

Anxiety before and after: Comparing changes in state anxiety during a speech task in people with low and high levels of social anxiety



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Abstract

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is the fear of social situations in which the individual may be scrutinized (APA, 2013). Research findings suggest that people with SAD report higher levels of anxious distress at any given stage of a public speaking task (e.g., anticipation of speech, post speech) relative to those without SAD (Cornwell et al., 2011). It is unknown, however, whether social anxiety severity (i.e., high versus low symptoms) impacts the degree to which people's anxiety during a speech task changes across two stages: anticipatory (before the speech task) and peak anxiety during the speech. Therefore, this study examined interactive effects between social anxiety severity and stage of speech task on state anxiety during an impromptu speech. People were assigned into low ($n = 11$) and high ($n = 21$) social anxiety groups based on their scores on the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (Liebowitz, 1987). Participants completed the Subjective Units of Distress Scale (SUDS; Wolpe, 1969) immediately before the speech and retroactively after the task to determine levels of anticipatory anxiety and peak anxiety. We found that there is no interaction between level of social anxiety and time. Participants from both groups reported greater peak anxiety than anticipatory anxiety. The high anxiety group also reported higher anxiety at both stages than participants in low anxiety group.

Introduction

- **Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD):** Fear of social interaction or social settings in which the individual feels noticed (APA, 2013)
- Individuals with SAD report higher anxiety at any stage of a public speaking task (e.g., anticipation of speech, post speech) than individuals with low social anxiety (Cornwell et al., 2011)
- During a speech task, anxiety steadily increases from anticipatory to performance stage among people with SAD (Price & Anderson, 2011)
- We know little about whether the same pattern is true for people without SAD

Research Questions

1. Does the level of social anxiety (SA) severity impact feelings of anticipatory anxiety and/or peak anxiety during a speech task?
2. Will the difference between anticipatory and peak anxiety rating be higher for HSA individuals than low LSA individuals?

Hypotheses

1. HSA individuals will have higher SUDS scores overall.
2. Mean peak anxiety will be higher than mean anticipatory anxiety for all participants
3. For HSA individuals, mean difference between anticipatory anxiety and peak anxiety will be higher than LSA individuals.

Methodology

Participants

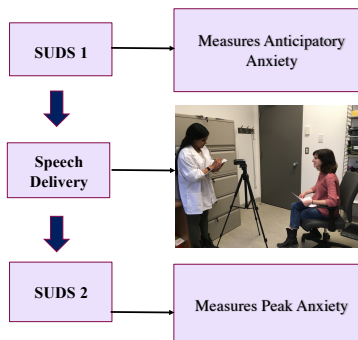
- 32 undergraduate students (81.8% female, $M_{age} = 19$ years, $SD = 1.76$ years, 21 HSA and 11 LSA)

Measures

- Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS; Liebowitz, 1987)
- Subjective Units of Distress Scale (SUDS, Wolpe, 1969)

Procedure

- Participants completed LSAS online.
-Score < 30 = Low Social Anxiety
-Score > 60 = High Social Anxiety



- SPEECH TASK:
-10 Speech topics are provided
-Participants are allowed to choose up to 3 topics
-2 minutes prep time allotted
-Recommended to talk for 5 minutes, but allowed to stop the speech at any time

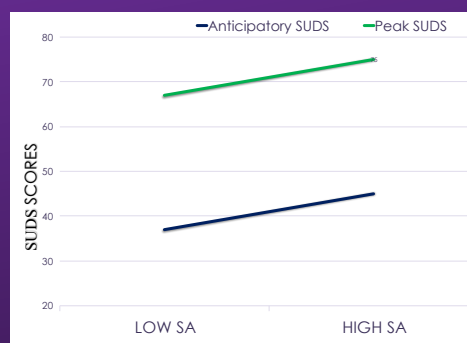
Analysis

- Mixed Model ANOVA
- Between participants IV: High vs. Low Social Anxiety
- Within participants IV: Time of SUDS completion
- Dependent variable: SUDS score

Results

- There were no significant interactive effects between the level of social anxiety and time of SUDS ($F(1, 30) = 0.01, p > .05$).
- Participants in both groups rated their anticipatory anxiety as significantly lower than their peak anxiety ($F(1, 30) = 4.27, p < .05$).
- Participants with high social anxiety reported greater anticipatory and peak anxiety compared to participants with low social anxiety ($F(1, 30) = 9.201, p > 0.05$).

LOW AND HIGH SA SUDS SCORES AT TIME 1 AND 2



Discussion

- It appears that most people report anxiety related to giving a speech.
- People with clinical levels of anxiety experience increases in anxiety from pre to peak at a rate similar to people with low social anxiety.
- Most treatments concentrate on reducing negative thoughts and fear of negative evaluation expressed prior to performance.
- Since peak anxiety is higher than anticipatory anxiety, treatments should focus more on anxiety during performance.

Limitations

- Our study did not have an equal number of participants in each group.
- Over 80% of the participants were female.
- Small sample size

References

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