

Social anxiety and the interpretation of positive social events

Lynn E. Alden^{a,*}, Charles T. Taylor^b, Tanna M.J.B. Mellings^a, Judith M. Laposa^c

^a University of British Columbia, Canada

^b Massachusetts General Hospital, United States

^c Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Canada

Received 20 March 2007; received in revised form 17 May 2007; accepted 18 May 2007

Abstract

We report four independent studies that examined the relationship between social interaction anxiety and the tendency to interpret positive social events in a threat-maintaining manner. Study 1 described the development of a scale that measures negative interpretations of positive social events, the interpretation of positive events scale (IPES). Study 2 cross-validated the structure of the IPES and established that social interaction anxiety explained significant variance in negative interpretations of positive social events beyond negative affect in general. Study 3 demonstrated that negative interpretation of positive events was significantly greater in a clinical sample of patients with generalized social anxiety disorder (GSAD) than a matched group of non-anxious community controls. In addition, within the GSAD group, the IPES was associated with negative social predictions following a positive interaction. Finally, study 4 confirmed that negative interpretations of positive social events mediated the relationship between social interaction anxiety and low positive affect.

© 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Social anxiety disorder; Positive affect; Negative interpretation

Research indicates that social anxiety and social anxiety disorder (SAD) are accompanied by low positive affect (Brown, Chorpita, & Barlow, 1998; Hughes et al., 2006; Kashdan, 2002, 2004). This deficiency is notable in that positive affect (PA) has been shown to have beneficial effects on human functioning. For example, PA helps to regulate, and facilitate recovery from, the physiological and behavioral effects of negative emotions (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004), serves to broaden and expand the individual's thought–action repertoire, and facilitates social approach behaviors (e.g., Folkman

& Moskowitz, 2000; Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2003; Reiss & Gable, 2003). Socially anxious people, in contrast, are prone to negative emotional states, engage in social avoidance, and often lead restricted lives. Understanding the link between social anxiety and low PA might shed light on those deficiencies, as well as point to treatment strategies to overcome them. In this paper, we examine one factor that might contribute to the relationship between low PA and social anxiety/SAD, namely that socially anxious people fail to savor positive social experiences because they interpret those events in ways that maintain, rather than reduce, anxiety.

The first indication of hedonic deficiencies in social anxiety came from research conducted within the tripartite framework of emotional disorders proposed by Clark and Watson (1991). According to the proposed model, depression and anxiety share the common

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4, Canada.
Tel.: +1 604 822 2198; fax: +1 604 822 6923.

E-mail address: lalden@psych.ubc.ca (L.E. Alden).

feature of high negative affect (NA), depression is distinguished by low positive affect (PA), and anxiety is distinguished by physiological arousal (e.g., Clark & Watson, 1991; Watson et al., 1995). Subsequent research indicated that social anxiety was the exception to the rule, in that social anxiety was found to be associated with low PA as well as high NA (Chorpita, Plummer, & Moffitt, 2000; Hughes et al., 2006; Watson, Clark, & Carey, 1988). Those findings were reinforced by research demonstrating that social anxiety is associated with lower levels of curiosity, exploration, and life satisfaction, which are characteristics believed to stem from PA (e.g., Kashdan & Roberts, 2004).

Signs of hedonic dysregulation also emerged in the realm of cognitive judgments. Hirsch and Mathews (2000) found that SAD was associated with an absence of the positive inferential bias that maintains self-esteem in non-anxious people. Gilboa-Schechtman, Franklin, and Foa (2000) found that SAD patients both underestimated the likelihood and over-estimated the cost of positive social outcomes. Similarly, SAD participants who were presented with positive feedback from a friendly partner expected to be more anxious in a second interaction than did a comparison group of SAD participants (Alden, Mellings, & Laposa, 2004). In addition, after receiving positive feedback, people with SAD predicted that their partner would expect more from them in the next interaction and that they would fall short of those expectations (Alden & Wallace, 1995; Wallace & Alden, 1997).

A number of factors undoubtedly play a role in the link between social anxiety and low PA. For one thing, social contacts have a major impact on happiness and subjective well-being (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), and the social inhibition that arises from social anxiety and SAD is likely to reduce the frequency of such events. In addition, socially anxious people selectively ignore positive social information in favor of negative information (Veljaca & Rapee, 1998). Therefore, socially anxious people may experience fewer events that elicit PA and not attend to positive social outcomes when they do occur.

However, what about situations in which positive events cannot be ignored? Contemporary cognitive theories of generalized SAD (GSAD) propose that negative predictions and judgments play a crucial role in the onset and maintenance of social anxiety (Clark & Wells, 1995; Rapee & Heimberg, 1997). According to these theorists, negative beliefs heighten social apprehension, which directs attention toward anxiety-related internal cues. Self-focused attention, in turn leads to negative biases in social judgments, which reinforce

pre-existing beliefs and maintain a self-perpetuating cognitive-emotional cycle (Clark & Wells, 1995; Rapee & Heimberg, 1997). The cognitive studies reviewed above suggest one explanation for the link between social anxiety and low PA, namely that the negative interpretative style that characterizes the social judgments of socially anxious and SAD people extends to their interpretations of overtly positive events, thereby diminishing pleasure in what to others are enjoyable and encouraging experiences. Deprived of positive subjective experiences, this tendency might then lead to a chronic state of low PA.

An alternative explanation is that low PA arises from the comorbid depression that frequently accompanies social anxiety and SAD (Ingram, Kendall, Smith, Donnell, & Ronan, 1987; Schneier, Johnson, Hornig, Liebowitz, & Weissman, 1992). Anhedonia, or an inability to experience enjoyment, is a key feature of depression. Arguing against that possibility is a recent study by Kashdan (2004) that revealed that social interaction anxiety was associated with hedonic deficits above and beyond depressive symptoms and non-specific anxiety. Those findings suggest that there is a unique association between social interaction anxiety and low PA, and point to the need to identify the factors that explain that relationship.

In this paper, we report the results of four studies that examined social anxiety and positive affect in four samples of research participants. We focus on social interaction anxiety because this is a core problem for people with GSAD. The first study began with reports about the meaning and consequences of positive social experiences garnered from people with GSAD and used these reports to develop a measure of interpretation of positive social events. Study 2 cross-validated the original scale and examined the discriminant validity of the measure relative to other measures of anxiety-related cognition. In Study 3, we examined whether the interpretation of positive events scale distinguished GSAD patients from matched community controls, and if so, whether that relationship remained when depression was controlled. We also assessed whether interpretation of positive events affected GSAD patients' responses to a social interaction task. Finally, we considered whether the negative interpretation of positive events mediated the relationship between social anxiety and low PA.

In line with cognitive models of SAD, we hypothesized that the negative cognitive biases that characterize social anxiety extend to judgments of positive events as well, and that this judgmental bias would be associated with social anxiety even when comorbid depressive symptoms were controlled. We also predicted that

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات