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Multimodal Comparisons of Social Phobia Subtypes and Avoidant Personality Disorder

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Abstract—The purpose of the present study was to further clarify the behavioral, physiological, and verbal response of patients with circumscribed social (speech) phobia, generalized social phobia without avoidant personality disorder, and generalized social phobia with avoidant personality disorder. Patients completed a battery of verbal report instruments and participated in two behavioral assessment tests. Measures of avoidance/escape behavior, cardiac response, level of behavioral skill, state anxiety, and positive and negative self-statements during performance were collected. Significant differences across response domains were found between the circumscribed social phobia and the generalized groups. Most of the distinctions were between individuals with circumscribed social phobia and those with both generalized social phobia and avoidant personality disorder, with the former group having less overall psychopathology. In addition, there was substantial overlap of problems between generalized social phobia individuals with and without avoidant personality disorder. Implications for the conceptualization of social phobia are discussed in terms of the differences among social phobia subtypes. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edition (*DSM-IV*; American Psychiatric Association, 1994), social phobia is a disorder characterized by a marked and persistent fear of acting in a humiliating or embarrassing way in one or more social or performance situations in which an individual is confronted with unfamiliar people or possibly to scrutiny by others. This diagnostic classification system also allows for the specification of a “generalized” subtype if the fears include “most” situations (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Some researchers have suggested the inclusion of additional subtypes, such as circumscribed and nongeneralized social phobia (e.g., Heimberg, Holt, Schneier, Spitzer, & Liebowitz, 1993). The circumscribed social phobia subtype is defined as fear in one or a limited number of discrete social situations (e.g., speaking, eating, or writing in public) and the nongeneralized social phobia subtype includes individuals who do not meet the criteria for the generalized subtype, but experience clinically significant social interaction anxiety in a wide range of situations (Heimberg et al., 1993). Circumscribed and nongeneralized subtypes are not included in the *DSM-IV* diagnostic scheme, and distinctions among subtypes remain unclear.

Some research has been conducted to clarify the relation between the circumscribed and generalized subtypes of social phobia. Consistent with these categorizations, recent epidemiological data from interviews with a sample of 8,098 individuals (ages 15–54) from a general household survey in the United States (i.e., the National Comorbidity Study) identified two social phobia subtypes (Kessler, Stein, & Berglund, 1998). Approximately one third of the individuals with diagnosable social phobia had “pure” public-speaking fear, while two thirds were those with multiple social fears (e.g., performance and interactional fears). Additionally, initial studies (Heimberg, Hope, Dodge, & Becker, 1990; Levin et al., 1993; McNeil & Lewin, 1986; Schneier, Spitzer, Gibbon,

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