Reviewer's report

Title: Social anxiety increases visible anxiety signs during social encounters but does not impair performance

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Reviewer: Corine Dijk

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The study tests the relations between several aspects of social behaviour and social anxiety disorder using two structured social tasks, a speech and a get-acquainted task. Furthermore, the role of gender is examined, as well as the difference between the relations. The study showed that social anxiety is mainly related to behavioural signs of social anxiety and embarrassment. Since individuals with social anxiety belief they have social skills deficits that this causes negative social judgments, it is important to understand actual behaviour of socially anxious individuals. However, there are a few issues that I feel need to be addressed before these findings can be published.

First, the study falls within a research line that tests social behaviour of socially anxious individuals. Clearly, previous studies have not tested if one type of behaviour was related more to social anxiety than another, and this is a valuable addition to the research. Nevertheless, the tasks as well as the behavioural measures are not new and I found the review of the previous literature a bit meagre. The introduction, but especially the discussion, would benefit from a clearer overview on how these findings replicate or contradict previous research.

The second issue has to do with the use of the word "performance". Performance implies some sort of achievement in obtaining a social goal. One can have different goals in interactions and specific behaviours may lead to difficulties in achieving these goals. For example, the authors state: "One way in which social anxiety can be harmful is by inhibiting the ability to perform effectively in social situations. Reduced social competence may lead to unsatisfactory outcomes in commonly-encountered situations such as job interviews, presentations, romantic encounters and numerous other social challenges " However, in a job interview one probably wishes to appear competent, while in an romantic encounter one wishes to appear nice. Several studies showed that social anxiety might be more related to difficulties in the dominance/competence domain than in the affiliation domain. This fits with the results of the study. If one appears socially anxious and displays discomfort, this will probably cause lower competence ratings but might not affect likeability judgments. Thus the behavioural findings might be less problematic
in the interaction task if one only wishes to get acquainted. Because neither the social goals of the participants are measured, nor the actual judgements of others, I believe it might be better to avoid the term "performance".

Related to that, the authors note that it might be helpful to use techniques to manage the display of overt anxiety symptoms. While this is certainly worthwhile if one wishes to appear tough, there is not much research showing that signs of anxiety hinder affiliation. Socially anxious individuals appear to overestimate the influence of their behaviours on several types of social judgments and it might be more beneficial to address that their effect is limited. Furthermore, this was a (largely) non-clinical sample and I believe it is unwise to pathologize adaptive shy behaviour.

Concerning the method, I was surprised that no video recordings were used. Raters using scales like the SRPS are usually trained with hours of videos and subtle behaviour like vocal quality might be difficult to rate from memory alone. This might explain the null-findings in these domains. Furthermore, both task where clearly structured and participants were informed what to do. Research showed that especially in unstructured settings socially anxious individuals had difficulties with social behaviour. Since in real life a lot of social situations are less clear and structured this somewhat limits the generalizability of the results.

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If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

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