



Interpersonal correlates of generalized anxiety disorder: Self versus other perception[☆]

Winnie Eng^a, Richard G. Heimberg^{b,*}

^a College of Staten Island, The City University of New York, New York, NY, USA

^b Adult Anxiety Clinic, Department of Psychology, Weiss Hall, Temple University,
1701 North 13th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19122-6085, USA

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Abstract

The present investigation examined the interpersonal functioning of undergraduate students who met self-report criteria for generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), both as they perceive it and as perceived by their self-nominated friends. Forty-eight participants who met self-report criteria for GAD endorsed greater global severity of interpersonal problems on the 64-item version of the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems [Horowitz, L. M., Alden, L. E., Wiggins, J. S., Pincus, A. L. (2000). *Inventory of Interpersonal Problems: Manual*. San Antonio, TX: The Psychological Corporation] than 53 control participants. However, friends of GAD participants did not attribute significantly greater interpersonal problems to them than did friends of control participants. GAD participants reported less secure attachment to their parents than control participants but reported similar levels of attachment to peers and perceived social support. Furthermore, there were no significant differences between the friends of the GAD participants and friends of the control participants on ratings of their friendships quality. Findings are discussed in the context of their relevance to the etiology, maintenance, and treatment of GAD.

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 215 204 1575; fax: +1 215 204 5184.
E-mail address: heimberg@temple.edu (R.G. Heimberg).

Recent studies suggest that persons with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) may experience significant difficulties in interpersonal functioning. An examination of prevalent worry themes (Dugas, Gagnon, Ladouceur, & Freeston, 1998), comorbid social anxiety (Brown, Campbell, Lehman, Grisham, & Mancill, 2001), insecure attachment relationships (Cassidy, 1995; Zuellig, Newman, Kachin, & Constantino, 1997) and marital dissatisfaction (Whisman, Sheldon, & Goering, 2000) suggests the importance of this area of study. However, no published research to date has compared the interpersonal difficulties reported by persons with GAD to how they are perceived by others in their interpersonal world. The present study assessed how young men and women meeting self-reported criteria for GAD describe their current interpersonal difficulties. These data were compared to close friends' reports of participants' interpersonal problems and the perceived quality of their friendships. In addition, specific patterns of interpersonal relatedness, characterized by attachment orientation and perceived social support, were investigated as potential correlates of GAD. It was hypothesized that participants with self-reported GAD would show higher levels of interpersonal problems than non-anxious participants. Close friends were expected to describe the GAD group as having greater interpersonal problems than friends of persons in the control group, with accompanying negative evaluations of the quality of their friendship. It was also hypothesized that the GAD group would report lower levels of attachment security to both parents and peers than the non-anxious group based on previous research.

The sample consisted of 48 undergraduate psychology students classified as meeting criteria for GAD and 53 as controls on the basis of their self-report scores on the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Questionnaire for DSM-IV (GAD-Q-IV; Newman et al., 2002). Participants were also asked to provide consent and information towards recruiting a "close friend" to complete a confidential packet of questionnaires that was sent via postal mail. Only one friend per participant was recruited, and no specific instructions were given regarding whether the person should be a personal friend or romantic partner. Of the 67 friends who returned completed questionnaires, thirty-five were friends of GAD participants, and 32 were friends of control participants.

Participants also completed a battery of self-report questionnaires measuring the excessiveness, duration and uncontrollability of their worry (Penn State Worry Questionnaire, PSWQ; Meyer, Miller, Metzger, & Borkovec, 1990), their interpersonal functioning (Inventory of Interpersonal Problems: 64-item version, IIP-64, Horowitz, Alden, Wiggins, & Pincus, 2000), attachment security (Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment; IPPA, Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), and perceived social support (Social Support Questionnaire-Six Item Version; SSQ-6, Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce, 1987). Friends of the participants completed two self-report questionnaires. The IIP-64-Other is a modified version of the IIP-64 used to assess the friends' perception of the participants interpersonal difficulties. The Friendship Quality measure (adapted

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