Behavioral Assessment of Social Phobia Among Adolescents
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Social Phobia is an anxiety disorder characterized by excessive social anxiety. Features include: (a) extreme shyness; (b) fear of scrutiny, embarrassment, and negative evaluation; and (c) avoidance of social situations or endurance with distress. Most research on the assessment of Social Phobia has used adult participants and focused largely on development of structured diagnostic interviews and self-report instruments.

Research with adults has identified a cluster of global behavioral ratings that are related to social anxiety. Social anxiety tends to be positively related to ratings of anxiety and self-consciousness, while negatively related to ratings of social skill, assertiveness, and friendliness (Arkowitz, Lichtenstein, McGovern, & Hines, 1975; Beidel, Turner, & Dancu, 1985; Johnson & Glass, 1989; Pilkonis, 1977; Segrin & Kinney, 1995; Twentyman & McFall, 1975).

Social Phobia is a disorder with onset typically during adolescence (Amies, Gelder & Shaw, 1983). Yet, most findings with adults have not been extended to adolescents. Hence, it is important to extend adult findings on the behavioral assessment of Social Phobia to an adolescent population.

This study examined differences in global behavioral ratings between adolescents with and without a diagnosis of Social Phobia. When observed during social anxiety-provoking behavioral tasks, socially phobic adolescents were expected to be rated as more anxious and self-conscious, while less socially skilled, assertive, and friendly, compared to normal controls.

Method
Participants
- 70 adolescents (35 males, 35 females).
- Age: 13 to 17 years ($M = 14.89$, $SD = 1.42$).
- Recruited from local community.

Diagnostic Assessment
- Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule for DSM-IV (ADIS-C; Silverman & Albano, 1996).
- 100% diagnostic agreement on random 25% subset of interviews.
- Final diagnostic groups:
  - 27 Social phobic (13 male, 14 female).
  - 43 Normal control (22 male, 21 female).

Behavioral Assessment
Participants completed two behavioral tasks:
- 10 minute conversation with a same-sex stranger.
- 10 minute impromptu speech before small audience.

Global Behavioral Measures
Following each behavioral task, participants were rated by a live observer on each of the following dimensions (using a 1-7 Likert scale):
- Anxiety.
- Self-consciousness.
- Social skill.
- Assertiveness.
- Friendliness.

Live observers included either:
- Conversation partner (conversation task).
- Audience member (speech task).

Results

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Discussion
As predicted, the observable behavior of adolescents during a socially anxiety-provoking situation was distinct from that of normal adolescents. Youth diagnosed with Social Phobia were observably more anxious and self-conscious, while less socially skilled, assertive, and friendly, compared to nonanxious peers. That pattern not only extended to adolescents from prior research with adults, but also held consistently across two separate anxiety-provoking situations.

It was also important to note that differences in global behavioral ratings were rendered by untrained observers (i.e., undergraduate research assistants serving as conversation partners and/or audience members). That suggested that potentially meaningful and readily observable differences in anxiety-related behavior can likely be detected and quantified by even untrained or minimally trained observers.

References