



Comparison of Social Phobia Subtypes Using Stroop Tests

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Abstract — Patients with circumscribed speech phobia, generalized social phobia, and generalized social phobia with avoidant personality disorder were assessed with modified Stroop color-naming tests. The two generalized social phobia groups demonstrated cognitive interference on a General Social Stimuli Stroop Test (e.g., *party*), which was not evident in the circumscribed speech phobia group. As expected, cognitive interference was manifested across all groups in a Specific Speech Stimuli Stroop Test (e.g., *speech*). Interference effects were found among all groups in a Negative Social Evaluative Stroop Test (e.g., *foolish*) as well. No differences were noted on any test between the generalized social phobia patients with and without avoidant personality disorder. Results support the distinctiveness of the circumscribed speech phobia group. Together with the similarity of response between the generalized social phobia groups with and without avoidant personality disorder, findings are consistent with contemporary conceptualizations of subtypes of social phobia.

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Support is accumulating for distinctions among subtypes of social anxiety* and phobia (Heimberg, Holt, Schneier, Spitzer, & Liebowitz, 1993). There is evidence for a circumscribed subtype of social anxiety and phobia, most commonly focused on public speaking (e.g., Boone, McNeil, & Lewin, submitted for publication; Heimberg, Hope, Dodge, & Becker, 1990; Levin et al., 1993; McNeil & Lewin, submitted for publication; McNeil, Vrana, Melamed, Cuthbert, & Lang, 1993; Turner, Beidel, & Townsley, 1992). It has also been suggested that there is a nongeneralized subtype of social phobia specifically affecting social interactions, in which discrete social anxieties may coexist, but with other social functioning that is not a problem (Heimberg et al., 1993; Herbert, Hope, & Bellack, 1992; Holt, Heimberg, & Hope, 1992). A generalized subtype of social phobia has been delineated in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, third edition, revised (DSM-III-R; American Psychiatric Association, 1987). The criterion is that there is anxiety in most social situations.

Using DSM-III-R criteria, avoidant personality disorder can be diagnosed concomitantly with generalized social phobia. Empirical studies (Herbert et al., 1992; Holt et al., 1992; Turner et al., 1992) have found that avoidant personality disorder and generalized social phobia overlap, further suggesting that avoidant personality disorder may be a more severe instantiation of generalized social phobia (cf. Widiger, 1992). In these investigations, there was a relative abundance of cases of social phobia, generalized type, in which the individual did not meet criteria for avoidant personality disorder; examples of avoidant personality disorder without coexisting generalized social phobia were very rare. Turner et al. (1992) had no cases of specific subtypes of social phobia in which avoidant personality disorder was also present.

Investigations on subtypes of social anxiety and phobia, like those of other anxieties and anxiety disorders, have been conducted from a three-systems perspective (Lang, 1968), assessing the realms of verbal report, psychophysiological response, and overt behavior. Typically, interviews and questionnaires, measures reflecting autonomic response, and ratings of social skill during behavioral tasks have been employed in this research. Within the last 10 years, cognitive psychology methods for studying attention, memory, and other cognitive processes have been applied to assessing anxiety and its disorders (Dalglish & Watts, 1990; Logan & Goetsch, 1993). Stroop color-naming (Stroop, 1935) is one such methodology that has been modified for use in anxiety research.

In one of the original Stroop color-naming tasks (Stroop, 1935), subjects performed significantly more slowly on a task involving incongruent stimuli (i.e., color words in antagonistic ink colors) than on naming solid-color squares. This phenomenon is the Stroop interference effect (Stroop, 1935). A

*Recent data (McNeil, Vrana, Melamed, Cuthbert, & Lang, 1993) suggest response differences between anxiety and fear. Some social concerns may most appropriately be thought of as based on anxiety (e.g., generalized social phobia) and others on fear (e.g., circumscribed speech phobia). Nevertheless, more research is needed for clarification, so for simplicity, only the term anxiety will be used in this paper. The word phobia refers to extreme forms of anxiety and/or fear, consistent with DSM-III-R criteria.

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