

# Social Phobia...still just shyness?

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The year of 2020 was like an uninvited guest. It crashed the party in all its glory, and sure enough, it did not come empty handed, kindly gifting us with many health related issues. One of many being mental health conditions such as panic disorder, social phobia, posttraumatic stress disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. They though, are not news to our society. Such mental illnesses have been having an impact on the human nation for quite some time now, though their appreciation history doesn't go that far... Social phobia, a "neglected anxiety disorder" that was not fully appreciated until the late 1980s, is quite a good example. What is social phobia? Is it a kind of *social distancing*? Or is it simply *shyness*?

Social phobia, better known as social anxiety disorder is a long-term and overwhelming fear of social situations. In simple, more day-to-day words: *social distancing*. In social anxiety disorder, fear and anxiety lead to avoidance that can disrupt your life. It affects everyday activities, self confidence, relationships and work or school life. In other words, it affects *the quality of life* (Patrick and Erickson (17): "the value assigned to the duration of life as modified by the social opportunities, perceptions, functional states, and impairments that are influenced by disease, injuries, treatments, or policies"). Regardless of all this information, there are still individuals who don't see social phobia as an illness, simply just as shyness. But can childish blushing and narrowing your head really be this severe? What is that, that really differs shyness from social phobia? The studies related to quality of life in individuals with social phobia may give us just the answer.

This particular study, carried by Schneier and colleagues using the Disability Profile and the Liebowitz Self-Rated-Disability Scale gave some very important results. More than half of all patients with social phobia reported at least moderate impairment at some time in their lives due to social anxiety and avoidance in areas of education, employment, family relationships, marriage or romantic relationships, friendships or social network, and other interests. A substantial minority reported at least moderate impairment in the areas of activities of daily living (such as shopping and personal care) and suicidal behavior or desire to live.

What these results have shown us is that: A - social phobia should not be referred to just as a "neglected anxiety disorder" and B – social phobia is not, by any means, shyness!

There is a tendency in today's society to underrate anxiety disorders, with many individuals even referring to them as made up, imagined, or fake. Social phobia, just like any form of anxiety disorder is very much a real state of feelings and, as a matter of fact, a very serious topic to be discussed.

A lot of people have associated social phobia with shyness. Luckily, nowadays, we know that it is wrong to define such anxiety disorder just as a simple personality trait. Thus we can't let it up in the air for some people to just say social phobia is shyness. In addition to the Schneier and colleagues study, some

research, published in the Journal of Current Psychiatry, Volume 12, No. 11 point out some crucial facts. The summary of the findings suggests that even though there are slight similarities, shyness and social anxiety disorder are two different things. Here's why: Shyness is a personality trait (shyness is considered a normal facet of personality that combines the experience of social anxiety and inhibited behavior, but is also described as "stable temperament."); many people who are shy do not have the negative emotions and feelings that accompany social anxiety disorder. They live a normal life, and do not view shyness as a negative trait; while many people with social anxiety disorder are shy, shyness is not a pre-requisite for social anxiety disorder (only about one half of those diagnosed with social anxiety disorder report having been shy).

Hoping that 2020 at least raised some awareness of the pure existence of this disorder, I expect importance and treatment to come next. Though there is one more question to be answered: Is social phobia a kind of *social distancing*? Well, I'm sad to say that the meaning of mentally distancing yourself from people, which in a way is a characteristic of this anxiety disorder, will have to stay in the shadow. Because the 2 meter distance definition made up by one and only, Mr. COVID is sadly, still running the show.

**Citation:**

<https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.ajp.157.5.669>

[www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/social-anxiety/](http://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/social-anxiety/)

[www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/social-anxiety-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20353561](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/social-anxiety-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20353561)

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