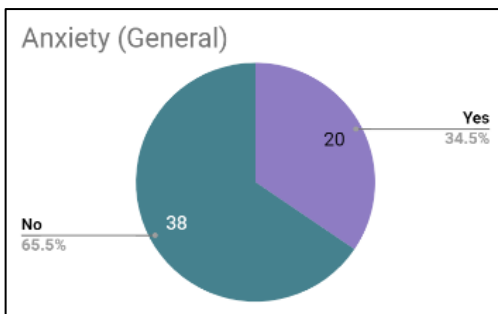


Chart 2

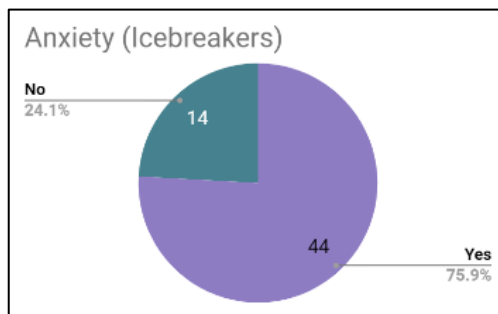


Chart 3

The group with the most “Yes” responses for Anxiety was “Shy & Not Social,” with “Shy & Social” in second (Chart 4). The group with the most “Yes” responses for Anxiety during

Icebreakers was about tied for “Shy & Not Social” and “Shy & Social” icebreakers (Chart 5). For those who are “Shy,” the majority have anxiety in general and during icebreakers. This is similar for those “Not Social” (Charts 6 & 7). For those who are “Not Shy,” the majority do not feel anxious in either scenario (Charts 8 & 9). For those labeled “Social,” the majority do not feel anxious in general, but there is large minority that do feel anxious during icebreakers (Charts 10 & 11). For those labeled “Shy,” it is about split about being anxious in general, but during icebreakers, the majority feel anxious (Chart 12 & 13).

Based on the graphs for Shyness vs. Anxiety and Shyness vs. Anxiety during Icebreakers there is a medium strength positive correlation between higher rating of shyness and high levels of anxiety (Graphs 2 & 3).

For the Anxiety during Icebreakers (Graph 3), the slope of the graph is higher than Shyness vs. Anxiety, meaning that as the level of “Shy” increases, the level of anxiety increases at a faster rate. The intercept for Shyness vs. Anxiety during Icebreakers is also higher, meaning that a lower level of “Shy” has more anxiety during icebreakers than that same level of shy would during the social situations as describe in the Anxiety questions above. These two factors could indicate that icebreakers give more anxiety than during the social situations.

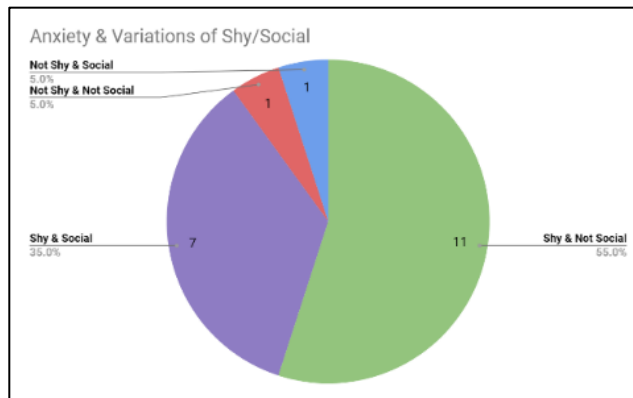


Chart 4

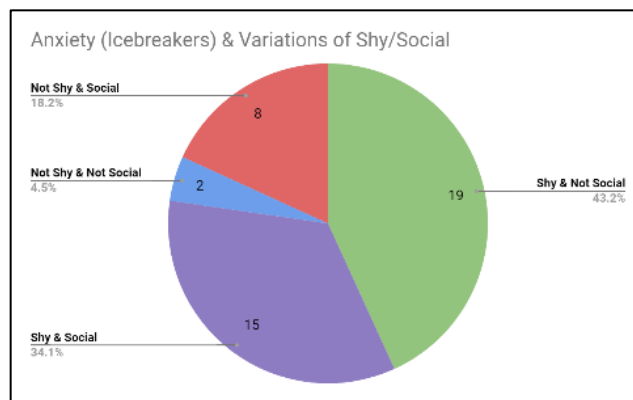


Chart 5

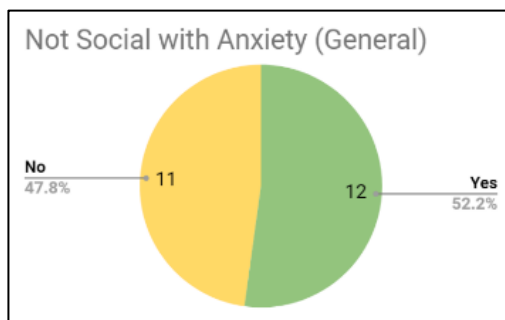


Chart 6

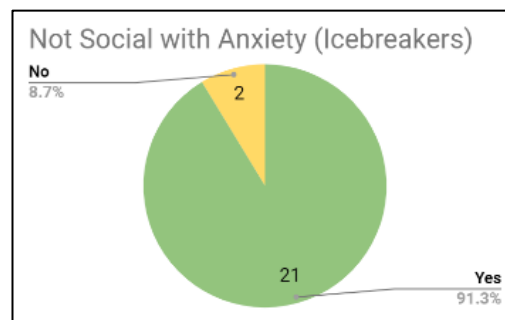


Chart 7

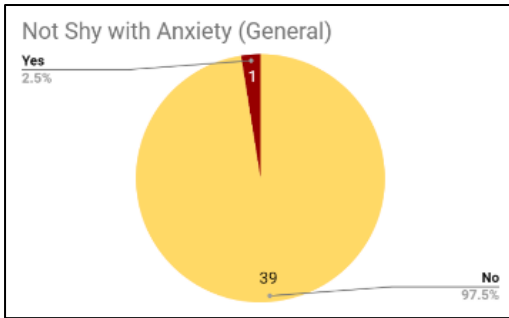


Chart 8

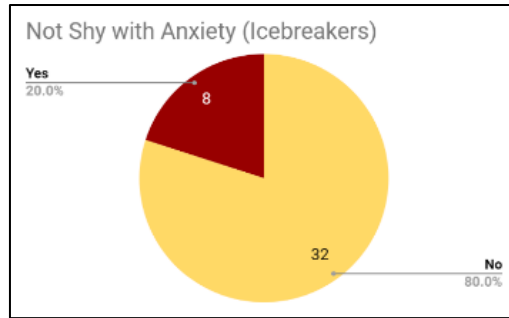


Chart 9

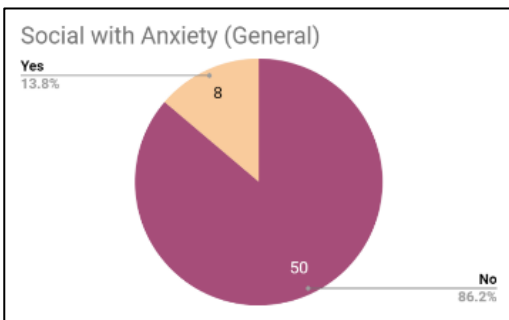


Chart 10

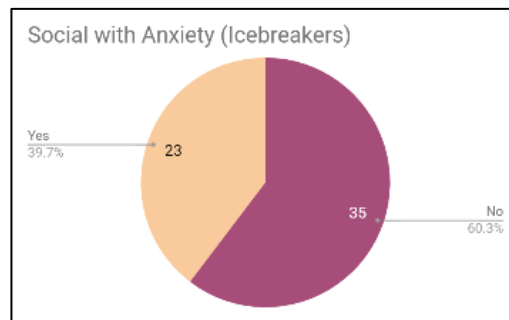


Chart 11

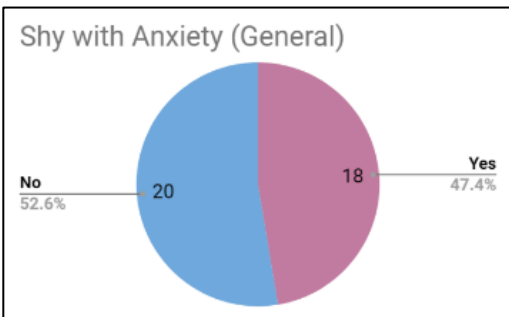


Chart 12

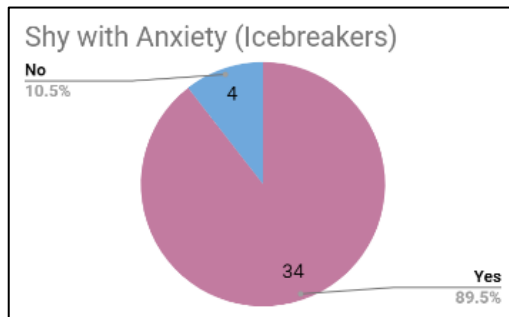
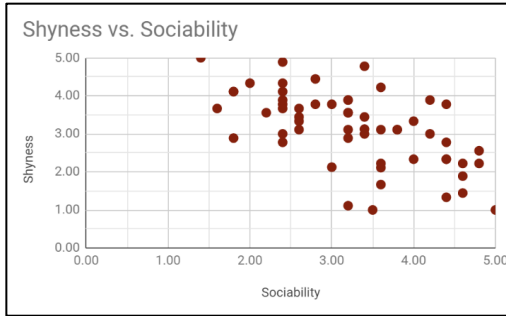
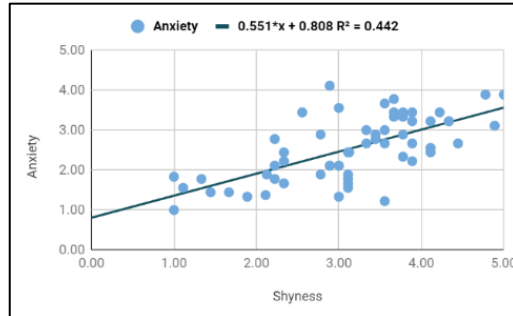


Chart 13

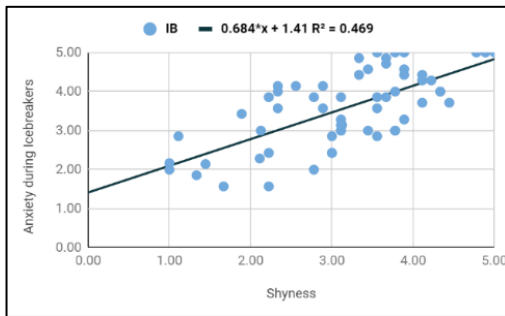
However, for the Sociability vs. Anxiety and Sociability vs. Anxiety during icebreakers, there is a low strength negative correlation between a higher rating of sociability and high level of anxiety (Graphs 4 & 5). This means that as the level of “Social” increases, the level of anxiety decreases for both situations. For this set of data, the larger slope occurs in Sociability vs. Anxiety during Icebreakers (Graph 5), which would again support the idea that icebreakers bring more anxiety than the social situations described above. This graph also has the larger intercept, which means that there is a higher anxiety level among the lower end of social than in Sociability vs. Anxiety.



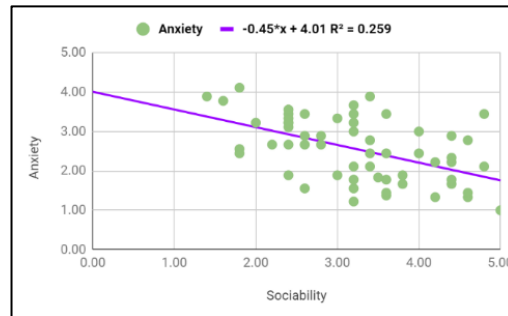
Graph 1



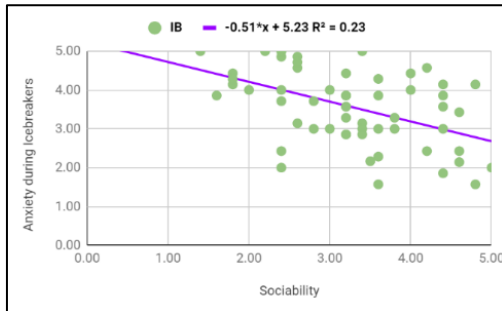
Graph 2



Graph 3



Graph 4



Graph 5

For the Statistical Analyses (Table 5), the overall results further support the more specific results above. For the median, or middle number of the results, the level of anxiety in general is less than the that for the level of anxiety during icebreakers. The median for anxiety in general is under the defined threshold for “Yes” of anxiety, while during icebreakers was above. As for the mode, or most repeated, the level of anxiety increases for during icebreakers. However,

for this analysis, both were above the threshold for “Yes” for anxiety in both situations. It is important to note that the most common average result for during icebreakers is 5.00, the highest score possible. The mean, or average, in the table below refers to the average of all of the results of the average of each individual. This part is similar to the median, where the level increased for icebreakers, and the anxiety general was below the threshold. The standard deviation value shows the variation of the results. The number given means that about 68% of the results are either the value more or less than the mean for that section. For the level of anxiety, the majority of the results will fall within the range of 1.73 to 3.346. Relative to that scale given, the difference in that range is large. The results of the statistical analyses over portray that the level of anxiety increase during icebreakers.

Table 5: Statistical Analysis	Level of Shy	Level of Social	Level of Anxiety	Level of Anxiety during Icebreakers
Median (Middle Number)	3.23	3.20	2.61	3.71
Mode (Most Repeated)	3.11	2.40	3.44	5.00
Mean (Average)	3.15	3.26	2.54	3.57
Standard Deviation (Variation)	0.973	0.912	0.806	0.971

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that facilitators such as student staff, teachers, and professor distribute this survey. This would allow the facilitator to better understand their students and how the students may feel and react when in certain situations. When someone does not feel safe or comfortable, they may not take in the information given. The role of the facilitator is to help the student have a better understanding of a topic. Also, if the facilitator recognizes that a student would be uncomfortable in speaking situations, other methods of participation can be discussed between the student and facilitator. Anxiety is a serious health issue for many, and it can be argued that not accommodating it would be equivalent to not accommodating a physical health issue, though that is not the purpose of the research, it is important to understand and consider. Based on the results of the survey from the facilitators, the choice of introductory method can be chosen. If overall the population is open to sharing and/or does not feel anxious about it, a method designed with sharing in mind could be a viable choice. However, if overall the population is averse to sharing and/or it makes them anxious, then a less invasive introductory method could be used. There are many workshops or icebreaker-type activities designed and upload to the Internet, where upon a brief skim of the activity or question, it can be determined how much information the participants would need to share.

Future study could be to have more students from various colleges and universities take this survey. This could either further support the current data or show that this data set is specific to Bowling Green State University. Within further study, a more in-depth analysis could be performed looking at the questions individually versus in sections as described above to see if the anxiety in the situations is distributed evenly or if there are certain specific situations that cause more anxiety to others. While the questions are analyzed in sections, there is more to be learned by looking at an individual's responses or for the individual situations to see if there are any correlations or point so interest.

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