

# Multi-Informant Assessments of Adolescents' Fears of Negative and Positive Evaluation: How Well Do They Predict Behavior within Interactions with Unfamiliar Peers?

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## Objective

- Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) is defined by intense fear and avoidance of social situations with unfamiliar individuals (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).
- Social anxiety is a commonly diagnosed disorder with a median age of onset of 13 years and a prevalence rate that spikes during adolescence (Kessler et al., 2012).
- Two core features of social anxiety are fears of positive evaluation and fears of negative evaluations.
- Psychometric properties for widely used measures of these fears have been established for adults (Weeks & Howell, 2012): Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale (FPES) and Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation (BFNE).
- Some limited psychometric data support the reliability and validity of scores taken from these measures exists for parent and adolescent reports of adolescents' evaluative concerns (Karp et al., 2018; Lipton et al., 2014), but we know little about how these measures relate to performance in situations with unfamiliar peers.
- This study tests links between multi-informant reports on the FPES and BFNE and adolescents' behavior within interactions with unfamiliar peers: a common concern among adolescents experiencing social anxiety and thus a core target of treatments for adolescent social anxiety (e.g., Cannon et al., 2020; Hofmann et al., 1999).

## Hypotheses

1. Adolescent' self-reports and parents' reports about their adolescent of the FPES and BFNE will demonstrate criterion-related validity in relation to independent observers' ratings of social anxiety and social skills displayed with interactions with unfamiliar peers.
2. FPES and BFNE differ in the degree to which they display incremental validity.
  - Given the relatively little work on these issues of incremental validity, this aim is considered exploratory.

## Method

- Participants were recruited for either a study examining parent and adolescent relationships (community group) or a social anxiety evaluation for "shy" adolescents (clinical group).
- Data was collected from 105 14-15 year-old adolescents, of which 68 were female and 37 came from the clinical group.
- Demographics of the participating adolescents reflected the broader population from which they were recruited (57.1% Black, 27.6% White, 4.8% Asian American, 1% American Indian, 8.6% Hispanic or Latino/a, 7.6% "other").
- Parents and adolescents completed a battery of measures including the FPES and BFNE (Weeks et al., 2008).
- Adolescents participated in the Unfamiliar Peer Paradigm (Cannon et al., 2020). All materials describing the paradigm appear online: <https://bit.ly/CCFPRPeerParadigmOSF>.
- Independent observers rated adolescents' social anxiety and skill based on video archives of the Unfamiliar Peer Paradigm.

## Results

- Observed anxiety was positively correlated with both the BFNE and FPES reports completed by adolescents and parents (Table 1).
- Observed skill was negatively correlated with adolescent reports but not parent reports on both the BFNE and FPES (Table 1).
- BFNE reports incrementally predicted variance in observed anxiety, relative to parents' BFNE reports ( $\Delta R^2 = .04$ ;  $\beta = .21$ ;  $p < .05$ ). However, parents' BFNE reports did not demonstrate incremental validity relative to adolescents' BFNE reports ( $p = .22$ ).
- Both adolescents' ( $\Delta R^2 = .11$ ;  $\beta = .33$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and parents' FPES reports ( $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ;  $\beta = .21$ ;  $p < .05$ ) demonstrated incremental validity in relation to observed anxiety, relative to each other.
- Adolescents' FPES reports displayed incremental validity in relation to observed anxiety ( $\Delta R^2 = .06$ ;  $\beta = .32$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and skill ( $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ;  $\beta = -.30$ ;  $p < .05$ ), relative to their BFNE reports. However, adolescents' BFNE reports did not demonstrate incremental validity in predicting observed anxiety and skill, relative to their FPES reports (both  $ps > .74$ ).

Table 1

*Correlations among adolescent and parent reports on measures of adolescent fears of negative and positive evaluation with observed ratings of anxiety and skill*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
BFNE, adolescent self-report	1	.30**	.63**	.24*	-.20*	.24*
BFNE, parent report about adolescent		1	.21*	.62**	-.13	.22*
FPES, adolescent self-report			1	.07	-.25*	.25**
FPES, parent report about adolescent				1	-.17	0.31**
Observed Skills Rating					1	
Observed Anxiety Rating						1

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

## Conclusions

- Both parents and adolescents provide reports about adolescents' fears of evaluation that predict adolescents' observed behavior in interactions with unfamiliar peers.
- Relative to parents' reports, adolescents' reports across fears of negative and positive evaluation robustly predict observed behavior in interactions with unfamiliar peers.
- Across both informants ratings of observed anxiety and skill, fears of positive evaluation (and not negative evaluation) provide incrementally valuable information in predicting how adolescents behave in interactions with unfamiliar peers.
- Limitations: peer confederates differed in age from our adolescent participants, so we cannot be certain reactions are the same as same-age unfamiliar peers.
- Evidence-based psychosocial interventions for social anxiety seek to improve adolescent clients' capacities for managing social interactions effectively (see Alfano & Beidel, 2011). Thus, future research should examine the degree to which multi-informant assessments of fears of positive and negative evaluation are sensitive to treatment response.