Originalni naučni članak

Relations of self-discrepancies with depression and anxiety in adolescents: The role of parents' and peers' expectations

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to explore relations between self-discrepancies, particularly in the actual and ought self, on one side, and depression and social anxiety on the other. The inconsistency in findings in existing studies is speculated to arise from variations in the definition of the ought self, which represents expectations of significant others about who we should be, with the term significant others not being defined. The results of research conducted on 543 high school students showed that all discrepancies are positively correlated with depression and social anxiety, and negatively with two dimensions of self-esteem: self-competence and self-liking. The findings indicate that all self-discrepancies serve as significant predictors of depression, with the discrepancy in the actual-ideal self and the actual-ought self by parents demonstrating a stronger predictive power than the discrepancy between the actual and ought self by peers. With regards to social anxiety, the discrepancy between actual and ought self by peers is a more influential determinant than the discrepancy between the actual and ought self by parents. It was also found that the discrepancy between the actual and ideal self is more significant than the expected discrepancy in the actual and ought self by peers in the prediction of social anxiety. Data on self-competence showed it was a mediating variable in the correlation between discrepancy in actual-ought self by parents, as well as actual and ideal self, and depression. Finally, self-liking appeared

to be a mediating variable in the correlation between the actual-ideal discrepancy and social anxiety.

Keywords: Self-discrepancy Theory, depression, social anxiety, self-competence, self-liking

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Introduction

Higgins' self-discrepancy theory (1987) associates discrepancies in self-concept with psychological consequences, primarily with depression and social anxiety. The key concepts of the theory involve different aspects of the self that may be in discrepancy: the actual self represents how we see ourselves, the ideal self encompasses everything we aspire to be, and the ought self relates to expectations of significant others about who we should be, with the term significant others not being defined. In the late 20th century, numerous studies on non-clinical populations attempted to establish a connection between self-discrepancies and psychological consequences. The main result indicated a clear correlation between actual-ideal self-discrepancy and depression (Boldero & Francis, 2000; Bruch et al., 2000; Fairbrother & Moretti, 1998; Gramzow et al., 2000; Higgins et al., 1985; 1986; 1987; Kinderman & Bentall, 1996; Philippot et al., 2018; Phillips et al., 2007; Phillips & Silvae, 2010; Scott & O'Hara, 1993; Stamać Ožanić, 2007; Stevens et al., 2014; Straumann & Higgins 1987, 1988; Strauman 1989, 1990, 1992, 1996). A higher discrepancy leads to an increased likelihood of experiencing negative emotions, subsequently influencing self-evaluation. Conversely, individuals with a closely aligned actual and ideal self will encounter positive emotions, fostering positive re-evaluation and optimistic environmental interpretation, thereby promoting a stable and congruent self-image.

Findings regarding social anxiety do not support Higgins´ assumption that anxious individuals exhibit a greater discrepancy between ought and actual selves compared to depressed or normal individuals (Bruch et al., 2000; Gramzow, et al., 2000; Phillips, et al., 2007; Phillips & Silvae, 2010; Scott & O'Hara, 1993; Stevens, et al., 2014; Weilage & Hope, 1999). Some studies also fail to confirm the predictive role of both actual-ideal discrepancy for depression and actual-ought discrepancy for social anxiety (Manzoni & Lotar, 2011; Ozgul, et al., 2003; Tangeny, et al., 1998).

Despite the mixed findings, numerous studies indicate a link between anxiety and self-image discrepancies (e.g., Fairbrother & Moretti, 1998; Francis,

et al., 2006; Higgins, 1987; Higgins, et al., 1985; 1986; 1987; Kinderman & Bentall, 1996; Philippot, et al., 2018; Strauman & Higgins, 1988; Strauman, 1996). Moreover, important variations have been observed in defining the significant other against whom the ought-self is rated – parent, peer, or not defined.

Incorporating the evaluative aspect of self-concept as a research variable helps find out what is happening with self-esteem when there is a discrepancy in self-concept. We utilized two components of self-esteem: self-liking and self-competence, introduced by Tafarodi and Swann (2001). We hypothesized that, although in both situations of actual-ought discrepancy (parent or peer) self-esteem is decreased, different components of self-esteem are affected differently. Self-competence represents a general sense of one's effectiveness, efficacy, and control. Individuals experience higher self-competence when they achieve their goals, thereby proving their abilities and competence. Actual-ought discrepancy when the significant other is a parent could be more associated with reduced self-esteem in terms of one's competence and thus lead to reduced self-competence, which is related to performance and perceived ability. When the significant other is the peer group, the actual-ought discrepancy could be more related to reduced self-liking, which is related to appearance, character, social identity, etc. We hypothesized the mediating role of self-competence in the relationship between the actual-ought discrepancy by parents and depression and the mediating role of self-liking in the relationship between the actual-ought discrepancy by peers and social anxiety.

The research problem centres around defining whether depression and social anxiety are higher when the actual self is not aligned with one's aspirations, peer expectations, and expectations of parents, and whether it relates to dimensions of self-esteem.

Firstly, according to aforementioned assumptions and theory, we believe that discrepancies in self-concept (actual-ideal, actual-ought by parents and actual-ought by peers) are significant predictors of depressive (H1) and anxiety (H2) symptoms, discrepancies in actual-ideal and actual-ought self by parents are better predictors of depressive symptoms than discrepancy in

actual-ought self by peers (H3), and discrepancy in actual-ought self by peers is better predictor of social anxiety than discrepancy in actual-ideal and actual-ought self by parents (H4).

We also hypothesized that self-esteem (specifically self-competence) is a mediating variable in the relationship between the variables of discrepancy in self-concept (actual-ideal, and actual-ought self by parents) and depressive symptoms, and that the mediating effect is partial (H5); that self-esteem (specifically self-liking) is a mediating variable in the relationship between the variable of discrepancy in the actual-ought self by peers and social anxiety, and that the mediating effect is partial (H6).

Method

Sample

A total of 543 high school students from Zagreb and Zagreb County participated in this study, following the principal's approval for surveying a particular class. A convenient sample of schools was utilized, and respondents provided written consent for study participation. The study has been approved by the Ethics Committee (Department of Psychology, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zagreb).

Instruments

The instruments used included the modified Self Concept Questionnaire – Conventional Version (SCQCV) (Watson, 2001), The Beck Depression Inventory Second Edition (BDI-II) (Beck et al., 1996), Self-Liking/Self Competence Scale (SLCS-R) (Tafarodi & Swann, 2001), and Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS-SR) (Liebowitz, 1987). Approval for all questionnaires was obtained while BDI-II was acquired from Naklada Slap (2011).

Self Concept Questionnaire – Conventional Version (SCQCV)

The Self Concept Questionnaire – Conventional Version (SCQCV) comprises 28 items (adjectives) for which the participant assesses on a 7-point scale (from 1 - never/almost never true to 7 - always/almost always true) how

well they correspond to their ideal, actual, and ought self. The Croatian translation was used for the first time in 2006 (Stamać Ožanić, 2007). The test-retest reliability for the original version was 0.76 (Babel, 2005), and 0.84 for the translated version. The SCQCV modification refers to the way of completing the questionnaire and defining the significant other - all students completed two versions of the ought-self assessment, one from the standpoint of the parent and one from the perspective of peers.

The Beck Depression Inventory Second Edition (BDI-II)

The Beck Depression Inventory Second Edition (BDI-II) consists of 21 questions with respondents providing self-assessed answers on a scale of 0 to 3, diagnosing mild, moderate, or severe depression. The reliability is 0.89 (Jokić-Begić, et al., 2014).

The Self-Liking/Self-Competence Scale Revised (SLCS-R)

The Self-Liking/Self-Competence Scale Revised (SLCS-R; Tafarodi & Swann, 2001) comprises 16 items assessed on a Likert-type scale. Two subscales measure two dimensions of self-esteem: self-liking, and self-competence, each with 8 items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Croatian version of the scale indicated high reliability, with values of 0.79 for the self-competence subscale, 0.85 for the self-liking subscale, and 0.88 for the overall self-esteem score (Jelić, 2008).

Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS-SR)

Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS-SR) was translated and validated in preliminary research, for the purpose of this research (Stamać Ožanić, 2020). The reliability coefficients for all scales were high: 0.96 (total score), 0.92 (total fear), 0.89 (fear of social interaction), 0.81 (fear of performance), 0.92 (total avoidance), 0.89 (avoidance of social interaction), and 0.83 (avoidance of performance).

Procedure

The researcher visited each class, explained the purpose of the study, collected written consent forms, and distributed questionnaires. Each respondent had to fill out modified SCQCV (Watson, 2001), BDI-II (Beck et al., 1996), Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale -LSAS-SR (Liebowitz, 1987), and SLCS-R (Tafarodi & Swann, 2001) in the specified order.

To ensure anonymity, the only personal information collected from participants was gender and age. Participants who scored high on BDI-II and/or LSAS-SR and requested feedback about their scores were informed that their scores might indicate high symptoms of depression or anxiety at the time of testing and were given information on where to seek advice and help. Following ethical standards, for any other participants with higher scores who did not contact us within a month after the end of the research, the school psychologists were only informed which classes they were in.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson`s correlation coefficients, stepwise regression, and mediation analyses as specified by Hayes (2013).

Results

Descriptive statistics

Our results indicate that 17.5% of participants can be classified as mildly depressed, 13.6% as moderately depressed, and 6.8% have symptoms of severe depression (Beck et al., 2011). 19% had generalized social anxiety at the time of measurement (Rytwinski et al., 2001).

Results for actual-ideal discrepancy, actual-ought discrepancy (peers), and self-liking were normally distributed. Actual-ought discrepancy (parents), self-competence, depression, and social anxiety deviated significantly from a normal distribution, mostly being positively asymmetric or leptokurtic. However,

parametric statistics were used because it is appropriate when a bimodal or u-distribution is not obtained (Petz, 2004) when a large sample size is used, subsamples are of equal or similar size, and finally when skewness and kurtosis do not exceed the value of 3 (Kline, 2010).

Hypothesis testing

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficients

	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	*M*	*SD*	*Skew.*	*Kurt.*
1. A-I D	.72**	.60**	-.45**	-.42**	.45**	.31**	40.5	15.89	0.173	0.133
2. A-O D (parents)		.62**	-.41**	-.36**	.45**	.24**	46.3	15.26	0.222	0.568
3. A-O D (peers)			-.27**	-.32**	.39**	.27**	43.4	14.61	0.501	0.938
4. SC				.67**	-.54**	-.47**	33.1	5.40	0.211	0.264
5. SL					-.65**	-.52**	35.1	7.32	-0.266	-0.552
6. BDI-II						.51**	12.7	9.66	1.248	1.783
7. LSAS-SR							41.2	23.43	0.684	0.145

Note. A-I D – Actual-ideal discrepancy; A-O D (parents) – Actual-ought discrepancy (parents); A-O D (peers) – Actual-ought discrepancy (peers); SC – Self-competence; SL – Self-liking; *M* – mean; *SD* – standard deviation; *Skew.* – Skewness; *Kurt.* – Kurtosis; ** $p < .01$.

First, a preliminary correlation analysis was conducted for regression and mediation models (Table 1). As expected, a positive correlation of discrepancies in self-concept with depressive and social anxiety symptoms was found, as well as a negative correlation with dimensions of self-esteem. The correlation between actual-ideal discrepancy and actual-ought discrepancy (parents) was not found to be significantly higher with self-competence than with self-liking (z = .61; p > .05; z = 0.96; p > .05). However, a significantly higher correlation of these discrepancies was found with depression than with social anxiety (z =

4.66; *p* < .01; *z* = 5.91; *p* < .01). Additionally, the correlation between these discrepancies and self-competence was significantly higher than with actual-ought discrepancy (peers) (*z* = -3.42; *p* < .01; *z* =-2.61; *p* < .01), but no such difference was found for correlation with depression (*z* = 1.20; *p* > .05; *z* = 1.20; *p* > .05).

No higher correlation between actual-ought discrepancy (peers) and self-liking compared to self-competence was found (*z* = -0.09; *p* >.05). Unexpectedly, a higher correlation between actual-ought discrepancy (peers) and depression compared to social anxiety was found (*z* = 2.20; *p* < .01). Contrary to expectations, the correlation of actual-ought discrepancy (peers) with social anxiety and self-liking did not show higher level compared to actual-ideal discrepancy and actual-ought discrepancy (parents) and the correlation of self-liking with actual-ideal discrepancy is significantly higher (*z* = 1.91; *p* < .05) than with actual-ought discrepancy (peers).

Stepwise regression with discrepancies as predictors, and with BDI-II scores as the criterion, explained 24.1% variance, and all three predictors significantly contributed (H1): discrepancies from ideal (β=.218; *p* <.01) and parental (β=.215; *p* < .01) requests played a pivotal role in depression, confirming our hypothesis, and were stronger predictors compared to actual-ought (peers) discrepancy (β = .122; *p* < .01) (H2).

When checking if self-discrepancies are significant determinants of social anxiety, using LSAS-SR as a criterion, we explained a total of 10.7% of the variance and actual-ought discrepancy (parents) was excluded due to lack of statistical significance so our hypothesis wasn't confirmed (H3). As anticipated, the actual-ought discrepancy (peers) (β = .138; *p* < .01) emerged as a stronger predictor compared to the discrepancy in the actual-ought discrepancy (parents), but surprisingly, the actual-ideal discrepancy (β = .224; *p* < .01) emerged as even more powerful (H4).

To check the mediating role of the two dimensions of self-esteem in the relationship between discrepancy of self-concepts and depression and social

anxiety, we first checked if the two dimensions of self-esteem can be predicted through discrepancies. We predicted 21.8% of the variance of self-competence and, as expected based on the theory, only actual-ideal discrepancy (β = -.325; p < .01) and actual-ought discrepancy (parents) (β = -.174; p < .01) were significant predictors. We predicted 18.3% of variance of self-liking and, as supposed by theory, only actual-ideal discrepancy (β = -.355; p < .01) and actual-ought discrepancy (peers) (β = -.107; p < .05) were significant predictors.

The basic conditions for mediation were met. Expected significant predictions of criteria (BDI-II and LSAS-SR) and mediators (two dimensions of self-esteem) through predictors (discrepancies in self-concepts) were obtained, as described above. Also, significant predictions of criteria (BDI-II and LSAS-SR) through mediators (two dimensions of self-esteem) and a drop in the predictive power of the predictor after the introduction of the mediator can be seen in Table 2. As expected, actual-ought discrepancy by peers did not prove to be a significant predictor of self-competence, and the one by parents was not a significant predictor of self-liking. That aligns with the prediction that self-competence would be a mediating variable in the relationship between the discrepancies in self-concepts (actual-ideal and actual-ought discrepancy (parents)) and depression, as well as self-liking being a mediating variable in the relationship between the actual-ought discrepancy (peers) and social anxiety (Table 2). The only overlooked result was a prediction of self-liking through the actual-ideal discrepancy. It is possible that with a low actual-ideal discrepancy, when we are aligned with our ideals, we simultaneously like ourselves more, that is, we have higher self-liking.

Table 2

Self-competence/self-liking mediation in the relationship between self-concept discrepancies and depression/social anxiety

IV (x)	Actual-ought discrepancy (parents)				Actual-ought discrepancy (peers)				Actual-ideal discrepancy			
	EF	*SE*	*Boot*	*ES*	*EF*	*SE*	*Boot*	*ES*	*EF*	*SE*	*Boot*	*ES*
BDI-II (criterion) and self-competence (mediator)												
C	.14**	.04			.08*	.04			.13**	.04		
C'	.09*	.04			.09**	.03			.05	.03		
A	-.07*	.02			.02	.02			-.12**	.02		
B	-.73**	.08			-.73**	.08			-.73**	.08		
AB	.05*	.02	.02–.09	.06	-.01	.02	-.04–.01		.09**	.00	.02–.05	.11
LSAS-SR (criterion) and self-liking (mediator)												
C	-.03	.12			.23*	.10			.35**	.12		
C'	-.09	.09			.17	.09			.13	.10		
A	-.04	.03			-.04	.03			-.14**	.03		
B	-1.51**	.14			-1.51**	.14			-1.51**	.14		
AB	.06	.05	-.03–.16		.06	.04	-.01–.15		.22**	.05	.13–.32	.10

Note. IV (x) – independent variable, EF – unstandardized regression coefficient, SE – standard error, Boot – bootstrapping 95 % with 10,000 bootstrapping samples, ES – effect size (standardized direct effect X to Y), C – total effect of the independent variable, C' – direct effect of the independent variable, A – effect of the independent variable (x) on mediator (m), B – effect of mediator (m) on criterion (y), AB – indirect effect of the independent variable X on dependent variable Y via mediator M. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

The regression coefficient for depression is R=0.609 and predicts 37.8% of variance. As we expected, self-competence significantly mediates the relationship between actual-ought discrepancy (parents) and actual-ideal discrepancy with depression, and there is no significant mediation of the relationship between discrepancy based on peers and depression (H5). For the relationship between actual-ought discrepancy (parents) and depression, the mediating role of self-competence is partial (EF=.05, SE=.02, BootCI95=[.02-.09],

ES=.06) due to the sustained significance of the independent variable. For the relationship between actual-ideal discrepancy and depression, the mediating role of self-competence is complete (EF=.09, SE=.00, BootCl95=[.02-.05], ES=.11) since the independent variable loses significance after mediator inclusion.

The regression coefficient for social anxiety is R=0.536 and predicts a 28.7% of variance. We discovered complete mediation of self-liking in the relationship between actual-ideal discrepancy and social anxiety (EF=.22, SE=.05, BootCl95=[.13-.32], ES=.10), contrary to the hypothesis but in line with prior explanations (H6). As we expected, we did not find a significant mediating role of self-liking in the relationship between actual-ought discrepancy (parents) and social anxiety, but neither did we find the expected mediating role of self-liking in the relationship between actual-ought discrepancy (peers) and social anxiety. The direct effect of the independent variable in this model with self-liking as a moderator could not be conclusively determined (p =.053), although actual-ought discrepancy (peers) is a significant predictor of social anxiety based on regression analysis. Also, there is no mediating role of self-liking (indirect effect).

Due to the marginal predictive significance of actual-ought (peers) discrepancy for social anxiety via self-liking on the sample of girls (p =.06) and considering the assumptions related to differences in relationships between girls and boys, separate analyses were conducted by gender.

A separate mediation analysis on girls reveals a significant mediation of self-liking in the relationship between actual-ought discrepancy (peers) and social anxiety (EF=.11, SE=.04, BootCl95=[.03-.30], ES=.06).

Discussion

Our study aimed to explore the relationship of self-image discrepancies with depression and social anxiety (Higgins, 1987). By considering different dimensions of self-esteem, we conducted our research on high school students who are still dependant on parents but quite influenced by peers.

The levels of depression and social anxiety in our sample indicated that respondents were not predominantly depressive (Beck et al., 2011) and experienced average levels of anxiety (Rytwinski et al., 2009). This aligns with

the typical occurrence of social anxiety during adolescence, marked by increased importance of social interactions (Rapee & Spence, 2004). Our findings echoed those of other surveys (Dodig-Ćurković et al., 2013; Poljak & Begić, 2016; Rudan & Tomac, 2009; Thapar et al., 2010).

Notably, the highest discrepancy was found in the actual-ought self by parents, followed by peers. Adolescents, undergoing a phase of identity-seeking and striving for independence, often experience substantial disagreements with their parents (Laursen, Coy & Collins, 2017). Friends gain greater significance during this period, overshadowing the influence of parents (Erikson, 1968). Consequently, the actual-ought discrepancy by parents tends to be higher than by peers, reflecting the increased importance of peer opinions during adolescence, overshadowing the influence of parents, who may feel distant both physically and emotionally. Parents are typically the primary objects of attachment during childhood (Hinde & Lorenz, 1996), but in this period of life, friends became more relevant. Finally, the lowest actual-ideal discrepancy could have its roots in the importance of self-focus (Arnett, 2006a) in this period of life, i.e. adolescents are insecure about acceptance by friends and peer groups, but they may have an even more important orientation towards themselves, their identity, and what they want to become (their ideal self).

Correlations between all discrepancies and depression are similar (not significantly different one from another) and mostly very large (Funder & Ozer, 2019). Similarly, the correlations with social anxiety are statistically equal and fall into the category of medium-sized correlations. However, all three correlations with depression are significantly higher than with social anxiety. Individuals dealing with depression may struggle to fit into their social environment and might have a more pronounced actual-ought discrepancy by peers. In contrast, those with social anxiety might not experience as many discrepancies in their self-images, potentially because social anxiety is focused on the social aspect of life. Alignment with their parents' (ought self by parents) or peers (ought self by peers) and own desires (ideal selves) might still be intact, although they have high social anxiety. Some other studies (e.g., Bošković & Novković, 2011) showed social anxiety and actual-ideal discrepancy are not correlated at all. On the other

hand, results for actual-ought peer discrepancy prompt the question of whether it might have been more insightful to evaluate the connection based on one's best friend rather than a peer group. It's possible that lacking a best friend or actual-ought discrepancy of someone perceived as a best friend could amplify social anxiety and confirm our hypotheses. Drawing from Sullivan's theory (1953, by Klarin et al., 2014), intimate and friendly bonds between two individuals not only influence empathy, interest assessment, expectations, and emotional isolation but also self-image, although the specific aspect of self-image wasn't outlined.

The stepwise regression approach affirmed the anticipated higher predictive value of actual-ideal discrepancy and of actual-ought discrepancy (parents) for depression in comparison to actual-ought discrepancy (peers). It also demonstrated significant predictive power of actual-ought discrepancy (peers) for social anxiety albeit explaining less variance than actual-ideal discrepancy. This suggests that social anxiety might be higher in individuals dissatisfied with personal ideals and public presentation, making actual-ought discrepancy by peers less significant for some individuals. Higgins et al. (1985) suggest that the link between discrepancies and social anxiety depends on the importance of the significant other in one's self-image assessment. Additionally, this can be explained with other theories like the tetrapartite model of the self: individual, relational, public, and collective aspects of identity (Cheek & Cheek, 2020).

As expected, actual-ought discrepancy by parents significantly determined self-competence, and by peers significantly determined self-liking. Self-competence, as a construct, pertains to the perception of one's own competence in terms of abilities. Given that actual-ought discrepancy (parents) addresses the perception of not meeting the parents' expectations, it is understandable that this construct strongly predicts self-competence. Parents are highly influential for adolescents in terms of achievement, academic success, and future career choices. If adolescents fail to meet their parents' expectations (often tied to educational success and career aspirations), it's possible for them to experience reduced self-competence. For example, Yu et al. (2019) showed

that parental warmth promotes adolescent self-competence. Self-liking is socially conditioned and linked to appearance, character, social identity, and similar constructs (Tafarodi & Swan, 1995). Thus, it's logical that actual-ought discrepancy (peers) strongly predicts this aspect of self-esteem. Adolescents follow their peers and strive to fit in, so they conform to the expected appearance and behaviour, aligning with their peers' desires. Adolescents compare themselves with their peers and, based on this, they evaluate and enhance some aspects of self (Suls et al., 2002). Consequently, if they adapt to peer expectations of appearance, character, and social identity, they are more likely to have higher self-competence and like themselves more.

As expected, and as the regression analysis showed, actual-ought discrepancy (peers) is not a predictor of self-competence, and actual-ought discrepancy (parents) is not a predictor of self-liking. The predictive nature of actual-ideal discrepancy for self-liking was not hypothesized, but it is understandable that such a discrepancy would determine self-competence. It's likely that our ideal self assumes that we are competent and capable, just as it assumes that we like ourselves, i.e., that we are satisfied with our appearance, character, and social identity. One's social environment sets standards and ideals of beauty, peer acceptance (Younis, 1982), and social identity are crucial during adolescence in forming one's personality.

The mediation in the relationship between actual-ought discrepancy (parents) and depression through self-competence was partial, as expected, while in the case of actual-ideal discrepancy and depression through self-competence, it was complete. In other words, individuals with actual-ideal discrepancy or actual-ought discrepancy (parents) are less aligned with standards perceived as their own and their parents`, and therefore could have lower self-esteem. Since personal norms and ideals, as well as parental expectations and standards, are more aligned with one's competence and success in various fields, and self-competence is a dimension related to the perception of one's ability, purposefulness, and efficacy (Tafarodi & Swan, 1995), it is understandable that actual-ought (parents) and actual-ideal discrepancies are associated with the perception of own competence. Thus, as expected, the

discrepancy in these self-perceptions is linked to reduced self-competence, which further relates to poorer mood or depression. In this study and many earlier research studies (e.g., Manzoni & Lotar, 2011), self-competence is clearly linked to depression. Tafarodi and Swan (1995), also discuss the connection between self-competence and depression, noting that individuals with higher scores on this construct view themselves as effective, capable, and goal-oriented, while those with lower self-competence scores exhibit reduced motivation and a higher risk of developing depression and anxiety.

The assumed mediating effect of self-liking in the relationship between actual-ought discrepancy (peers) and social anxiety was not found. As expected, there was no statistically significant mediation in the relationship between actual-ought discrepancy (parents) and social anxiety, but statistically significant and complete mediation of self-liking was observed in the relationship between actual-ideal discrepancy and social anxiety. Although this was not hypothesized in the fundamental research hypotheses, we clarified earlier that this discrepancy can have predictive value for self-liking. On the other hand, self-liking, which is related to social anxiety, can serve as a mediator in the relationship between actual-ideal discrepancy and social anxiety. In other words, if we are aligned with our ideals, we like ourselves more (positive self-concept), and the fact that we like ourselves more can leads us to believe that others like us more as well, resulting in lower social anxiety.

The absence of self-liking as a mediator questions the appropriateness of assuming a substantial connection between social anxiety and actual-ought discrepancy (peers). Consideration of actual-ought discrepancy by close friends might provide additional insights, as research generally focuses on interactions within peer groups rather than close friendships. Studies generally indicate that socially anxious individuals have significantly fewer friends with whom they frequently socialize (Eng et al., 2001; Wittchen et al., 2000) and generally struggle with forming close relationships (Komadina et al., 2013). Medved and Keresteš's (2011) research on adolescents suggests that for girls, the predictor of loneliness is the absence of social support (e.g., from family), while for boys, sociometric status or peer groups are crucial. Furthermore, overall popularity (Putarek &

Keresteš, 2012 and 2016) significantly predicts loneliness which could be important in this context for both depression and social anxiety.

Some authors (e.g., Laursen & Williams, 1997) mention that cliques are more important in early adolescence, which was not covered in our study. Close friends become more important later. Also, Gabriel and Gardner (1999) showed that girls define themselves interdependently through close friendships, while boys do it more through groups (peers, sports, etc.). Mediation analysis by gender showed discrepancy with peer expectations is a determinant of social anxiety through mediation with self-liking, but only in the girls' sample.

This study, despite some limitations in sample size and self-assessment methods, contributes to understanding self-discrepancy theory through a variety of dimensions, especially concerning significant others, and additional mediation through dimensions of self-esteem. In practical terms, the study emphasizes the importance of self-discrepancy in emotional problems, potentially altering the focus of counselling and psychotherapeutic support for social anxiety and depression. It also recommends measuring two-dimensional self-esteem as a useful practice.

Conflict of interest

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Data availability statement

Data used in this paper are available upon a reasonable request.

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