Social Anxiety

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Social Phobia

1. Persistent fear of social or performance situations. Individual fears he/she will act in a way which will be humiliating or embarrassing.
2. Exposure to above situations almost always provokes anxiety.
3. Fear recognised as excessive or unreasonable.
4. Feared situations are avoided or endured with intense distress.

➢ Social avoidance leading to social incompetence.
➢ Social incompetence leading to social isolation.
➢ Social isolation leading to indulgence in solitary activities.
Social Anxiety

**Characteristics and Consequences**
- Most common anxiety disorder (Kessler et al. 2005: lifetime prevalence 12%).
- Typically childhood onset (median 13 yrs) and often lifelong in the absence of treatment (Bruce et al 2005: natural recovery rate 37% over 12 years).
- Increased risk of suicide, alcohol & drug abuse, depression, other anxiety disorders.
- Marked under-achievement.
- Low treatment seeking rates.

**Descriptive Psychopathology**
- **Feared situations**
  - public speaking
  - parties, meetings, authority figures
  - eating or drinking in public
  - working or writing while being observed
  - telephone calls
- **Subtypes**
  - generalised vs. non-generalised (performance or limited interactions types).
  - avoidant personality disorder

**Basic Cognitive Theme**

**Social Phobic believes**
1. will behave in an unacceptable way
   **and**
2. this will lead to rejection, loss of worth or status, failure to achieve important personal goals ... I am being JUDGED by people!

**Typical Thoughts**
- What I say sounds stupid
- I'm boring
- I will make a fool of myself
- They don't like me
- They'll see I'm anxious
- I won't have anything to say
- I'll blush/shake/lose control
Mystery about Social Anxiety

- Avoidance of social situations is often not possible, e.g. work, college, family, friends, ....
- When escape is not possible, the person will stay in the situation and endure.
- Repeated exposure to the feared situation does not result in habituation or extinction of the fear.
- Instead, the social anxiety persists and is impervious to exposure treatment.
- WHY ???

Clark & Wells (1995)

Social Phobia persists due to:

- shift to internal focus of attention
- use of internal information to infer how one appears to others
- Use of safety behaviours

Safety Behaviours

Intended to prevent feared catastrophes, but they actually:
- prevent disconfirmation
- heighten self-focus
- cause feared symptoms (e.g. sweating, handshaking, mental blanks)
- make them appear withdrawn and unfriendly ("sticks out like a sore thumb")
- draw attention to the feared behaviours (e.g. blushing, sweating) and oneself (speaking quietly)
Improvement

CBT for Social Anxiety
- Re-focusing attention to external cues.
- Using visual feedback (photos and videos) to disconfirm distorted imageries of the self, e.g. blushing, trembling, sweating, etc.
- Re-structuring assumptions and schema.
- Behavioural experiments.
- Behavioural coaching and social skills training.

Assumptions and Self-Schema

Excessively high standards for social performance
- My speech must be perfectly fluent
- I must appear intelligent and witty

Conditional Beliefs
- If I disagree with someone, they will think I’m stupid
- If I appear anxious, people will think badly of me
- If others want to know me, they will let me know

Unconditional Beliefs about the Self
- I am uninteresting, different, weird
- I’m un-likeable

Behavioural Experiments

Examples:
- People are staring at me
- I am boring
- My mind will go blank
- People will see I’m nervous
- If I shake, people will notice and think I’m weird
- If I stutter, people will think I’m stupid
- I stand out