

INTRODUCTION

The Spiral of Silence Theory propounded by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann has been the fundamental basis for understanding the changes in public opinion. But a major component of the theory, that people fear social isolation has not been tested experimentally. Though Noelle-Neumann herself conducted some field experiments and not as a variable. Here, I replicate an experiment done by Shoemaker, Breen and Stamper to test the assumption of fear of social isolation.

HYPOTHESES

- The more a person fears negative evaluation, the less discrepancy there will be between the person's opinion and perception of the predominant opinion.
- The more a person fears negative evaluation, the less likely he or she will be to discuss a minority opinion.

METHOD

I used a survey to collect data about certain variables (mentioned in the results section) on a Likert scale. To determine FNE, I used six variables out of thirty of the scale forwarded by Watson and Friend way back in 1969. I presented the survey to the respondents in two separate parts to avoid them from guessing the hypotheses. Then, I used the Pearson correlational coefficient analysis to determine the validity of the claims.

RESULTS

The survey form was answered by **81 individuals**. As constrained by the nature of questions, all of them were from engineering background (mainly from IITs). Gender break-up was **13 girls and 67 boys** while a single respondent refrained from revealing gender. Results are tabulated in table 1.

TABLE 1

Sr. No.	Variables	Mean
1	Individual's opinion*	2.92
2	Individual's perception of predominant opinion*	2.68
3	Discrepancy between opinion and perception of predominant opinion**	1.04
4	Willingness to express individual opinion***	3.41
5	I worry about seeming foolish to others*	3.09
6	I worry about what people think of me even when I know it doesn't make any difference*	3.09
7	I become tense and jittery when I know somebody is keenly assessing me*	3.42
8	Other people's opinion do not bother me (Reverse Coded)****	2.91
9	When I am talking to someone, I worry what they may be thinking about me*	3.27
10	I often worry that people who are important to me won't think very much of me*	3.12
11	Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) Index	19.07

*5=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree

**Absolute difference between two Likert scales

***5=very likely, 1=highly unlikely

****1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree

FNE is taken as sum of the six individual items above

GENDER VARIATIONS:

I found no real difference between the FNE of males and females. In fact, contrary to expected results, **FNE of males was slightly more than that of females**. This may be attributed to lopsided demographics of the sample set and it is completely possible that we may obtain expected result from a more unbiased sample set.

Gender	FNE
Male	19.04
Female	19

CORRELATIONAL COEFFICIENTS:

In a major blow to my hypothesis, absolutely no correlation was found between either FNE and discrepancy of opinions or FNE and willingness to express individual opinions in public. Original experimenters had obtained a moderately high correlation between the same variables and they expected better results in subsequent experiments with different subject (the manner in which I have done). I have used the same Pearson correlational coefficient formula as used by the authors.

Variables	Correlational Coefficient
FNE and discrepancy of opinions	0.12
FNE and willingness to express opinion	-0.07

CONCLUSIONS

As we can see from table 1, clearly there is a similarity between individual's opinion and individual's perception of predominant opinion. Thus, there was a minimum discrepancy between the two opinion variables, yielding an opinion discrepancy score of 1.04 which is expected to be even less for a larger sample set. Respondents were also, in general, likely to express their opinions in public irrespective of the dominant opinion in a discussion, which can be supported by the willingness to express individual opinion score of 3.41.

I was not able to compute any significant correlation between FNE and tendency to express minority opinion as well as FNE and discrepancy between opinions. Yes, there was minimum discrepancy between the opinions, but that was not in any way related to FNE. Irrespective of their FNE scores, people placed their opinions very close to each other. Also, people tend to voice their opinions irrespective of their FNE score.

I also cannot determine any considerable gender bias in FNE ratings. Perhaps, this was due to very less number of female respondents.

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