



Social anxiety and discomfort with friendly giving

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ABSTRACT

Individuals higher in social anxiety report more impaired friendship quality, which past research suggests may stem from constrained warmth. We examined three motivations for constrained warmth in friendships and determined how these motivations related to social anxiety and friendship impairment. To do so, we assessed the psychometric properties of the Favor Scale (FS), which measures an individual's response to friendly giving. Results indicated that the FS has three subscales: negative reactions to favors (NEG), positive reactions to favors (POS), and expectation of tit-for-tat behavior (E-TFT). Structural equation modeling demonstrated that social anxiety related directly to NEG, and indirectly to POS and E-TFT through NEG. POS related directly to friendship quality, indicating that friendships may be impaired in social anxiety disorder due to the cumulative effects of responding negatively to friendly behavior.

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Many studies indicate that maladaptive social anxiety has detrimental interpersonal effects. For example, in a recent study, Rodebaugh (2009a) found that people with social anxiety disorder reported more impaired friendship quality above and beyond various other factors (e.g., family relationship quality) and diagnosis of other mental disorders (e.g., depression). Similarly, individuals with maladaptive levels of social anxiety have also reported reduced quality in their romantic relationships (e.g., Sparrevohn & Rapee, 2009) and family relationships (Schneier et al., 1994). Despite clear evidence of these interpersonal problems, little is known about how they develop or how they are maintained.

The literature as a whole supports the hypothesis that people with higher social anxiety show excessive interpersonal constraint, which may help to explain interpersonal impairment. For example, Walters and Hope (1998) examined role-play interactions of participants with and without social anxiety disorder. They coded for *dominant* behavior (e.g., standing with an erect posture), *submissive* behavior (e.g., gaze aversion), and *cooperative* behavior (e.g., head-nodding), among other behaviors. Although these authors expected a higher frequency of submissive behaviors in people with social anxiety disorder, as predicted by psychoevolutionary theory (Gilbert, 2001), they instead found that both low dominance and low cooperation (but not submissive behaviors) distinguished the social anxiety disorder group from the group without the disorder.

The notion that higher social anxiety is related to a constrained, low cooperation (or low affiliation), low dominance (or low asser-

tion) style is also supported by reports of how others perceive people with higher social anxiety: Across studies, observers and peers report that people with higher social anxiety (or more avoidant personality disorder traits) are both less assertive and less warm (e.g., Clifton, Turkheimer, & Oltmanns, 2004; Creed & Funder, 1998). A recent study that examined only the variance shared by self-rating and peer-rating (i.e., the information that the self and peers could agree on) found that the interpersonal problems that were the highest correlates of social anxiety and avoidance were those related to low warmth and low dominance (Rodebaugh et al., 2010). A particularly striking demonstration of this tendency is described by Maleshko and Alden (1993). These authors demonstrated that people with higher social anxiety showed a lack of reciprocation in escalating intimacy during a role-play interaction, failing to respond to highly personally disclosing partners by being more disclosing themselves. Instead, these participants disclosed at a moderate level of intimacy regardless of their partners' behavior.

Lack of both assertion and warmth could have multiple consequences for close relationships. For example, lack of assertive behaviors could impair the ability to make friends at all, as such behaviors would hinder the interactions required for the formation of friendships. Indeed, people with social anxiety disorder are more likely to report having no close friends (Whisman, Sheldon, & Goering, 2000). However, low warmth might be even more detrimental to establishing and maintaining close relationships: A person lacking warmth is less likely to be seen by others as willing to invest in relationships. People with higher social anxiety also report other types of interpersonal problems (e.g., excessive anger: Erwin, Heimberg, Schneier, & Liebowitz, 2003), and observers report additional salient features (e.g., anxiety) when people with higher social anxiety interact with others (Creed & Funder, 1998). However, the balance of evidence (as also argued by Alden & Taylor, 2004)

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suggests that lack of warmth may have a more pervasive impact on interpersonal interactions than displays of social anxiety per se.

It seems clear that lower warmth coupled with lower assertion would have drawbacks. Because such behaviors persist, however, they may also serve a purpose. Alden and Taylor (2004, 2010) suggest that such behaviors may share a common motivation of self-protection from negative outcomes. That is, people with higher social anxiety may expect negative outcomes from interpersonal interactions in general, perhaps because of a belief that they do not possess the attributes required to be accepted or valued by others (Moscovitch, Orr, Rowa, Reimer, & Antony, 2009; Rodebaugh, 2009b). Behaviors based on these beliefs may include avoidance of evaluation in general, whether negative or positive (Weeks, Heimberg, & Rodebaugh, 2008; Weeks, Heimberg, Rodebaugh, & Norton, 2008; Weeks, Rodebaugh, Heimberg, Norton, & Jakatdar, 2009), to avoid these perceived costly outcomes.

1. Three motivations for constrained warmth in friendships

We believe that friendship is an important relationship category in which to study interpersonal problems relating to social anxiety because problematic social anxiety has a special relationship with friendship and peer relationships (Rodebaugh, 2009a; Starr & Davila, 2008). One context for studying lack of warmth related to social anxiety concerns *favors* between friends. The existing literature would suggest that people with higher social anxiety should display restricted warmth in response to such overtly friendly gestures (as reviewed above). However, it is unclear what underlying cognitions might motivate such behaviors. We identified three overlapping yet distinct beliefs that could potentially relate both to social anxiety and friendship impairment.

1.1. Lack of positive expectation

Perhaps most obviously, people with higher social anxiety could fail to respond warmly to favors because they do not perceive such behaviors as being positive. A lack of recognition of positive events in general would be expected for people with higher social anxiety, since social interaction anxiety has been shown to have an inverse relationship with positive affect (Brown, Chorpita, & Barlow, 1998; Hughes et al., 2006; Kashdan, 2007). Thus, when a friend increases potential intimacy through positive behaviors, people with higher social anxiety may simply fail to view this behavior as positive, leading to constrained reciprocation of warmth.

1.2. Presence of negative expectations

Alternatively, people with higher social anxiety could experience positive social events as negative or indicative of future negative outcomes. Fear of positive evaluation, which correlates strongly with social anxiety (Weeks, Heimberg, & Rodebaugh, 2008), might itself constrain warmth. When a friend confers a favor, a person with higher social anxiety may primarily see the situation as an occasion for evaluation and potential revelation of their limited worth (Rodebaugh, 2009b) or an indication that the friend expects more of them, increasing the likelihood of future failure (e.g., as suggested by Wallace & Alden, 1991). The negative affect generated by such expectations could lead to a focus on avoiding interpersonal mistakes rather than reciprocating warmth.

1.3. An atypical model of close relationships

A somewhat different possibility is that at least some people with higher social anxiety simply lack experience with truly close relationships. Various theorists (Silk, 2002; Tooby & Cosmides,

1996) have proposed that friendship differs from less intimate relationships. These theorists propose that friendship is not founded on strict reciprocity, whereas many other social relationships are. Cooperative relationships not involving friendship are proposed to involve interpersonal strategies such as the tit for tat (TFT) approach, which theorists have proposed may be the basis for many types of cooperative relationships (Trivers, 1971). Such strategies focus on reciprocating both cooperation and lack of cooperation, such that giving a favor would be followed by the expectation that the favor would be returned in kind. Given that people with higher social anxiety have fewer and more impaired friendships (as reviewed above), they may apply acquaintanceship-based rules to their friendships and expect that their friends render favors out of the expectation that the favors will be returned. It seems doubtful that they would express much warmth in reciprocating such favors.

2. The current study

To test which beliefs about favors among friends are most related to social anxiety, we generated a measure that we hypothesized would assess each type of underlying motivation (lack of positivity, presence of negativity, and expectation of strict reciprocity [i.e., TFT]) in regard to close friends. We tested the psychometric properties of this measure, assessed whether, as hypothesized, its subscales related uniquely to social anxiety, and tested the proposition that these motivations might help explain the relationship between social anxiety and friendship impairment.

3. Study 1: factor and construct validity

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

Participants for all studies are described in Table 1. Participants in this study completed a questionnaire packet for course credit, including a variety of measures not reported on in this study, across several semesters of data collection. The Favor Scale was given each semester, but some other scales were only given for certain semesters (see below). Participant social anxiety, as measured by the total score of the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (Mattick & Clarke, 1998), ranged from very low to very high (original total range: 0–70; straightforwardly worded total range: 0–60).

3.1.2. Measures

The Favor Scale (FS) is a scale designed to measure the cognitions related to positive friendship behaviors (operationalized as favors). Below we describe the development of the measure, followed by a description of the version used in this study.

FS: Development and pilot versions. Pilot versions were assessed in two studies. The original version included 16 items, derived rationally based on the theory that people with problematic social anxiety tended to have a different model of friendship than people with lower social anxiety. Items focused primarily on cognitions and behavior regarding favors in a specific close friendship. The typical model of friendship was represented by items such as *My friend would probably offer to help*, whereas the atypical friendship model (tit-for-tat) was represented by items such as *If I had asked a favor lately, I wouldn't ask for more help*. Initial psychometric analyses indicated a problematic factor structure consisting of two factors: tit-for-tat cognitions ($\alpha = .79$) and feelings of affiliation toward the friend ($\alpha = .66$). The subscale describing tit-for-tat cognitions was a unique predictor of social interaction anxiety. Additional items were generated and the resulting subscales were found to have good test-retest reliability across a 1–2 week period (ICCs > .71). Given this mixed psychometric picture, we re-evaluated the scale

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