

# Self-Consciousness, Self-Efficacy and Psychological Reactance in University Students

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<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2024.13.4.28>

## Abstract

*The present study explores the relationship between self-consciousness, self-efficacy, and psychological reactance in university students. Stratified random sampling was used, and data from 300 university students, including 150 males and 150 females, was taken from BS students. To take a homogenous sample, 150 students were hostilities, and 150 were day scholars with an equal gender ratio. The self-consciousness Scale by (Fenigntin et al., 1975), the Self-efficacy Scale by (Chen et al., 2001), and the Psychological Reactance Scale by (Hong, 1992) were used with a Demographical form for the data collection. A cross-sectional Correlational research design was used. The study results showed a significant positive correlation between self-consciousness and psychological reactance as there is a negative correlation between self-efficacy and psychological reactance. The role of gender difference also existed, as male university students showed more self-consciousness and self-efficacy than female university students. Also, resident university students react more psychologically to self-efficacy than day scholars.*

**Keywords:** Self-consciousness, Self-efficacy, Psychological reactance, University Students

## Introduction

Transitioning from college to university is a significant change for students. This transition comes with a series of responsibilities, extra hard work, and a constant need to meet people's expectations. All these changes can be challenging for students because they require high self-esteem, a firm belief in one's capabilities, cognitive flexibility, and great coping strategies. The absence of any one of these factors can lead to multiple academic, emotional, and behavioral issues (Mulaudzi, 2023).

Many emotions and feelings within individuals help them deal with various issues that arise in their lives and improve their perceptions and even thinking processes. However, the problem occurs when these feelings exceed a certain healthy level. *Self-consciousness* is defined as an individual's high evaluation of self. When they enter the university, students are very conscious about how they look, behave, and think (Ganieva, 2021). They keep re-evaluating themselves in every aspect as they want to be approved by others. Although self-consciousness helps students monitor their thoughts, behaviors, and feelings, when they start to analyze every aspect of their lives, it leads to many negative consequences (Ejaz & Muazzam, 2021).

When they enter the university, they try their best to be accepted by everyone and do their best. Still, university life is very different from college life in many aspects, as explained above. The

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increased workload, new peers, and high expectations can make them doubt their capabilities (Al-Abyadh & Abdel Azeem, 2022). Self-efficacy is an essential component of being successful in life as it ensures that an individual has trust in his capabilities and knows that he can achieve anything that he wants. This self-confidence enables him to work hard and have an optimistic view of the future. Self-efficacy increases students' motivation, academic achievement, and self-confidence (Zysberg & Schwabsky, 2021). It helps them set and achieve appropriate goals because it increases their problem-solving skills. Students with high self-efficacy tend to focus on their strengths and logically analyze the feedback provided to them to improve themselves. Such students have good cognitive flexibility and healthy social relationships with others (Deniz, 2021).

Focusing on feedback and learning from one's mistakes is essential to move forward and help students improve themselves. Entering university comes with the feeling of independence and autonomy. University students engage in new experiences and enjoy a sense of agency. All these changes can sometimes lead them towards egocentrism, and they tend to become very rigid (Clayton, 2022). Rather than positively taking suggestions and opinions from others, they become resilient and develop psychological reactance in themselves. Psychological reactance is the feeling that others threaten their independence and that people around them want to control them. Due to these thoughts, they try to develop a strong motivation to restore their sense of agency. This feeling peaks during middle or late adolescence (Rosenberg & Siegel, 2023).

The intensity of psychological reactance in adolescents depends on two factors. The first factor is the significance of the freedom under threat, and the second factor is the level of threat that the individual is experiencing. Feeling of high psychological reactance can lead to various emotional and behavioral issues. Psychologically, they become very rigid and develop a negative view of others. Behaviorally, they become aggressive, arrogant, and hostile; all these factors negatively impact their social relationships and academic performance and hinder their ability to move forward. The theory of psychological reactance also highlights that an individual will feel threatened if he feels his freedoms are threatened. University life is filled with innumerable challenges and requires a student to be confident about his strengths, have effective coping strategies, and work on his weaknesses (Reynolds-Tylus et al., 2021). The present study highlighted a significant relationship between self-consciousness, self-efficacy, and psychological reactance.

## Literature Review

University students have always been the focus of many research studies. This time period brings a lot of responsibilities and challenges for the students; although they do enjoy the feeling of independence that comes with this stage, it becomes tough for them to deal with the transition effectively. The inability to deal with these issues can lead to negative consequences, such as poor decision-making skills and academic performance (Alkhaldeh et al., 2023).

One of the major causes of these negative consequences is the student's extreme self-consciousness. A research study conducted on 538 students highlighted a significant relationship between self-consciousness and depression. Certain self-consciousness is essential for students to move toward their goals, but extremely high- or low-level self-consciousness can lead to negative consequences (Yuan et al., 2024). High self-consciousness in students is significantly related to constant doubt in one's capabilities, and it also reduces an individual's flexibility to understand another person's point of view (Ejaz & Muazzam, 2021).

Self-efficacy refers to the trust an individual has in his own abilities. A research study conducted on 860 participants emphasized the significant role of self-efficacy in predicting academic

achievement. It was highlighted that students who have high self-efficacy are not afraid to work hard; they acknowledge their strengths as well as weaknesses. Such students are more determined to succeed (Lei et al., 2022).

Students with high self-efficacy have high motivation and consistently believe they can achieve their goals irrespective of the challenges and issues that come their way. Bandura's social learning theory also supports this concept. This faith significantly improves their academic performance and decision-making skills. Self-efficacy is significantly related to proactive behavior. Students with high self-efficacy are likelier to set higher and more realistic goals. They keep learning new skills and use problem-focused coping rather than emotional-focused strategies. These factors increase their confidence and academic achievement and strengthen their relationships with others (Choveaux & Leng, 2024).

Another essential characteristic of self-efficacy is that it enables an individual to understand other people's perspectives. Such individual learns from their mistakes, consider feedback, and improve themselves. A research study highlighted a significant relationship between self-efficacy and psychological reactance. Students who have poor self-efficacy are more likely to have high psychological reactance. Psychological reactance is the motivational force that pushes an individual to regain his freedom. In adolescence, students usually receive a lot of opinions and feedback from others so that they can improve themselves. Still, sometimes, students start to think that these opinions and suggestions are taking their freedom away. This feeling brings outbursts of emotions and negative behaviors, which can negatively impact their performance and social relationships (Yan et al., 2024).

The detailed literature review highlighted the challenges and issues faced by university students and how they can significantly impact various domains of their lives. The researchers emphasized the importance of self-efficacy and a balanced level of self-consciousness. The present study aimed to explore how self-efficacy and self-consciousness lead to psychological reactions in adolescents.

## Hypotheses

- The present study hypothesized that there would be a significant positive relationship between self-consciousness and psychological reactance in university students.
- The present study hypothesized that there would be a significant negative correlation between self-efficacy and psychological reactance in university students.
- There would be significant gender differences in self-consciousness, self-efficacy, and psychological reactance.
- There would be a significant difference in university students' self-consciousness, self-efficacy, and psychological reactions depending on whether they are residents or day scholars.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The present study used a cross-sectional correlational research design to assess the relationship between self-consciousness, self-efficacy, and psychological reactions in university students.

### Sample

A stratified sample of (N=300) consisted of an equal number of (n=150) male and (n=150) female university students. The sample's age range was 19-30 (M=27.12, SD=1.07). Data was collected from public and private sector universities of Lahore. University students who were married were excluded from the study. Moreover, university students who had any physical disability were also

excluded.

## **Measures**

### **Demographics Sheet**

A demographics sheet consisted of personal information. It included age, gender (male, female), studying in (the BS semester), and students as (resident and day scholars).

### **Self-Consciousness Scale**

Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss developed the Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS) in 1975. It is a 23-item questionnaire that assesses public and private self-consciousness and social anxiety. Participants indicate their self-consciousness and anxiety on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (extremely uncharacteristic) to 4 (extremely characteristic) in terms of how characteristic each item is of them (Fenigstein et al., 1975).

### **Self-efficacy Scale**

Chen et al. (2001) developed the self-efficacy Scale. It consisted of 26 items, and responses were marked on a 4-point Likert scale.

### **Hong's Psychological Reactance Scale**

Hong's Psychological Reactance Scale (Hong, 1992) is the most commonly used instrument. It was developed by Hong and Page in 1989 and revised in 1992. It has 14 items. Responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree (De las et al., 2014). The Cronbach's alpha, or reliability value, of the Scale was .80 (Shen & Dillard, 2005).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations for the study were as follows:

- Prior permission for the use of questionnaires was sought from the respective authors.
- Informed consent was taken from the concerned authorities and individuals.
- Anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of the data was maintained.
- Participants of the study were given the right to withdraw at any point in the research.

### **Procedure**

The research was started in an orderly by acquiring permission from the Scale authors for data collection. Formal authority letters were sought from the Institute for data collection. After this, the questionnaires were administered to determine the university students' willingness to fulfill the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Individuals were chosen based on their availability and interest. The participants were guaranteed the right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Each set of questionnaires required around 10-15 minutes for administration.

## **Results**

This study aimed to find the relationship between self-consciousness, self-efficacy, and psychological reactance in university students.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Demographics (N=300)**

| Variable     | <i>f</i> (%) | <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) |
|--------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Age          |              | 17.12(1.07)            |
| 19-22        | 105 (38)     |                        |
| 23-26        | 105 (38)     |                        |
| 27-30        | 90 (24)      |                        |
| Gender       |              |                        |
| Female       | 150 (50)     |                        |
| Male         | 150 (50)     |                        |
| Students     |              |                        |
| Day scholar  | 150 (50)     |                        |
| Hostel elite | 150 (50)     |                        |

Note. *F*= Frequency, % = Percentage, *M*= Mean, *SD*= Standard Deviation

The table above shows the percentage and frequency of the demographical variable in terms of gender and if those students are day scholar or resident.

### Correlational Analysis

**Table 2: Correlation among Self-Consciousness, Self-efficacy and Psychological Reactance among University Students (N=300)**

| Variables               | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4       |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| Self- Consciousness     | –     | .37** | .28** | -.47*** |
| Self-efficacy           | –     | –     | .26** | -.18*   |
| Psychological Reactance |       |       |       | –       |
| <i>M</i>                | 16.30 | 11.68 | 51.90 |         |
| <i>SD</i>               | 3.33  | 3.51  | 7.46  |         |

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

It was revealed through the correlational analysis that self-consciousness had a significant positive correlation with self-efficacy and significant negative correlation with psychological reactance. However, self-efficacy also has a significant negative correlation with psychological reactance.

**Table 3: Multiple Regression analysis predicting Psychological Reactance (N=300)**

| Psychological Reactance |          |                 |           |
|-------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|
| Variables               | <i>B</i> | 95.0% <i>CI</i> |           |
|                         |          | <i>LL</i>       | <i>UL</i> |
| Constant                | 34.78*** | 26.41           | 43.14     |
| Self-consciousness      | .51**    | .10             | .91       |
| Self-efficacy           | .38**    | -.20            | .54       |
| Total $R^2$             | .11      |                 |           |
| <i>F</i>                | 5.99     |                 |           |
| $\Delta F$              | 5.99     |                 |           |

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; *B* = Unstandardized Co efficient,  $\Delta F$ = *F* change

Results explained that the self-consciousness and self-efficacy are the significant predictors of psychological reactance in university students.

**Table 4: Independent Sample t –test for Gender Difference on Self-consciousness, Self-efficacy and Psychological Reactance among University Students**

| Variables               | Male     |           | Female   |           | <i>t</i> (df) | <i>P</i> | 95% CI |      | Cohen's <i>D</i> |
|-------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|---------------|----------|--------|------|------------------|
|                         | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |               |          | LL     | UL   |                  |
| Self-Consciousness      | 18.82    | 3.01      | 9.86     | 3.06      | 2.09(148)     | .005***  | 0.58   | 2.02 | 0.34             |
| Self-efficacy           | 15.30    | 3.28      | 17.30    | 3.10      | 3.83(148)     | .004***  | .96    | 3.03 | 0.62             |
| Psychological Reactance | 51.04    | 7.46      | 53.77    | 7.52      | -.21(148)     | .02**    | -2.68  | 2.15 | 0.03             |

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; *CI*= Confidence Interval, *M*= Mean, *SD*= Standard Deviation, *LL*= Lower Limit, *UL*= Upper Limit

Results of the table above reflects that role of gender is very dominant in explanation of self-consciousness, self-efficacy and psychological reactance among university students. Male university students score higher than females in self-consciousness and self-efficacy however, female university students score more than male university student on psychological reactance.

**Table 5: Independent Sample t –test for Resident and Day scholar University Students on Self-consciousness, Self-efficacy and Psychological Reactance**

| Variables               | Resident |           | Day Scholar |           | <i>t</i> (df) | <i>p</i> | 95% CI |      | Cohen's <i>D</i> |
|-------------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|---------------|----------|--------|------|------------------|
|                         | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>    | <i>SD</i> |               |          | LL     | UL   |                  |
| Self-Consciousness      | 18.82    | 3.01      | 9.86        | 3.06      | 2.09(148)     | .025     | 0.58   | 2.02 | 0.34             |
| Self-efficacy           | 25.30    | 3.28      | 17.30       | 3.10      | 3.83(148)     | .005***  | .96    | 3.03 | 0.62             |
| Psychological Reactance | 81.04    | 7.46      | 53.77       | 7.52      | -.21(148)     | .004***  | -2.68  | 2.15 | 0.03             |

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; *CI*= Confidence Interval; *M*= Mean; *SD*= Standard Deviation, *LL*= Lower Limit; *UL*= Upper Limit

Results of the table above reflected that there was no significant difference existed in university students in terms of self-consciousness. However, resident university students showed higher score on self-efficacy and psychological reactance.

### Concluding Remarks

In Pakistan, minimal literature exists on self-consciousness, self-efficacy, and psychological reactance; these variables have not been studied much—the present study aimed to explore the relationship between self-consciousness, self-efficacy, and psychological reactance in adolescents. Correlational, prediction, and independent sample t-test analysis were proposed and analyzed using the results. Results of the present study indicated a positive relationship between self-consciousness and psychological reactance in university students. Previous literature was also by this result. Similarly, Carver & Scheier (2019) researched male and female adolescents and

proposed that individuals with high self-consciousness are more psychologically reactant (Carver & Scheier, 2019).

Similar results were presented by Millar (2007), who examined how anger interacted with public self-consciousness to influence aggressive driving or reactant behavior. The results indicated that self-consciousness (public self-consciousness) is positively associated with aggressive driving and reactant behavior in adolescents (Miller, 2007). The results of this research supported the results of the present study as well (Miller, 2007). Likewise, Tangney (2016) also found that those students who exhibit more self-conscious emotions are more likely to externalize behavior, show poor self-efficacy, and are psychologically reactant. Such students experience intense anger and express that anger in destructive ways, including direct physical, verbal, and symbolic aggression (Tangney, 2016). Multiple types of research conducted in the past support the results of the present study as enlisted in the review of the previous literature.

### Suggestions and Implications

Future studies could also focus on their relationship with other variables to understand the relationship between different variables of self-consciousness and psychological reactance. In the future, other demographics like income, socioeconomic status, and lack of siblings should also be studied to understand better what factors lead to self-consciousness, self-efficacy, and psychological reactance in university students. However, the present study highlighted how self-consciousness is a risk factor for developing adverse outcomes such as psychological reactance in adolescents because they are significantly related. The results of this study can emphasize the importance of positive self-consciousness and enhancement of self-efficacy in university students, which may lead to healthy outcomes.

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